Social Media as a Learning Platform for EFL Learning: A Case of Undergraduate Students

Madhukar Pandey

Department of English, Nepal Mega College, Tribhuvan University

madhukarpandey07@gmail.com

Abstract

Social media is one of the most popular learning platforms among youths, especially for the university level EFL students. The paper aims to explore how undergraduate level EFL students in a university utilize social media to improve their English writing skills. Using a meta-analysis approach, seventeen peer-researched articles published in the last five years were downloaded from google scholar and closely reviewed. Based on the review, the study concluded that social media was used as one of the informal learning platforms for writing in English. Students were reported to have been engaged in independent writing in social media while communicating with their peers, and relatives, thereby developing confidence in writing in English, though the use of more informal language structures were preferred. The findings of the study imply that higher engagement of EFL students in social media communication positively impacts their writing skills, so institutions are to increase the use of ICT in their pedagogical practices for students' meaningful learning.

Keywords: social media, ICT, informal classroom setting, integration, writing skill, stress-free writing

Introduction

Recently, social media has brought information to homes, workplaces, schools, colleges, and universities from different sources to help people find new knowledge in a new learning platform (Luo & Stefaniak, 2020). As social media becomes a part of life for all the people, including EFL students also who use it in both formal and informal settings. It has been a source of quick access to information. Besides receiving information, students also generate insights from social media platforms. Students use social media to share information with their peers, professors, and mentors more quickly and efficiently so that they can save time and money (Rasheed et al., 2020). If learners enjoy learning new ideas, they learn them actively in a very short time, so students enjoy using social media to exchange ideas and talk to their friends. When they write to express their

ideas to others, they become familiar with the structure of the language, vocabulary, grammar, and more often organization of content (Kang, 2020).

If students are allowed to write anything beyond the classrooms, for example, a bog, they feel more comfortable and can write independently. As a result, they develop writing skills spontaneously (Putri & Aminatun, 2021). Students very often write on Facebook, Twitter, and blog platforms. In these social networking sites, they express their independent opinion on any subject matter. When they write independently, they develop their interest as a result, they write more correct and insightful ideas. Furthermore, messaging is one of the frequent activities that students adopt in social media for receiving and generating knowledge. The frequency of writing messages or commenting on friends' posts is quite high (Bayer et al., 2022) and that can eventually enhance the users' fundamental skills in writing.

Almost half of the population in the world uses social media for communicating ideas (Istifci, & UCAR, 2021). Social media platforms are becoming popular among youths, specifically undergraduate students, for posting feelings, facts, and emotions (Klimova & Pikhart, 2019). Undergraduate EFL students frequently write their ideas on the social media platform, and while writing, they become conscious; consequently, they develop their writing skills. In addition to that, when they sit writing on social media platforms, they try to make their language more standard for two reasons: first, they need to give a good impression to their peers; and second, they want to express their ideas to others correctly. As students regularly write on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, they develop the habit of posting on social media, so their writing skills go upimprove (Bakeer, 2018).

EFL and ESL students develop English writing through different processes. Classroom activity is the major platform that they learn the basics of their writing (Zhang & Zou, 2023). Additionally, practicing reading, speaking, and listening in formal and informal settings helps them enhance their writing skill (Dizon, 2021). Besides, writing in an informal setting, for example, on Facebook and Twitter, helps them learn writing techniques. Additionally, making videos and posting them on YouTube also supports them learn the tentacles of writing for undergraduate students. In addition to that, students also learn English writing through email writing activities. Although students do not enjoy writing emails, it helps to improve their writing skills. Based on the existing literature on EFL and ESL undergraduate students' email writing challenges in English medium universities, Chauhan (2022) concluded that EFL and ESL undergraduate students hesitate to write emails to their faculty for several reasons: first, they have very little knowledge of the English language, and second, they do not know proper email writing etiquette. Therefore, to be successful in their academic lives, EFL and ESL undergraduate students must develop proper email writing skills (Chauhan, 2022).

Different people perceive social media differently. For example, the academic community in the South Asian context, does not perceive social media as a helpful tool for students' academic activities (Sobaih et al., 2020). However, other researchers argue that social media can be a great learning platform (Deeken et al., 2020). Building upon this background, this paper explores the positive aspects of how social media can develop EFL undergraduate students' writing skills. Engaging in activities like chatting, posting, and making videos helps students develop their vocabulary, grammar, and content organization. In formal settings, students may face different pressures, such as feeling uncomfortable with friends, the classroom environment, and

occasionally with professors. However, when they write on social media platforms in an informal setting, they do not experience the same pressure, enabling them to understand better, write more, and feel good about writing. In this scenario, regular writing on social media significantly enhances their writing skills compared to an academic setting. Therefore, integrating social media and technology into the learning setting outweighs potential negative outcomes (Naslund et al., 2020).

