

## VARK LEARNING STYLES AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN EFL CONTEXTS: INSIGHTS FROM TERTIARY-LEVEL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** The integration of social media into EFL learning has become increasingly popular, fostering greater student engagement, collaboration, resource innovation, and personalized learning experiences. This study examines the usage patterns of social media and their alignment with VARK (Visual, Auditory, Read/write, Kinesthetic) learning style among tertiary-level EFL students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Brawijaya. Utilizing a quantitative survey design, data were gathered from 100 undergraduate students of the 2023 cohort, all of whom had used social media for EFL learning for over a year. Analysis through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel revealed that audio-based platforms, such as those featuring English songs and podcasts, are particularly favored by auditory, kinesthetic, and auditory-kinesthetic learners. YouTube emerged as the most preferred platform, with the highest mean score (3.64), selected by 31% of respondents. However, the findings indicate that students' social media preferences for EFL learning do not always align with their individual learning styles, suggesting a disconnect between preferred platforms and learning modalities. The study underscores the importance of selecting appropriate social media platforms tailored to diverse learning preferences in EFL education. These findings can guide educators in designing more effective EFL teaching strategies, leveraging the potential of social media to meet varying learner needs.

**Keywords:** *EFL Learning, social media; VARK learning style; preference.*

### INTRODUCTION

Today, integrating social media while providing personalized and customized learning experiences is crucial for both academic and practical reasons (Shemsack, 2020). This approach, known as Social Media - Open Educational Resources (SM-OERs), leverages the interactive and collaborative aspects of social media to enhance learner engagement, collaboration, and personalized learning. Social media has equipped EFL teachers with accessible instructional materials and course content sources, while also encouraging collaborative learning in the EFL classroom (Ghimire, 2022). It is also known that social media offers learning tools that make teachers' tasks easier than those of conventional media.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as a collection of Internet-based platforms built on Web 2.0 technologies that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content,

while also encouraging social engagement through scalable and widely available communication mechanisms. They categorize social media into different types based on social presence and media richness, including blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. These platforms offer diverse forms of content, enabling EFL students to engage with materials in ways that suit their individual learning preferences. Some students may prefer visual content on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, while others may enjoy practicing dialogues from TikTok videos. These varying content formats allow students to absorb information differently, depending on their preferred sensory input. As a result, social media plays a significant role in shaping how students process information, tailoring their learning experiences to align with their personal preferences (Soetan et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the implementation of social media is not yet optimally utilized in the classroom. Khaerunnisa et al. (2023) stated that most English teachers rely on basic features of a limited subset of software rather than more advanced Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools and basic social media functions. This suggests poor preparedness and limited abilities in integrating social media features optimally to enhance learning experiences. Additionally, although social media offers various educational materials which might align with individual learning styles, the optimal impact may not be realized if the features are not utilized to their full capacity (Arniza, 2024).

In addition to the underutilization of social media features, the relationship between social media use and learning styles—how students perceive, process, and retain information—remains understudied. While previous research has primarily focused on social media's impact on classroom teaching and specific EFL skills, such as its effects on students' reading comprehension (Yanti et al., 2020; Sadha et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2021), writing skills (Shahzadi & Kausar, 2020; Purnama, 2024), speaking skills (Mujayanah et al., 2024; Manogaran & Sulaiman, 2022), and vocabulary skills (Helan & Tamilarasan, 2022; Rita & Subekti, 2023), little attention has been given to how social media might cater to students' diverse learning preferences. Hence, this study aims to address this gap by exploring how EFL students with different learning styles (Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, Kinesthetic) respond to and engage with various forms of content and features on social media.

