THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLANG AMONG EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the impact of social media on the development of slang usage among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, specifically focusing on sixth-semester students in the English Language Education Department at FKIP UHAMKA. Using semi-structured interviews with five participant EFL students, the study explores the types of slang encountered on social media platforms and how these platforms shape students' understanding, usage, and attitudes toward slang. The findings reveal that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X expose students to a wide variety of English slang, which they often integrate into their online and offline communication. Students view slang as an important aspect of modern communication, enabling them to stay updated with global trends and express identity, though some still prioritize formal grammar for academic purposes. The study concludes that social media acts as an informal learning environment that significantly supports language acquisition, especially in informal registers, and highlights the need for educators to balance formal instruction with awareness of contemporary language use.

Keywords: *Social Media, Slang, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Informal language*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed modern communication, especially among youth, who engage daily with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X. For EFL students, these platforms are not merely tools for social interaction but also environments where language learning occurs informally. According to Kadwa and Alshenqeeti (2020), social media has significantly reshaped the EFL learning landscape by providing accessible, engaging, and authentic exposure to English. Slang, as a rapidly evolving and informal linguistic form, is a prominent feature of this digital environment.

The informal and creative nature of slang provides EFL learners with new means of expression, peer affiliation, and cultural integration (Rustemovna, 2023). However, understanding and appropriately using slang can be challenging due to its contextual and dynamic nature. Social media exposes EFL students to trending expressions, often rooted in native-speaking contexts, which become embedded in students' lexicons and influence their communication styles.

This study focuses on students from the English Language Education Department of FKIP UHAMKA. It aims to explore how social media influences their understanding, use, and perception of slang, with the broader goal of informing educational practices in EFL contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Social Media

Social media refers to internet-based platforms enabling users to create, share, and engage with content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It includes applications such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X, which facilitate global communication and rapid information exchange. These platforms encourage interactivity, foster user-generated content, and influence language practices among their users (Capriotti et al., 2024; Zhuang et al., 2023).

Definition of Slang

Slang is an informal, non-standard form of language used primarily within specific social groups to create identity and solidarity (Mattiello, 2008; Allan & Burridge, 2006). Slang evolves rapidly, influenced by cultural trends and digital media. Its use is often tied to creativity, social bonding, and rebellion against mainstream norms (Abushaev, 2023; Manurung et al., 2022).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

EFL refers to the teaching and learning of English in countries where English is not the primary language (Richards, 2010). In Indonesia, English is taught formally in educational institutions, and students often have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Digital platforms offer opportunities for informal practice and immersion in English.

Impact of Social Media on Language Development

Social media significantly contributes to the development and dissemination of new linguistic forms, especially slang (Jackson, 2023; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). For EFL learners, platforms like Instagram and TikTok serve as informal learning environments that expose them to real-life language use, including abbreviations, idioms, and colloquial expressions (Zainal & Rahmat, 2020).

Previous Studies

Several studies have investigated the influence of social media on slang and language learning. Mahardika (2023) compared perceptions of slang use between English majors and non-majors. Herlina et al. (2024) conducted a literature review on the emergence of internet slang, while Dembe (2024) explored how social media contributes to language evolution. Saputra and Salih (2023) studied slang's influence on Indonesian youth, and Kurniati (2021) examined EFL students' Instagram posts and their perceptions of slang's importance.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative ethnographic method to explore how EFL students experience and perceive the influence of social media on their use of slang. The study involved five sixth-semester students at FKIP UHAMKA's English Language Education Department.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom from May 13-16, 2025. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions exploring students' daily social media use, language choices,

exposure to slang, application of slang in conversation, and opinions on the educational value of slang. To ensure validity, the researcher applied member checking by sharing summaries of interview responses with each participant for verification. All participants approved the content without requesting changes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Participants will be provided with a brief explanation of the interview's purpose at the beginning. They will be assured of the confidentiality of their responses and will be informed that the interview will last approximately 5 to 10 minutes. This question was adapted by (Mahardika 2023)

1. What social media do you often use in your daily life?
2. How often do you use social media in a day?
3. What language do you use most often on social media? Do you use English? How often?
4. Do you often find slang words in English when using social media? Can you give an example?
5. Have you ever used the English slangs you find on social media in your conversations? In what context?
6. Do you think social media helps you learn English? If so, how?
7. Do you think it is important to learn slang? Why or why not?

