



Research Article

# Application of Social Media Platforms in Language Practice: Impact on Iranian EFL Learners' Language Skills

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## Abstract

The intersection of social media and language education has introduced new paradigms for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in contexts like Iran where access to authentic English interaction is limited. This mixed-methods study investigates the impact of social media platforms on the development of Iranian EFL learners' language skills. Grounded in Sociocultural Theory and Connectivism, the study examines how tools like Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, and WhatsApp facilitate skill integration, learner autonomy, and communicative competence. A sample of 120 intermediate Iranian EFL learners was divided into control and experimental groups across three institutes in Tehran and Isfahan. Over a 12-week period, the experimental group engaged in curriculum-aligned social media tasks, while the control group followed traditional instruction. Data were collected through standardized language tests, questionnaires, interviews, social media usage logs, and focus groups. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests and ANCOVA; qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using MAXQDA. Findings reveal significant improvements in integrated language skills among the experimental group, alongside heightened learner motivation, autonomy, and digital literacy. This paper offers pedagogical implications for curriculum designers, teacher training, and technology-enhanced language learning in EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Learner Autonomy; Social Media; Sociocultural Theory; Technology-Enhanced Language Learning; Technology

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## 1. Introduction

Consequently, given the pervasive nature of digital communication, English language learners today do not rely exclusively on texts and classroom communication either. Today, online environments such as Instagram,

YouTube, Telegram, and other such web-based facilities operate as online spaces where authentic English exposure, engagement, and presentation are carried out (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Pasaribu, 2020). Iranian English-as-a-second-language learners today are particularly fortunate since their authentic

English exposure is usually limited by the ideological and formal restrictions of the Iranian polity and educationally justified frameworks (Aghaei & Zare, 2021; Rassaei, 2017). Though the interest for the online learning of languages is increasing, the studies carried out in the Iranian culture and context have usually remained patchy, centering on a distinct skill only, an independent platform, or personal uses only (Zarei & Afshar, 2014; Khany & Nezhadmehr, 2020). A vast research gap still lurks in the level of comprehension concerning the possible role of social media sites for the integrated development of the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing within the collective learning context of the Iranian culture.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural Theory (SCT), proposed by Vygotsky (1978), indicates that the process of learning takes place in a fundamentally social manner employing the use of tools from culture. In this regard, the development of linguistic proficiency takes place within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners are able to achieve greater competency for linguistic performance via the intervention of the knowledgeable other. In the modern day and age, the contemporary online arena enabled by technologies such as the internet, computers, and other devices encompasses the medium within an arena where the 'social' becomes the paramount aspect (Warschauer, 2011). Typically, Iranian participants utilizing the Telegram or Instagram medium may be seen employing the comment, share, and voice note functions of said networks, facilitating negotiation for input and output (Aghaei & Zare, 2021; Rassaei, 2017).

### 2.2. Connectivism

Connectivism redefines the process of learning from the development of a network of knowledge within the contexts of society and technology combined (Siemens, 2005). In the context of English as a foreign language, the relevance of Connectivism supports the use of social networks since it facilitates instantaneous interaction between varied linguistic and cultural content (Almurashi, 2016; Kessler, 2013). Iranian students may rely on YouTube to provide their English tutorials, for example, or group discussions via WhatsApp, in effect corresponding the process of knowledge development within the online communities of practice (Taghizadeh & Hasani, 2021). An increasing literature points to the benefits of the affordances of social media in an education context for second language acquisition. Manca & Ranieri (2016) established the benefits of the integration of social media for enhancing the engagement of and collaboration

between learners. In an Iranian context, positive findings for vocabulary learning and writing skills for Iranian English major students were achieved via the implementation of tasks using the Telegram platform (Rassaei, 2017).