One widely used learning style model in Indonesian classrooms is the VARK model, developed by Fleming and Mills (1992). This model categorizes learning styles into four types: visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic. Visual learners excel with diagrams, charts, and visual representations of content. Auditory learners thrive when exposed to spoken information, such as lectures or discussions. Read/write learners prefer to engage with written text, gaining a deeper understanding from reading and writing. Kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, learn best through hands-on activities that integrate real-world experiences and practical applications. By recognizing these different learning styles, educators can create more effective and personalized learning experiences. Aligning instructional strategies with students' preferred ways of learning helps to not only improve

academic performance but also fosters deeper engagement with the material (Marzulina et al., 2019). In today's digital landscape, where social media offers a range of content tailored to different sensory inputs, understanding these learning preferences becomes even more essential for optimizing the EFL learning experience.

Based on the background of the study, the primary motivation is to discover how EFL students in tertiary education with diverse learning styles respond to and view different content forms and features from social media. Kenanoğlu and Kahyaoglu (2024) researched the relationship between Kolb's Model of learning styles and social network use, revealing that students primarily use Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Google Plus for activities like sharing photos, making friends, sharing videos, and playing games. They also found that students with different learning styles (assimilative, accommodative, converging, and diverging) tend to prefer different social networks and purposes, though these differences were not statistically significant. In addition, they suggested employing other learning style models in the same area of study, such as the VARK model, to examine the connection with social media use. This study will take that suggestion to explore the topic in greater depth.

On the other hand, Soetan et al. (2020) discovered that social media usage influences learning styles, though there was no significant gender difference in this influence. Meanwhile, Almodiel and Lacaste (2020) examined the correlation between individual learning styles and social media use for online learning management. They found that students viewed Facebook groups as user-friendly and beneficial for learning, with verbal learners finding them particularly easy to navigate. In contrast, active and intuitive learners struggled to use Facebook groups for learning purposes. Hence, this study seeks to address the research question: How do visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic learners view specific social media content and activities in EFL learning?

The findings of the study are expected to provide both practical and theoretical advantages. Practically, it will enlighten EFL teachers who wish to use social media or networking sites as teaching tools by helping them choose the best platforms, fostering more meaningful learning experiences for EFL students when social media is utilized. Moreover, it can enrich and equip EFL teachers, specifically at the tertiary education level, to develop a comprehensive understanding of

social media features and content so that all social media features can be utilized optimally. Theoretically, this study will contribute to the literature focusing on learning styles and social media in EFL, as well as providing relevant references for future research.

#### **METHOD**

This research utilized a quantitative approach to explore the social media usage patterns and the learning styles of EFL sophomore students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Brawijaya. Mohajan (2020) stated that the quantitative approach aids in addressing questions such as who is involved, what actions are taken, when these actions occur, where they occur, and to what extent. Quantitative research encompasses various study designs, including experimental, correlational, and survey designs (Creswell, 2012). Hence, descriptive research in the form of a survey was employed for this study. The present study aimed to collect data on the social media usage patterns and learning styles of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students at a specific moment. To achieve this, the research employed a cross-sectional design.

The sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling. The participants were sorted based on two criteria: sophomore students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Brawijaya (2023 cohort) and individuals who have used social media applications for over a year. Sophomore students were chosen due to their unique position as being in their early semesters, providing current insights into EFL learning trends. Additionally, as they have not experienced online learning during college, their engagement with social media for EFL learning is expected to reflect present-day patterns in this context.

However, there are several limitations and potential biases associated with the sampling and data collection methods. Purposive sampling, while effective for targeting specific groups, may introduce selection bias as it does not allow for random sampling, limiting the generalizability of the results. The reliance on self-reported data through surveys could also result in response bias, where participants may overestimate or underestimate their social media usage. Moreover, as the study only focuses on a single cohort from a single institution, the findings may not fully represent the broader population of EFL students in other contexts or universities.

This study employs two questionnaires as research instruments. The first is the VARK

learning style questionnaire, consisting of 16 multiple-choice questions where participants can select multiple answers. The reliability scores, as examined by Leite et al. (2010), were .85 for visual, .82 for aural, .84 for read/write, and .77 for kinesthetic. The best-fitting model for the data was the correlated trait-correlated method, confirming reliability and initial validity.