Review of the Literature

Many researchers have explored the significance of social media in learning English in general and writing in particular, especially in the case of EFL and ESL undergraduate students in South Asian higher educational settings. For example, Manca (2019) experimented with how snapping, pinning, liking, and texting help university EFL and ESL students beyond Facebook. As the positive impact of social media on education was not considered an important factor in the past, potential issues remain untouched. However, as the researcher points out, this paper digs out these concerns into discussions. According to the researcher, for considering the effective outcome in education, one should consider other social media platforms than Facebook and Twitter, as they are surpassing additional features. Therefore, for the researcher, as there is a plethora of social media platforms, higher education students can take advantage of them in many cases, including their English language development and writing skills. With more platforms, there are better resources for students to get the knowledge they need for language and writing learning. In addition to that, the author asserts that although social media is for social presence, it helps to understand the language from different perspectives.

Mukminin et al. (2023) investigated the area of social media for preservice English teachers. The paper asserts that social media is an innovative tool where teachers and learners can develop new strategies for teaching and learning, and it also helps to improve teaching and learning activities. In the paper, in the methodology section, survey and data collection techniques were conducted to gather information. The sample size of the survey was 1470 preservice English teachers in four Indonesian universities. The paper summarizes that the technology should be used for educational purposes. It further highlights that, if there is integration of ICT in university classes, the avenue of learning will be strong and powerful.

According to Mohammad et al. (2023), there is a crucial role of social media in developing language skills. The researchers adopt students' survey questionnaires, students' semi-structured interviews, and WhatsApp messages. The researchers argue that EFL students predominantly utilize the English language during interactions with friends and colleagues on social media. This constant engagement provides them with opportunities to enhance their writing skills. The paper concluded that students commonly use Google for reading books and turn to YouTube for watching videos. Whether they are composing posts, exchanging messages, or searching for English channels and websites, these activities contribute to the development of their English language writing skills.

Similarly, Muftah (2022) revealed the increasing integration of social media into daily routines for learning, education, information dissemination, medical purposes, and advertising. In this paper, the researcher uses the qualitative research method for the detailed studies of smaller areas using closed questionnaires. The study concludes that English learners can adopt innovative techniques

through social media, enhancing their language learning effectiveness. In other words, the study showed that students can expedite their language productively learning through social media.

Social media provides the best writing platforms and opportunities for language learners (Lakhal, 2022). In line with this study's findings, Bakeer (2018) found that the use of social media significantly provides positive impacts on students' writing skills. The study concentrates on the current education system, which requires more involvement of ICT tools in university education. The paper tries to explore how social media can be a solution for university students who have lost interest in writing skills. The paper asserts that information and technology play a crucial role in the development of writing skills among university students. The researcher further argues that among the four language skills—reading, speaking, listening, and writing—special attention should be given to writing, as it is the most accurate way of conveying information. Social media supports students to create a helpful learning community for the students, so it is considered one of the best tools for communication, collaboration, sharing of information, and promoting student-centered learning (Klimova & Pikhart, 2019). The researchers further highlight Facebook also provides an opportunity for students to communicate with native speakers so that language learning becomes highly effective for the learner. Facebook is a promising and flexible tool that significantly enhances ESL and EFL students' writing skills.

Apart from that, Istifci and Ucar (2021) studied the existing literature and claimed that social media serves as an effective platform for language teaching and learning, creating a conducive environment for students. The researchers conclude that social media facilitates the acquisition of grammar, context, and vocabulary. Additionally, the researcher highlights the potential for an intercultural community, emphasizing its positive impact on language learning outcomes. Their study also suggests that social media serves as a tool to teach, learn, and acquire a second language without necessitating extensive time and effort. The EFL and ESL learners often experience discomfort in traditional classrooms, facing challenges with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. The researchers propose that learning English in an informal setting outside the classroom allows for quicker language acquisition.

According to Perez and Abraham (2021), teachers can use digital platforms for writing instruction. In the study, it is explained that if technology is used in the classrooms, students produce information and become active in the classrooms. On the contrary, if teachers generate knowledge in a one-sided manner, students do not receive any new knowledge. Therefore, to make the classrooms live and active, teachers in the classrooms should actively use technology that promotes a participatory approach to teaching. As the methodology of this study, the researchers adopted formative experiments to determine the use of appropriate instructional context. The paper concludes that if teachers use technology in writing classrooms, it gives them more confidence, and there is a high possibility that students understand the concept. Therefore, digital tools not only help to understand the idea for the students but also give positive feedback to the instructors.