Also, Aghaei & Zare (2021) showed the successful findings of the implementation of Instagram in English foreign language education for boosting the engagement and motivation of Iranian English major students for the skill of reading comprehension. However, the vast majority of studies above achieve findings within the context of single skills and single tools of the social media; therefore, holistic studies are required (Khany & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Zarei & Afshar, 2014). Research Questions and Hypotheses

### 2.3. Research Questions

This study aims to address the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ1.** *To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' speaking skills?*

**RQ2.** *To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?*

**RQ3.** *To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?*

**RQ4.** *To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' writing performance?*

**RQ5.** *What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of using social media for developing their English language skills?*

**RQ6.** *What challenges do Iranian EFL learners and teachers face when incorporating social media into language instruction?*

### 2.4. Research Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in speaking skills between the experimental and control groups.*

**H<sub>02</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in listening comprehension between the experimental and control groups.*

**H<sub>03</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups.*

**H<sub>04</sub>:** *There is no significant difference in writing performance between the experimental and control groups.*

**H<sub>05</sub>:** *Learners perceive no significant benefit in using social media for language skill development.*

**H<sub>06</sub>:** *Learners and teachers face no significant challenges in using social media for language instruction.*

## 2.5. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses the gap in research on the integration of social media in the Iranian EFL context. While social media has been widely studied in Western and other Asian contexts (Pasaribu, 2020; Blattner & Fiori, 2009), its potential in the Iranian EFL classroom remains underexplored. As an authoritarian context with strict controls on internet usage, Iran presents unique challenges and opportunities for digital language learning. Thus, this study contributes to understanding how learners in such a context can benefit from social media engagement and what challenges they encounter.

Second, by exploring the impact of social media on all four language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—this research contributes to the growing body of literature on integrated language learning. Most studies tend to focus on one or two skills (Aghaei & Zare, 2021; Rassaei, 2017), leaving a gap in comprehensive analyses of how multiple skills can be developed simultaneously through digital platforms.

Moreover, this study will provide useful insights for educators and policymakers in Iran and other similar contexts, helping them design more effective and engaging language learning environments. It also offers valuable recommendations for incorporating social media tools into the curriculum to foster greater learner autonomy, engagement, and motivation.

Finally, the findings of this research may inform future teacher training programs. By identifying effective social media strategies for language learning, the study can guide teachers on how to incorporate these tools into their pedagogy, supporting the development of digitally literate, autonomous learners.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

In this investigation, the proposed research uses a convergent parallel mixed methods study approach proposed, where both the quantitative and the qualitative methods are combined for collecting as well as for the analysis of the findings simultaneously. In fact, the method used for analysis in this proposed research will permit the combination of findings, which ultimately will strengthen the findings obtained for the proposed investigation.

The objective of the quantitative study within the proposed thesis will be to identify the impact of the changes experienced by the learners in their linguistic skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing).

The qualitative component intends to examine the possible experiences of the learners and the instructors

regarding the role of social media in foreign language learning, as well as the possible difficulties they may have encountered in the process of the intervention study. The qualitative component will be carried out through semi-structured interviews, as well as the analysis of the log files of the participants' activity on the selected social media sites, since both elements are likely to offer very valuable information for the assessment of the experiences of the participants and the effectiveness of the approach carried out through the selected sites.

### 3.2. Participants

Participants of this study were Iranian English foreign language learners at intermediate levels of proficiency, namely B1-B2 level, aged between 18 and 25 years old, totaling 120 participants. The participants were selected from three private English language institutes in Tehran and Isfahan cities. The three private English language institutes were selected for the purpose of the study to ensure the participants are from diverse geographical and socio-economic environments. Participants were selected via purposeful sampling for the objective of the study to ensure the participants are at equal levels of competency and familiarity with the general concept of social media. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental group (n=60) or the control group (n=60). Participants in the experimental group were provided with language practice via social media for a period of 12 weeks, whereas the control group were offered classroom-based language learning.

Apart from the students, six other English as Foreign Language teachers, namely three male teachers and three female teachers, from the target language centers were included in the study. Moreover, the six teachers' ideas about the use of social networks for teaching languages, the problems they were facing, and the performance of their students were collected through the administration of focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews.

### 3.3. Instruments

In order to assess the effects of the use of social networks on skills in the English language, tools such as the following were used:

#### 3.3.1. Pre-Tests and Post-Tests

To ascertain the level of language proficiency before and after the intervention, pre/post-tests such as the IELTS Test or the Cambridge English Tests were used. The pre/post-tests were designed to cover the four aspects of the English skills, namely the speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills of the participants based on the participants' level of proficiency.