The second instrument is a social media usage patterns questionnaire, adapted from various studies (Wardana, 2024; Utimadini et al., 2015; Cahyani et al., 2023; Sagita, 2021; Silalahi & Pariyanto, 2021; Laili, 2023). It assesses five dimensions: audio-, text-, visual-, action-based content, and preferred apps. A 4-point Likert scale was used, with one question for the preferred apps. In a pilot study of ten students from the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Brawijaya, Cronbach's Alpha results showed reliability: 0.64 (audio), 0.88 (text), 0.72 (visual), and 0.9 (action). Pearson correlation analysis validated 23 items with a coefficient above 0.632.

In the process, a hundred participants completed a Google Form questionnaire over approximately a month. The data obtained were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, specifically percentages and means, were used. Initially, participants assessed their learning style preferences through the first questionnaire and were grouped based on their preferences (Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic). Following this, their attitudes toward each social media application were measured. To analyze this, the mean score for all items was calculated to identify which item had the highest mean score within each dimension. Each learning style was treated as a dimension. The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS 23.0 and Microsoft Excel.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

##### *Percentage of distribution of respondents based on their learning style and gender*

The data were gathered, and the highest average score was identified to assess the gender and learning styles of all participants. The learning styles were categorized into four types: Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic. However, combinations of two or three learning styles are also possible.

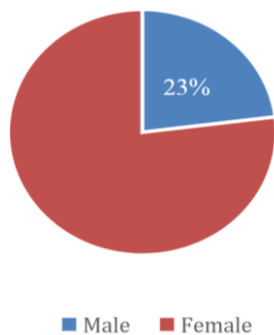


Figure 1. *Percentage of distribution of respondents by gender*

Figure 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents: 23% were male, while 77% were female.

Table 1. *Percentage of distribution of respondents by learning style*

Learning Style	Frequency	Percent
Visual	5	5
Auditory	16	16
Read/Write	12	12
Kinesthetic	62	62
Auditory Kinesthetic	5	5
Total	100	100

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of respondents based on their learning styles. It shows that the majority, 62%, were kinesthetic learners, followed by 16% auditory learners. Additionally, 12% of respondents identified as read/write learners, while 5% were visual learners. Some respondents also had combined learning styles, with 5% being auditory-kinesthetic.

*Visual learners’ preference in using social media for EFL learning*

After administering the VARK learning style questionnaire, it was found that 5 out of 100 participants were identified as visual learners. The findings indicated that the items with the highest mean scores were the enjoyment when listening to English songs and analyzing new words to apply them in real-life situations, mainly using audio-based platforms. They also grasp the material more quickly through YouTube videos, which helps them reduce the time needed to understand English concepts, and they find learning English through YouTube more enjoyable. However, they selected a variety of social media applications as their favorites, including Instagram, Discord, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube.

*Auditory learners’ preference in using social media for EFL learning*

Out of 100 EFL students, 16 were identified as

auditory learners. According to the data, the highest mean score with a value of 3.94 was in enjoyment of improving their English proficiency by listening to English songs and podcasts. The second highest score was for reading English content in Instagram feeds and stories and frequently use English in their bios, stories, comments, and captions, with a mean of 3.75.

Regarding their most favorite social media application in EFL learning, six of them selected YouTube as their preferred social media platform for learning English, followed by TikTok and Twitter, which were equally popular, based on Table 3. Moreover, one of them also discovered a platform that was rarely mentioned before, EF, commonly known as the English First platform.

*Read/write learners’ preference in using social media for English learning*

After evaluating 100 EFL students at Universitas Brawijaya, it was found that 12 of them were read/write learners. Most of these learners enjoy reading English posts in feeds and stories and frequently use English in their bios, stories, comments, and captions. They also like to create playlists with English songs that reflect their current mood. This preference is evident from the higher average scores for these activities compared to other items in the survey.

Besides, TikTok has the highest frequency among read/write learners, followed by YouTube, Twitter and Instagram consecutively. In addition, only one person favors Spotify for EFL learning.