The following section presents the interview findings gathered from five individuals who have responded to seven questions. These questions aimed to examine how social media contributes to the emergence and spread of slang expressions among students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The responses provide an overview of participants' experiences, opinions, and observations regarding the linguistic impact of social media in their daily communication.

1. Social Media Usage

The first thing the researchers asked was what social media do you often use in your daily life. The participants reported a variety of social media platforms they frequently use. Participant 1 (P1) mentioned using Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp, while Participant 2 (P2) favored Instagram and TikTok. Participants 3 (P3) and 4 (P4) also included Platform X in their daily usage, highlighting the popularity of these platforms among EFL students. Participant 5 (P5) primarily used Instagram and WhatsApp. This variety reflects the multifaceted nature of social media engagement, which aligns with the findings of previous studies that emphasize the role of social media in shaping communication styles among youth (Smith et al. 2020).

2. Frequency of Use

The researcher asked the participants to how often do you use social media in a day. The frequency of social media usage varied significantly among participants. P1 reported spending 4 to 5 hours daily, while P4 indicated an astonishing 12 hours. P5 even mentioned using social media throughout the day, sometimes extending up to 24 hours. This high level of engagement is consistent with research by (Auxier and Anderson 2021) which found that young adults often spend substantial time on social media, impacting their language use and social interactions.

3. Language Preferences

The researcher asked what language do you use most often on social media, how often use English. When discussing language use on social media, participants exhibited a blend of Indonesian and English. P1 and P5 noted a combination of both languages, while P3 reported using English almost exclusively. P2 indicated a shift towards more consistent use of English after beginning studies in English Education. This trend aligns with the concept of code-switching, where bilingual individuals alternate between languages based on context (Gumperz 1982). The participants experiences reflect the dynamic nature of language use in digital communication, where informal language and slang often prevail.

4. Encountering Slang

The researcher asked them how often find slang words in English when using social media, and give an example. All participants acknowledged encountering slang on social media. P1 highlighted the term "On My Way," while P2 provided examples such as "Correct Me If I'm Wrong" (CMIIW) and "Laugh Out Loud" (LOL). P3 mentioned terms like "No Cap" and "Sigma," indicating exposure to Western slang. This finding supports the notion that social media serves as a rich source of linguistic innovation, particularly slang, which is often not covered in formal education (Thorne and Lantolf 2006).

5. Usage of Slang in Conversations

The researcher asked in what context how ever used the English slangs you find on social media in conversations. The integration of slang into conversations varied among participants. P1 and P2 reported using slang in interactions with friends, while P4 noted a preference for slang over standard language. P5, however, mentioned using slang primarily in social media posts rather than spoken conversations. This reflects the context-dependent nature of slang usage, where informal language is more prevalent in casual settings (Jenkins, Baker, and Dewey 2017).

6. Learning English Through Social Media

The researcher asked them opinion about social media helps learn English. Participants unanimously agreed that social media has been beneficial for learning English. P1 emphasized the accessibility of English language content, while P2 noted the informal nature of slang, which is often absent from traditional education. P3 and P4 highlighted the role of social media in providing a platform for self-expression in English. This aligns with the findings of previous studies that suggest social media can enhance language learning by providing authentic contexts for language use (Godwin-Jones 2015).

7. Importance of Learning Slang

The researcher asked how it is important to learn slang. The participants expressed varying opinions on the importance of learning slang. P1 viewed it as less critical compared to formal grammar, while P2 and P3 emphasized its relevance in understanding contemporary culture and language evolution. P4 and P5 echoed this sentiment, suggesting that slang is essential for effective communication in modern society. This perspective aligns with sociolinguistic theories that argue for the significance of informal language in understanding cultural nuances (Labov 1972).