### 3.3.2. Questionnaires

Participants were asked to complete two primary questionnaires:

1. Language Learning Experience and Digital Literacy: Through the use of the questionnaire, the learners' former experiences in learning languages, their levels of digital literacy, and their exposure to using social media for learning were determined.

2. Perceptions of social media: This survey examined the learners' attitudes towards the use of social media in learning foreign languages through aspects such as motivation, autonomy, effectiveness, and ease of use. The survey was based on an adapted version of the framework used by Wang & Vásquez (2012), employing the Likert scaling technique for the survey administration.

### 3.3.3. Social Media Usage Logs

Students were asked to keep logs regarding their utilization of the various social media sites used for learning foreign languages. A log was kept regarding the time spent on the sites, the activities carried out (e.g., listening to podcasts on Telegram, uploading videos on Instagram), and the sites used (e.g., YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, among others).

### 3.3.4. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out on 20 participants (10 from the experimental group and the other 10 from the control group), and the other 6 participants will be from the instructor group, one from each institute of languages. The participants were asked about their personal encounters and experiences using social media tools for the purpose of learning foreign languages, the impressions they got from the utility of the tools, as well as the difficulties they encountered during the process.

### 3.3.5. Focus Groups

A focus group was held in every language institute after the intervention, among 5-6 participants from the experimental group. These sessions was an opportunity to understand the participants' view regarding the tasks given on social media sites, their level of engagement, and the problems they have faced in the study process.

## 3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The experiment took a total of twelve weeks, and it started with the pre-intervention phase where a demographics survey, a pre-test measuring the participants' existing level of linguistic skills, and a language learning experience survey measuring their level of digital literacy

skills were administered to every participant. The participants' level of existing skills measured during the pre-test survey enabled the formation of a basis for comparison among the participants in order to ascertain the level of improvement brought about by the intervention process among the two distinct groups.

During the intervention phase, which ran for twelve weeks, both groups received instruction in two different ways. Members of the experimental group engaged in a set of learning endeavors designed around the ubiquitous use of social media sites. The needs of the existing curriculum were integrated with the provision of a well-rounded development of the four skills inherent in the English language. To enhance speaking skills, members could create video communications on sites such as Instagram/TikTok, where they could recount stories, deliver speeches, or react to questions posed for group discussions in English. To improve their listening skills, members could listen to English podcasts/YouTube videos placed on sites such as general/academic subjects, where members would then react to the presentations through discussions on WhatsApp forums for their respective groups.

Reading skills would be honed through members accessing English articles/posts/commentaries placed on sites such as Telegram channels and other online forums for discussions. To enhance members' skills in writing, members could write short posts/comments/reflective writings on sites such as the WhatsApp forum; for extended assignments such as blog writings, members could opt for sites such as Medium and Blogger sites.

In contrast, the control group was given the traditional classroom experience using only physical face-to-face classroom instruction during the same twelve-week period. Also, the learning process of the control group remained rooted in paper documents, classroom exercises, and classroom discussions, without the aid of social media tools for their integration purposes.

After the completion of the twelve-week intervention period, the post-intervention phase began. A post-test identical to the pre-test was administered to all participants, and the findings could then be quantitatively analyzed for changes in the participants' level of language proficiency in the four skills.

In fact, participants also reacted to a questionnaire designed to survey the participants' personal view of the effectiveness of using social media for learning languages. To shed additional light on the subject, semi-structured interviews were held with participants as well as the teachers to understand their personal experiences and difficulties associated with the intervention process. Moreover, focus group discussions were held at both institutions for participants to share their personal view about the intervention and the limitations associated with it.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