As a counterpoint, Panah et al. (2021) delve into the realm of mobile apps designed for learning grammar. The research paper bases its exploration on the theoretical framework proposed by Supyan Hussain, incorporating four key components: system, program, curriculum, and language and culture. Notably, the study highlights a drawback associated with these mobile apps, namely the presence of advertisements, which can pose challenges for learners. The unwanted information from these ads may lead to a loss of concentration among students, hindering their academic focus.

Furthermore, the study contends that the perception of learning grammar through mobile apps might be illusory, suggesting that these apps may not fully satisfy the needs of their users. Additionally, the research implies that students utilizing such apps may encounter misunderstandings in their grasp of grammar.

Caliboso (2021) carried out a study of social networking sites and ESL students' writing proficiency in English. The paper asserts that social media sites have both negative and positive impacts on students' writing proficiency in English. The paper used the descriptive method to find out the impacts of social media sites on students' writing proficiency. The paper concluded that the positive effects of social media sites outweigh the negative impacts on the writing performance of the students.

Similarly, Nguyen (2021) explored the impacts of social media on learning new vocabulary. The paper asserted that social media is one of the best ways to learn new words. In the review paper, the researcher reviews several articles that make a comparison between traditional classrooms and modern social media-applied classrooms. The paper concluded that the use of social media helps students learn new words that have great significance around target language learning.

Likewise, Katawazai and Yusof (2020) carried out a study that found that technology has reached a certain stage in teaching writing. The research paper examines the previous literature within the last five years. Specifically, English language learners and teachers adopt social media for language learning. As technology advances day by day, teachers and students should both catch up to the pace of technology. The researchers further explain that academic institutions have been adopting new methods of delivering content, so students and teachers have been adopting new technologies for their academic benefit, and teachers should work on innovation in designing the syllabus. In addition to that, the researchers maintain that adopting social media not only improves the language learning of the learners but also helps them improve some additional skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, helpfulness, and collaboration, as well. Therefore, the paper suggests incorporating social media and the Wiki platform.

Similarly, Alobaid (2020) argued that YouTube helps students develop language fluency in written communication. This research is a long-term analysis of time series data trends, and the performance of the participants was evaluated before and after the experimental intervention. The paper further remarks that YouTube is one of the best platforms to find relevant resources for writing for university students. The paper states that when they use it in a formal and informal setting, students significantly foster their written communication, so the paper recommends that students and teachers use this platform both inside and outside the classes, and the learning becomes more effective, interactive, sharable, and retainable.

Besides, Khodabandeh and Naseri (2020) compared the common and limited social networks for writing skill learners. The study embraces a quasi-experimental design, with the dependent variable being the writing proficiency of EFL learners and the independent variables being a common WhatsApp group with no interaction. In the observation, the paper finds out that writing skills will be fostered in the common WhatsApp group, so it is significantly beneficial and efficient. The study shows that the restricted group is less supportive of enhancing the writing skills of the students. Furthermore, the study explains that in the common WhatsApp group, the participants were dynamic and result-oriented, so the researchers recommend that interaction plays an essential role in language learning.

Alharthi et al. (2020) conducted a study to illustrate the potential of social media platforms in facilitating the acquisition of new vocabulary. To elucidate this concept, the researchers conducted a thorough review of existing literature and explored various databases. The study established criteria for inclusion and exclusion, encompassing platforms like Facebook and Twitter while excluding others such as YouTube and WhatsApp. The findings of the paper suggest a notable gap in research concerning vocabulary acquisition on social media platforms. The study concludes that there is insufficient evidence to support the assertion that learning new words through social media is justified. Emphasizing the controlled nature of the research, the paper highlights the need for more extensive studies to determine the effectiveness of social media in developing vocabulary. The researchers also note a lack of substantial evidence supporting the idea that social media significantly contributes to the enhancement of vocabulary skills.

Furthermore, Shahzadi and Kausar (2020) examined the role of social media in fostering academic English writing skills. As a methodology, the paper uses the mixed method to conduct the study. The survey and experiment were conducted to get data and explore the experiment. The researchers maintain that to upgrade the language classes, we need to use social media in the classrooms to motivate the students for the digital world. The paper further remarks that as students get the Facebook platform easily, both teachers and students make it a potential tool for language learning. The paper summarizes that students write freely on social media, so they do not feel any stress while writing. Additionally, the paper concludes that Facebook promotes interactions between teachers and students so that they can learn new things in a limited time frame. However, the researchers point out that the Facebook platform cannot be a replacement for the traditional classes.