*Kinesthetic learners’ preference in using social media for English learning*

Out of 100 EFL learners, 62 were identified as kinesthetic learners which is most of the participants are kinesthetic compared to the other learning styles. Based on the result, they prefer improving their English by listening to songs and podcasts in English. The second highest mean value, 3.53, was for the enjoyment in reading English posts on Instagram and frequently use English in their bios, stories, comments, and captions. In addition, YouTube is discovered as the most popular social media platform for learning English, favored by 20 EFL students. TikTok ranks second, selected by 13 respondents, while Instagram takes third place, with 10 students choosing it. Spotify follows with eight respondents, and Twitter comes next with 6. Other platforms like Netflix, Apple Music, and unspecified websites were also chosen by a few respondents.

*Auditory-kinesthetic learners' preference in using social media for English learning*

After conducting the VARK learning style questionnaire, which allows respondents to select multiple statements, it was observed that some individuals exhibit more than one learning style. In this study, five participants had equal preferences for auditory and kinesthetic learning styles. The highest mean score, 3.80, was recorded for the preference of enhancing their English skills by listening to English songs and podcasts. They also enjoy creating playlists with various English songs that match their mood or situation, which scored 3.60. These activities are categorized as audio-based. Spotify and TikTok are the most favored social media apps for learning English, while only one respondent chose YouTube.

*Preferences of all participants regarding the use of social media for learning English*

Data were collected to identify the highest mean score in order to evaluate the social media usage patterns and application preferences among EFL students at the tertiary education level. Social media usage was categorized based on content type: visual-based, audio-based, text-based, and action-experience-based. Each category was further divided into specific applications and features. The visual-based category included Instagram and YouTube, while the audio-based category covered music and podcast features primarily used through platforms like YouTube Music and Spotify. The text-based category included Twitter and WhatsApp, and the action-experience-based category focused on TikTok. Participants were also asked to select their preferred social media application for learning English.

Table 2. Overall respondents' preference in using social media for EFL learning

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
X1.1 When I listen to English podcasts, I love to analyze the structure of the sentences and imitate them in real situations.	2.95	.716
X1.2 I enjoy listening to English songs and podcasts to improve my English proficiency.	3.64	.659
X1.3 When I listen to English songs, I love to analyze the new words and use them in real situations.	3.41	.712

X1.4 I love to create a playlist which contains many English songs which represent my current condition.	3.38	.763
X2.1 I am an active Twitter user.	2.43	1.191
X2.2 I enjoy posting my own tweets in English.	2.43	1.121
X2.3 I love reading and retweeting English tweets.	2.69	1.152
X2.4 I love giving replies to the English tweets that I read on Twitter.	2.22	1.088
X2.5 I follow @englishfess_ and other English accounts to improve my English on Twitter.	2.26	1.160
X2.6 I joined WhatsApp Group and like to use it for classroom discussions in English.	2.24	.922
X2.7 I am always enthusiastic about responding in English in the WhatsApp group.	2.56	.880
X3.1 I understand the material better using videos from YouTube, which shortens my time in understanding English materials.	3.28	.792
X3.2 I feel learning English is much more fun when watching different material delivered on YouTube.	3.42	.727
X3.3 I follow several accounts that use English to communicate on Instagram.	3.32	.863
X3.4 I enjoy reading English in feeds and stories on Instagram and often use English in my bio, stories, comments, and captions.	3.52	.659
X4.1 I love using TikTok to improve my English skills.	3.10	1.020
X4.2 I love replying to English content on TikTok in the comments.	2.65	1.077
X4.3 I love continuing an English conversation with interactive content on TikTok.	2.80	1.092

Table 2 presented all respondents' social media usage patterns, specifically for learning English. It highlighted that 100 participants prefer listening to English songs and podcasts to enhance their English proficiency (item X1.2), as indicated by the highest mean score of 3.64 compared to other items. This was followed by item X3.4, with a mean of 3.52, showing that respondents enjoy reading English in Instagram feeds and stories and frequently use English in their bios, stories, comments, and captions.