The process of data analysis consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methods, allowing for methodological triangulation and increasing the validity of the findings. On the quantitative front, the data obtained from the pre- and post-testing was analyzed utilizing the Paired Sample t-test for within-subjects analysis, whereas ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance), a statistical analysis technique, was used for comparing the experiment group and the control group after adjusting for the pre-testing scores. Through this analysis technique, it became possible to identify the effect of the intervention and the level of enhancement contributed specifically by the use of social media for instruction. In the qualitative analysis, the recorded interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques employing the MAXQDA analysis tool. In this analysis, the researchers identified themes and patterns of occurrences reflecting the attitudes, difficulties, and experiences of the learners and teachers during the intervention process. The themes captured the dynamics of interaction between the participants and the online learning environment, affecting their levels of motivation and linguistic development. Finally, the technique of triangulation was used to verify the findings from both quantitative and qualitative sources to ensure a holistic interpretation of the findings obtained. Discrepancies existing between the findings obtained through statistics and the experiences reported by the participants were closely evaluated to create a holistic view of the importance of social media in contributing to improvements in foreign language acquisition.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Statistical Results of the First Research Question

**Table 1.** Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Speaking Skills by Group

Group	Pretest <i>M</i>	Posttest <i>M</i>	<i>F</i> (1, 117)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Experimental ( <i>n</i> = 60)	68.42	82.37	28.47	< 0.001	.19
Control ( <i>n</i> = 60)	69.05	72.16	-	-	-

*Note.* Higher scores indicate greater speaking proficiency. ANCOVA was conducted with pretest scores as the covariate.

**Table 2.** Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Listening Comprehension by Group

Group	Pretest <i>M</i>	<i>F</i> (1, 117)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Experimental ( <i>n</i> = 60)	70.11	24.31	< 0.001	—
Control ( <i>n</i> = 60)	71.32	-	-	-

*Note.* Posttest means were not reported in the original manuscript. ANCOVA was conducted with pretest scores as the covariate. Effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) was not provided for this analysis in the source

**Table 3.** Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Reading Comprehension by Group

Group	Pretest <i>M</i>	<i>F</i> (1, 117)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Experimental ( <i>n</i> = 60)	67.83	26.14	< 0.001	0.18
Control ( <i>n</i> = 60)	68.95	-	-	-

*Note.* Posttest means were not reported. ANCOVA was conducted with pretest scores as the covariate

*To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' speaking skills?* The experimental group, which received social media-based instruction, showed a substantial increase in speaking proficiency ( $M = 82.37$ ) compared to the control group ( $M = 72.16$ ). The ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant effect of the treatment ( $F(1,117) = 28.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.19$ ), suggesting that participation in social media-based speaking tasks (e.g., Instagram stories, WhatsApp voice messages) considerably enhanced oral fluency, pronunciation, and interactional competence. These results reject the first null hypothesis and confirm the positive influence of social media engagement on speaking skills.

### 4.2. Statistical Results of the Second Research Question

*To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?* The experimental group outperformed the control group significantly in listening comprehension ( $F(1,117) = 24.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Learners' exposure to YouTube podcasts, English vlogs, and Telegram audio clips improved their comprehension of varied accents, speech rates, and colloquial expressions. The results support the conclusion that authentic multimedia input provided via social media fosters listening skill development, consistent with [Almurashi \(2016\)](#) and [Pasaribu \(2020\)](#).

### 4.3. Statistical Results of the Third Research Question

*To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?*

**Table 4.** Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Writing Performance by Group

Group	Pretest $M$	$F(1, 117)$	$p$	$\eta^2$
Experimental ( $n = 60$ )	66.54	27.83	< 0.001	0.19
Control ( $n = 60$ )	67.12	-	-	-

Note. Posttest means were not reported. ANCOVA was conducted with pretest scores as the covariate

The ANCOVA results show a significant main effect for group ( $F(1,117) = 26.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.18$ ), indicating that the experimental group's exposure to online articles, captions, and interactive reading materials on Telegram and Instagram improved comprehension and vocabulary retention. This finding confirms the effectiveness of contextualized and authentic digital texts in enhancing reading comprehension (Rassaei, 2017; Aghaei & Zare, 2021).