Awadeh (2020) explored the topic of the role of social media in fostering academic English writing skills. As a methodology, the paper adopts an exploratory descriptive study with mixed methods to conduct the study. The survey and experiment were conducted to get data and explore the experiment. The researchers remark that, as social media is a social space, stakeholders should draw benefits from this space. Furthermore, the researchers maintain that students love to live with new technologies. Along with the development of technology, the method of teaching inside classrooms has been changed. Additionally, the paper summarizes that if the teachers adopt technology in teaching writing classrooms, there is a better possibility of making the class effective and understandable.

Alghammas (2020) assessed the developing of the grammatical accuracy of EFL students in web-based writing. The researcher further argued that if students write with the help of web-based tools, there is less chance of making mistakes in their writing. The paper adopted the mixed method to identify the web-based group writing, and the researcher has used the yes/no question in the questionnaire, where the respondents share about their experiment. Furthermore, an open-ended question was also a method that the paper adopted while conducting the research. The paper summarizes that if learners use web-based tools, they can write more error-free sentences. Therefore, both teachers and students significantly benefit from web-based tools to learn the target language.

To summarize the literature, it can be observed that social media has a positive impact on the students' development of English language competencies. EFL students learns new vocabulary and adopt novice sentence structure and effective grammar in sentence structure through social media.

Research Methodology

This study adopts the meta-analysis approach to review the outcomes of integrating social media tools in an academic setting to improve EFL and ESL students' writing skills. Seventeen peer-reviewed papers were discussed for the review, with Google Scholar serving as the primary source for finding research articles. To this end, the researcher employed two main criteria: he finalized only peer-reviewed journal articles among forty selected articles, and second, only the articles published within the last five years were selected. Some of the key terms that the researcher used to find these articles include social media and writing, social media for undergraduate EFL and ESL students, vocabulary development in social media, and integration of technology in academia.

Discussion of Results

In modern educational settings, teachers deliver knowledge to their students using various platforms, including social media (Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). Likewise, Manca (2019) focused on the idea that, apart from Facebook, snapping, pinning, liking, and texting help university students develop their writing skills. This study also investigated the idea that social media helps students with language learning. Similarly, according to Bakeer (2018), ICT tools become more helpful for developing significant positive impacts on students' writing skills, which is one of the issues that this study carried out.

While Katawazai and Yusof (2020) asserted that social media not only improves the language learning of the learners but also helps them improve some additional skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, helpfulness, and collaboration, this paper did not look at other aspects of how social media helps them. Like the idea of Mohammad et al. (2023), this paper examines how students use Google and YouTube for reading and watching, composing posts, exchanging messages, or searching for English channels and websites. Moreover, Perez and Abraham (2021) studied the use of digital platforms for writing instruction by teachers. In the study, it is explained that if technology is used in the classrooms, students produce information and become active in the classrooms. This study also examined the importance of the integration of technology in the classrooms.

Grammar is one of the most important parts of English writing. Unlike this paper's assumption in the development of grammar, Panah et al. (2021) argued that social media does not help in developing grammar for students. However, Alghammas (2020) conveyed that with the help of web-based tools, one can write many error-free sentences. This study also carried out a similar theme to the conclusion of this article.

Additionally, Caliboso (2021) pointed out that the use of social networking sites develops English writing proficiency in ESL students. This paper also concluded that social sites help students develop the overall organization of the language while writing. Therefore, the available literature supports the assumption of the study that social media helps students learn English writing.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Based on the review of the seventeen articles, social media is an essential platform for developing the writing skills of undergraduate EFL and ESL students. Also, integrating technology into academia helps improve writing skills even in a limited-time format, so by engaging in social media, FFL students learn new vocabulary, grammar, and writing. In addition to the traditional classrooms, social media provides additional opportunities for developing English language and

writing skills. However, EFL and ESL students prefer an informal setting for writing and social media is one of the best learning platforms for developing English writing skills of EFL and ESL undergraduate students. Therefore, to improve EFL and ESL students' writing skills, EFL and ESL teachers can integrate social media into their lessons. Also, EFL and ESL program administrators can support EFL and ESL students and teachers by converting traditional classrooms into technology-dominated classrooms. Ultimately, it helps EFL and ESL students to develop their writing skills and be successful in their academic undertakings.

References

Alghammas, A. (2020). Advancing Grammatical Accuracy of EFL Students in Web-Based Writing. *TESOL International Journal*, *15*(3), 83-110.