The findings from this qualitative study illustrate the profound influence of social media on the development of slang among EFL students. Participants demonstrated diverse patterns of social media usage, language preferences, and the integration of slang into their daily conversations. The results underscore the importance of social media as a tool for language learning and cultural understanding, highlighting the need for educators to consider these platforms in language instruction. Future research could further explore the implications of slang usage on language proficiency and cultural identity among EFL learners.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that social media has a substantial influence on the development of slang among EFL students. Participants reported frequent use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X, all of which expose them to a diverse range of informal expressions and slang commonly used in native speaker communities. This aligns with the findings of (Zainal and Rahmat 2020) who argue that social media enhances learners' exposure to vocabulary outside the classroom environment, particularly informal registers.

Social media provides a rich and dynamic environment for language learning, often outside the bounds of traditional instruction. As noted by (Jackson 2023), social platforms contribute to the rapid evolution of language through user interaction, memes, and viral expressions, which serve as vehicles for new slang to

spread and become normalized. In this context, slang is not merely peripheral but central to how youth construct identity and communicate within peer groups.

Participants in this study shared that they regularly encounter slang terms such as *LOL, POV, TBH, No Cap, Sigma,* and *Gonna.* These expressions are widely disseminated on social media, often originating from Western digital culture. As (Crystal 2003) notes, the global nature of the internet fosters the widespread diffusion of linguistic trends, leading to hybrid language practices that blend global (English-based) slang with local usage patterns. This was reflected in how students code-switched between Indonesian and English depending on platform, audience, or intent.

Slang was also identified as a key element in forming personal and cultural identity. Several participants mentioned that using slang made them feel "up to date" and "more connected to Gen Z culture." These supports (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) theory of identity construction through language, where the use of particular linguistic forms signifies social belonging and cultural alignment.

While most participants valued the ability to learn slang via social media, one respondent expressed a more cautious stance, emphasizing the importance of formal grammar over informal expressions. This suggests that while digital platforms offer rich input for informal learning, they must be balanced with instruction in academic English. As highlighted by (Jenkins, J., Baker, W., & Dewey 2017), EFL instruction should develop learners' ability to shift registers depending on context, fostering pragmatic competence.

Furthermore, the study's findings reinforce the idea that learners are not just passive consumers of content but active participants in language development. (Keidar et al. 2022) assert that slang evolves through user innovation and community reinforcement, both of which are inherent to social media interactions. The constant engagement of EFL students in these spaces contributes to their linguistic creativity and adaptation.

From a pedagogical standpoint, these findings call for EFL educators to critically integrate social media awareness into language instruction. As (Godwin-Jones 2015) suggests, digital tools should not be seen as distractions but as resources that can be harnessed for language development. Educators should equip students with the skills to navigate both formal and informal registers, recognizing that contemporary language competence involves both.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to explore the influence of social media on the development of slang among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, focusing on sixth-semester students of the English Language Education Department at FKIP UHAMKA. The findings, derived from semi-structured interviews with five participants, provide important insights into how social media platforms contribute to language development, particularly in the informal register of English slang.

The results show that social media especially platforms like Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X plays a significant role in shaping students' language use. Participants reported frequent exposure to English slang and demonstrated an ability to understand and apply these expressions in both online and offline contexts. Slang terms such as *LOL*, *POV*, *No Cap*, and *TBH* were commonly encountered and used by students in daily communication, especially among peers.

It was also found that students perceive slang as a relevant aspect of English learning, not only as a linguistic tool but also as a means of expressing identity, keeping up with trends, and connecting with global youth culture. This highlights the dual function of slang as both a communicative resource and a cultural symbol. However, there is also awareness of the limitations of slang, particularly in formal academic or professional settings, suggesting the need for balanced language instruction.

Social media has proven to be an informal yet powerful learning environment, enabling students to engage with authentic English usage beyond the classroom. It encourages vocabulary expansion, cultural immersion, and pragmatic competence. Nevertheless, the study underscores the importance of pedagogical guidance in helping students navigate the informal language of digital spaces while maintaining proficiency in formal English.

In conclusion, the influence of social media on the development of slang among EFL students is both profound and multifaceted. Educators are encouraged to acknowledge this reality and integrate media literacy and informal language awareness into EFL curricula to better equip students for real-world communication. Future research may expand the participant pool or explore longitudinal effects of digital exposure on language proficiency and identity development.

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