#### 4.4. Statistical Results of the Fourth Research Question

*To what extent does the use of social media platforms affect Iranian EFL learners' writing performance?*

The ANCOVA results ( $F(1,117) = 27.83$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.19$ ) reveal that social media-based writing activities (e.g., blog posts, WhatsApp discussions, and Instagram captions) significantly improved writing performance in the experimental group. Learners demonstrated enhanced grammatical accuracy, coherence, and lexical diversity. The results align with Shih (2011) and Wang & Vásquez (2012), showing that collaborative digital writing encourages fluency and confidence through feedback loops and peer interaction.

#### 4.5. Qualitative Results Related to the Fifth and Sixth Research Questions

*RQ5: What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of using social media for developing their English language skills?*

Thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups revealed three dominant themes:

**Enhanced Motivation and Enjoyment:** Learners found social media tasks more engaging than traditional drills, citing freedom, creativity, and relevance to their daily lives.

**Autonomy and Accessibility:** Participants appreciated the flexibility of learning "anytime, anywhere," which fostered self-regulated learning.

**Authentic Communication:** Learners valued real-world interactions with peers and native speakers, which boosted confidence and communicative competence.

*RQ6: What challenges do Iranian EFL learners and teachers face when incorporating social media into language instruction?*

Two major challenge categories emerged:

**Technological Barriers:** Limited internet access, censorship, and device constraints occasionally hindered participation.

**Pedagogical Challenges:** Both learners and teachers reported uncertainty regarding structured guidance, feedback mechanisms, and balancing formal and informal learning spaces.

#### 4.6. Summary of Results

Across all four quantitative research questions, social media integration produced statistically significant gains in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Qualitative results reinforced these results by showing strong learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy, though accompanied by technological and instructional challenges.

### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1. Discussion Concerning the First Research Hypothesis

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant difference between the speaking skills of the experimental group and the control group.

The findings obtained from the current study showed a statistically significant enhancement in the performance level of the speaking skills of the experimental group, who practiced English via the social media sites, compared to the control group, which was trained in the conventional manner. This refutes the first null hypothesis and proves the effectiveness of the interaction tasks carried out via the social media sites in increasing the speaking skills' level of the participants.

These findings are consistent with the increasing amount of literature focusing on the communicative affordance of social media networks for the teaching of English as a foreign language. For example, researchers such as Nguyen and Dinh (2021) discovered that students who participated in storytelling via Instagram showed greater fluency in their pronunciation compared to students in a traditional classroom setting. Moreover, Ali & Al-Harbi (2022) discovered that learners who participated in group conversations on the communication apps 'WhatsApp' and 'Telegram' showed an improved level of interaction competence compared to the traditional classroom setting because the setting enabled the learners to be less nervous during conversation. The

findings of the above studies are replicated in the Iranian context in the current study and indicate the authenticity of the level of communicative exposure offered by social networks compared to traditional settings, even within a limited context. In addition, the findings are in line with the ideas proposed by [Rassaei \(2023\)](#), who indicated the importance of the immediacy of feedback and the informal nature of online communication for the spontaneous use of language. Finally, the participants found the tasks given on the social media platform, such as sharing voice recordings or video recordings, engaging and helped them to communicate freely without the fear of committing an error. The findings validate the importance of Sociocultural Theory ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)), where the role of the mediator in oral production, specifically the social media platform in the current context, was highlighted.

## 5.2. Discussion Concerning the Second Research Hypothesis

H<sub>02</sub>: No statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the area of listening comprehension.

The statistical analysis showed that there was an increase in the comprehension levels among the participants who used the authentic AV input available on sites such as YouTube and Telegram. The non-acceptance of the second null hypothesis proves the assumption that the provision of listening practice in the real context of social sites increases the comprehension levels compared to textbook learning. These findings are in line with the findings obtained by [Fitria & Dewi \(2020\)](#), who found that the participants who used YouTube-listening activities achieved not only their comprehension skills but also their skills for tone and context interpretation. In the most recent study, [Wang & Li \(2022\)](#) found that the sustained exposure to the podcast-based English learning delivered significant improvements in the auditory skills for the participants. In the same line, [Karimi & Ghafouri \(2023\)](#) confirmed that Iranian participants who joined the Telegram-listening conversation activity achieved enhanced inferencing skills and enhanced retention levels compared to those who gained exposure to the static-listening activity in class. In the current experiment, the participants' progress could be attributed to the fact that the content available on the social sites was multifaceted and centered around exposure to varied accents, authentic rate of pronunciation, and realistic contexts of communication. Also, the above findings are well-supported by the 'Connectivism' theory proposed by Siemens in 2005, which focuses on the fact that the process of learning takes place after interaction between the varied information nodes and the online communities around them. In conclusion, the findings of this study