Alharthi, M., Bown, A., & Pullen, D. (2020). The use of social media platforms to enhance vocabulary Development in learning a new language: A review of the literature. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL*, (6), 318-331.

Alobaid, A. (2020). Smart multimedia learning of ICT: Role and impact on language learners'writing fluency—YouTube online English learning resources as an example. *Smart Learning Environments*, *7*(1), 24-37.

Awadeh, O. K. A. (2020). The role of social media in improving the academic English writing skills of Arab students. *Journal of Content, Community and Communication*, *12*(6), 117-126.

Bakeer, A. M. (2018). Effects of information and communication technology and social media in developing students' writing skill: A case of Al-Quds Open University. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *8*(5), 45-53.

Bayer, J. B., Anderson, I. A., & Tokunaga, R. S. (2022). Building and breaking social media habits. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *45*, 101-303.

Caliboso, J. C. (2021). Social Networking sites and ESL Students Writing Proficiency in English. *TESOL International Journal*, *16*(4), 224-237.

Chauhan, P. (2022). Request Strategies Used by English Language Learners: Student-Professor Email Communication. *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal*, *45*(1), 79-91.

Deeken, A. H., Mukhopadhyay, S., & Jiang, X. S. (2020). Social media in academics and research: 21st century tools to turbocharge education, collaboration, and dissemination of research findings. *Histopathology*, *77*(5), 688-699.

Dizon, G. (2021). Subscription video streaming for informal foreign language learning: Japanese EFL students' practices and perceptions. *Tesol Journal*, *12*(2), 566-587.

Istifci, I., & UCAR, A. D. (2021). A review of research on the use of social media in language teaching and learning. *Journal of Educational Technology and Online Learning*, *4*(3), 475-488.

Kang, E. Y. (2020). Using model texts as a form of feedback in L2 writing. *System*, *89*, 102-196.

Khodabandeh, F., & Naseri, E. (2020). Exploring the impact of common vs. restricted social networks on English foreign language learners' writing skill. *Journal of Language Horizons*, *4*(2), 81-100.

Klimova, B., & Pikhart, M. (2019). Cognitive and applied linguistics aspects of using social media: the impact of the use of Facebook on developing writing skills in learning English as a foreign language. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, *10*(1), 110-128.

Luo, T., Freeman, C., & Stefaniak, J. (2020). "Like, comment, and share"—professionaldevelopment through social media in higher education: A systematic review. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, *68*, 1659-1683.

Lakhal, M. (2022). The Role of social media in Developing English Language Writing Skills: Moulay Ismail University as a Case Study. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)*, *7*(3), 76-89.

Manca, S. (2020). Snapping, pinning, liking or texting: Investigating social media in higher education beyond Facebook. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *44*, 1007-1028.

Mohammad, T., Khandey, A. Y., Idris, S., & Syed, Z. (2023). Role of social media in developing English language skills: writing in context. *Br. J. Arts Humanities*, *5*(3), 116-130.

Muftah, M. (2022). Impact of social media on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PSU Research Review*, 203-215

Mukminin, A., Habibi, A., Muhaimin, M., & Hidayat, M. (2023). Social media use for English writing (SMU-EW): Preservice English teachers. *Ampersand*, *10*, 100-112.

Naslund, J. A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K. A. (2020). Social media and mental health: benefits, risks, and opportunities for research and practice. *Journal of technology in behavioral science*, *5*, 245-257.

Nguyen, N. T. T. (2021). A review of the effects of media on foreign language vocabulary acquisition. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, *1*(1), 30-37.

Panah, E., Babar, M. Y., Shakib, S., & Ghanad, A. (2021). Analysis of Mobile Apps for Learnin Grammar through Mobile Assisted Language Learning Approach. *Asian TESOL Journal*, *1*(1), 46-67.

Putri, N., & Aminatun, D. (2021). Using Facebook to practice writing skill: What do the students think?. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, *2*(1), 45-50.

Shahzadi, A., & Kausar, G. (2020). Using social media to improve students' English writing skills: A mixed method study. *Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, *8*(1), 2305-6533.

Sobaih, A. E. E., Hasanein, A. M., & Abu Elnasr, A. E. (2020). Responses to COVID-19 in higher education: Social media usage for sustaining formal academic communication in developing countries. *Sustainability*, *12*(16), 65-97.

Sofi-Karim, M., Bali, A. O., & Rached, K. (2023). Online education via media platforms and applications as an innovative teaching method. *Education and Information Technologies*, *28*(1), 507-523.

Zhang, R., & Zou, D. (2023). A review of research on technology-enhanced peer feedback for second language writing based on the activity theory framework. *Education and Information Technologies*, *28*(6), 6727-6753.