Table 3. Overall respondents' preference of social media application for EFL learning

Social Media Application	Frequency	Percent %
TikTok	23	23.0
YouTube	31	31.0
Twitter	12	12.0
Spotify	12	12.0
Instagram	15	15.0
Others	7	7.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 3 presents the favorite social media platforms among all respondents, regardless of their learning styles. The data indicated that 31 out of 100 respondents preferred using YouTube to learn English. TikTok came next, with 23 EFL students favoring it for learning English. Fifteen respondents chose Instagram, while 12 respondents preferred both Twitter and Spotify. Lastly, fewer respondents used other platforms like Netflix, Apple Music, EF, Discord and other websites.

This study aims to explore the social media usage patterns and learning styles of EFL students at the tertiary education level, specifically within the English Language Education program at Universitas Brawijaya. The research was conducted by distributing questionnaires to gather quantitative data.

**Table 4. Cumulative summary**

Learning style	Preferred social media activity	Preferred social media app
Visual	Analyzing and practicing new words from songs	Instagram, Discord, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube.
	Watching YouTube videos	
Read/write	Reading and writing English text on Instagram	TikTok
Auditory	Listening to songs and podcasts	YouTube
Kinesthetic		YouTube
Auditory-kinesthetic		Spotify and TikTok

Table 4 reveals that visual learners enjoy analyzing and practicing new vocabulary from English songs and watching English videos on YouTube. Their app preferences varied, including those of Instagram, Discord, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube. Meanwhile, read/write learners tend to focus on reading and writing English content on Instagram, with TikTok being their favored social media app. Conversely, auditory, kinesthetic, and auditory-kinesthetic learners prefer listening to songs and podcasts. Auditory and kinesthetic

learners commonly use YouTube, while auditory-kinesthetic learners favor Spotify and TikTok.

This study examines the patterns of social media usage and learning styles among EFL students in higher education. A total of 100 EFL students from the English Language Education Program, Faculty of Cultural Studies at Universitas Brawijaya, participated in the research. Data were collected through questionnaires to gather quantitative information, which was subsequently analyzed to determine whether students' social media usage patterns align with their learning styles.

English songs and podcasts as tools in EFL learning have become increasingly popular, particularly at the tertiary level. As shown in Table 4, four of the five identified learning styles indicated that English songs are the most preferred learning activity. The findings indicate that the majority of EFL students have a positive response towards learning through English songs and podcasts generally. This implies that incorporating these mediums can significantly enhance their engagement and overall learning experience (Kumar et al, 2022; Wusqo et al., 2024). English songs, with their rhythm, melody, and everyday language use, help students acquire new vocabulary and improve pronunciation specifically in college students (Isnaini and Aminatun, 2021). Moreover, it has demonstrated that learning English through songs is enjoyable, engaging and effective in promoting cognitive development (Wusqo et al., 2024). English songs also offer a convenient and accessible way to enhance listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary through various platforms (Putri, 2023). Similarly, podcasts offer authentic, real-world English, enabling students to improve their listening comprehension skills and exposure to diverse accents and topics. Gunawan et al. (2023) found that podcasts help students maintain focus and introduce them to diverse and engaging topics in EFL learning. Additionally, podcasts provide EFL learners with a flexible, reflective, and interactive learning environment (Andersen & Dau, 2021).

Based on these results, it is recommended that EFL teachers, especially those at the tertiary education level, integrate English songs and podcasts into their curriculum. EFL teachers can effectively integrate English songs and podcasts into their curriculum by aligning them with learning objectives, considering their motivational value, and contextualizing them within lessons (Ghidhaoui, 2024). This approach not only makes learning more dynamic and enjoyable but also

aligns with students' interests, potentially leading to better retention and practical language usage. Furthermore, the versatility of these resources allows for flexible learning, whether in a classroom setting or as supplementary materials for self-study, catering to different learning preferences and paces.