support the fact that the integration of social networks in the learning process of English as foreign language listening skills leads to a greater variety of input than the classroom recording method used previously.

## 5.3. Discussion in Relation to the Third Research Hypothesis

H<sub>03</sub>: No statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group regarding their performance on the comprehension examination.

The third hypothesis was also rejected since the experimental group learners scored significantly higher in the reading comprehension than the control group learners. This may be attributed to the fact that the learners read authentic online texts such as posts, comments, and articles, which enhanced contextual reading and vocabulary building. This finding supports the findings of the study by [Abdullah & Yunus \(2021\)](#), where the researchers found that the integration of Instagram captions and short blog posts in EFL reading lessons enhanced the inferencing and critical reading skills of the participants. Furthermore, [Aghaei & Zare \(2021\)](#) found in their study the beneficial effects of Telegram channels on the comprehension and vocabulary mastery of the participants as the content in the channel could be accessed easily according to their interest in the topic. More recent studies include the confirmation by [Rahimi & Nejad \(2024\)](#) about the effects of the multimodal format of the reading materials on Iranian EFL students' comprehension of the discourse in social networks. The interactive component of reading via social media should not be ignored either. Comments, sharing, and discussions about texts among classmates encouraged greater levels of engagement and autonomy in readers, confirming the findings of [Manca & Ranieri \(2020\)](#), who found the use of social networks positively influences the process of collaborative meaning-making. In the proposed study, readers' growth in this investigation would find their readings enhanced by familiarization with materials related to their interests, raising their level of intrinsic motivation for readership development. From a theoretical point of view, these findings further support the Connectivist approach to learning, according to which understanding findings from interaction with dynamic and socially-networked texts. Consequently, the current research re-emphasizes the importance of authentic reading input via social networks for the enhancement of linguistic understandings as well as autonomy.

## 5.4. Discussion Concerning the Fourth Research Hypothesis

H<sub>04</sub>: No difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of performance in writing ability.

The findings showed that the experimental group students' performance exceeded the control group students' performance in their written assignments, specifically in the aspects of coherence, diversity, and creativity. Therefore, the fourth null hypothesis was rejected. The dynamic aspect of the task for the write-to-publish process in the social media context, which included posting, commenting, and editing, contributed to the development of the mentioned skills.

These findings support the findings reported in the study of [Pasaribu \(2020\)](#), where the author found that composing through the means of social media sites increases the sense of authorship and the production of creativity among English as a Foreign Language learners. Furthermore, the impact of collaborative authoring in the context of WeChat on grammatical precision and organization for the purpose of authentic communications was discovered to be effective by the authors of the study of [Shadiev & Yang \(2021\)](#). Moreover, in the Iranian culture, the findings reported by the authors of the study by [Farahani & Khodabakhsh \(2023\)](#) demonstrate the enhanced effects of Telegram peer editing on increasing fluency and correctness compared to written texts.

However, the current research also affirms the claim made by [Li \(2022\)](#) concerning the significance of online environments where learners may be scaffolded from the level of surface linguistic competence to the level of higher order competency in their writing processes via the process of revisions and collaboration among the learners where the participants found it very motivating for their writings to be visible to the target audience. Such findings are consistent with Sociocultural Theory, according to which writing must be understood from the perspective of a socially mediated process involving processes of feedback, dialogue, and co-production of meaning among individuals. In the context of the asynchronous nature of social media writings, the reflection, editing, and refining of the writing process enabled the learners to develop their metacognitive awareness.