Although the most preferred activity of the respondents is listening to songs and podcasts, most of them choose YouTube as their most preferred app to learn English. It is well known that YouTube is a valuable classroom tool that enhances student engagement, fosters creativity, covers material comprehensively, and makes learning more enjoyable and worthwhile (Abbas & Qasim, 2020). Moreover, YouTube positively impacts EFL learners' English proficiency by aiding vocabulary acquisition, enhancing engagement, improving comprehension, providing relevant materials, supporting note-taking, and developing both speaking and listening skills (Tahmina, 2023). YouTube is also known as an accessible and familiar social media platform for both teachers and students. Not only in higher education, but YouTube is also popular among EFL teachers as early as elementary school, and even earlier.

From that, it suggests that EFL teachers can integrate both songs and podcasts using YouTube in EFL classrooms. Students can search for English songs as well as their lyrics, watch English vlogs with subtitles, or even engage with other users. YouTube is also often employed as a video task submission platform, allowing students to do peer reviews by leaving comments in the comment section. Various channels are well known on YouTube and are often utilized in EFL classrooms, such as TED Talks, BBC Learn English, Learn English with Emma, etc.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that not all learning styles consistently align with students' preferred social media activities and applications. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners showed alignment between their learning styles and social media activities. However, only the auditory-kinesthetic learners demonstrated a match between their learning style and their preferred social media platforms. These results align with Kenanoğlu & Kahyaoğlu's (2024) study, which found no statistically significant difference between students' learning styles and their preference for social networks or the purposes for which they use them. This contrasts with Soetan et al. (2020), which discovered that social media influences the learning styles of students in Colleges of Education

based on a sample of 220 students.

The implementation of discovering students' learning styles is crucial in education, particularly in EFL contexts. Whether they are visual, auditory, read/write or kinesthetic learners. In many Indonesian schools, there may be regulations that require assessments of students' learning styles to tailor teaching methods accordingly. However, it is important to note that not all students will always adhere strictly to the learning style identified. Some may perform better with different approaches depending on the subject matter, context, or mood. This highlights the need for flexibility in instructional strategies.

The role of social media in EFL learning is increasingly significant as it aligns with students' interests and current trends. By integrating social media applications into EFL teaching, educators can create more engaging and relatable learning experiences. EFL teachers can select social media platforms that are popular among their students—such as Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok—to enhance language learning. These platforms can provide opportunities for real-world communication, exposure to authentic language, and multimedia resources that cater to diverse learning preferences.

However, it is not just about following trends; EFL teachers must also ensure that the chosen social media tools align with the learning objectives. For example, if the goal is to improve students' listening and speaking skills, a platform like YouTube, which offers a wide range of videos and audio content, might be more suitable. On the other hand, if the focus is on reading and writing, platforms like Twitter or blogging websites could be more appropriate. The key is to strike a balance between leveraging students' preferred learning styles and using media that supports the specific language learning goals.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the findings reveal that students from the 2023 English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Brawijaya favor audio-based applications, specifically songs and podcasts, as tools for English language learning. These platforms have proven to be highly effective in enhancing EFL learning by increasing motivation and offering various benefits that extend beyond mere alignment with individual learning preferences. While students predominantly enjoy listening to songs and podcasts, YouTube emerges as their preferred platform for English learning.



Despite some alignment between learning styles and social media preferences, not all learning styles corresponded consistently with social media activities. This inconsistency emphasizes the importance of flexibility in instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learning preferences. Ultimately, the integration of social media into EFL teaching can create relatable and engaging experiences, provided that educators align chosen platforms with specific learning objectives.

On top of the findings and results, this research has certain limitations. The distribution of learners across different learning styles is uneven; for instance, there are five visual learners compared to sixty-two kinesthetic learners. This imbalance may result in the voices and perceptions of the fewer respondents in specific learning styles being less prominent than those with a larger number of respondents. Therefore, it is recommended that future research focus on one or more specific learning styles to better amplify and understand their perspectives. Additionally, employing different methodological approaches, such as mixed methods or correlational, could lead to richer findings and insights. Future studies might also consider exploring alternative learning style models, such as Kolb's model, Gregorc learning model, Hermann Brain Dominance, or other personality inventories.

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