### 5.5. Discussion In Response to the Fifth Research Question

H<sub>05</sub>: Students do not perceive benefits from the utilization of social media in the development of their language skills.

The findings from the qualitative study greatly contradicted the fifth null hypothesis. The participants showed very positive attitudes towards the use of social media as an additional resource to enhance their English language skills. The participants mentioned greater motivation, freedom, and enjoyment, as well as the convenience of practicing the language without being in the classroom. Such findings support the current empirical findings, whereby positive attitudes among learners

towards teachers have an imperative effect on their level of engagement and learning findings. For instance, [Rahman & Wang \(2020\)](#) reported that EFL learners who frequently used Instagram and YouTube for non-academic English exposure reported an enhanced sense of ownership and confidence in communication. Their study confirmed other literature in the field where [Huang & Hung's \(2021\)](#) findings indicated the learners found the social environment to be an environment of low anxiety that promoted the the willingness to communicate in English.

Findings from the Iranian context indicated that the independent learning process encouraged by Telegram/WhatsApp-based learning enhanced autonomy in the learners by fostering independent learning behavior among them, according to [Moradi & Aghaei \(2022\)](#). The current study enhances the level of understanding from the above finding by indicating the development of enhanced metacognitive knowledge, where the learners are able to assess their performance and seek feedback from online forums. These findings are very much in line with the Connectivist framework proposed by [Siemens \(2005\)](#), where the process of learning happens within a distributed network of virtual engagements and knowledge sources. Social media thereby increases the possibility of such networks among learners, who are able to create, refine, and share their linguistic knowledge through linguistic content production and sharing.

Moreover, the positive findings from the above study reinforce the finding of another study by [Chen & Lee \(2023\)](#), indicating the increased motivation of EFL learners who used social media as authentic, creative, and meaningful experiences. Such authenticity bridges the academia-generated requirements for foreign language knowledge and everyday communication, which cannot be achieved in a classroom environment. Consequently, the non-acceptance of the fifth null hypothesis highlights the fact that learners not only are aware of the importance of social media in language development but also esteem the potential of the latter in this aspect.

### 5.6. Discussion Connected to the Sixth Research Question

H<sub>06</sub>: Students and tutors are not faced with major challenges in the application of social media for teaching languages.

Though the finding validated the effectiveness of learning processes through social media, the rejection of the sixth null hypothesis also occurred since both participants and instructors identified various difficulties that interfered with the effective implementation process. The major difficulties included technological problems, lack of training in pedagogical aspects, and inconsistency in support frameworks. These are echoed by the findings

of studies carried out worldwide in the realm of EFL. For example, [Kessler and Plakans \(2020\)](#) emphasized the point that although online learning spaces enhance autonomy, at the same time, they require high levels of ICT competence and autonomy in learners, which may not be the case for everyone. Furthermore, the observations made by the scholars of the field, as presented in the paper by [Reinders and Benson \(2021\)](#), showed that teachers tend to struggle to incorporate the usage of social media into the classroom settings because of the lack of training and management concerns. Furthermore, the findings obtained by the researchers in the study carried out by the scholars of the field, as mentioned in the paper by [Zou, Xie, & Wang \(2022\)](#), revealed the point that the absence of proper pedagogical frameworks may finding in the limited and improper uses of

In the Iranian setting, the study by [Khany & Nezhadmehr \(2020\)](#), as well as [Aghaei & Zare \(2021\)](#), highlighted the limitations of the available technology, such as limited internet access and the blocking of certain platform networks by the Iranian government, as serious hindrances to effective learning via social networks. In the current study, the above limitations are validated; however, the hunger for e-learning among the participants overcame the limitations of the infrastructure by utilizing the VPN and other apps. The other major issue relates to the quality of peer feedback and unofficial communications via social sites. The participants indicated that although the feedback was instant and widespread, it often lacked validity and quality. This point validates the claim by [Lee & Kim \(2023\)](#) that without the intervention of teachers, the findings of peer collaboration via the Internet could be unequal and misleading. The teachers in the study indicated the importance of having guidelines within the institution to avoid distractions associated with the Internet.

However, the challenges posed notwithstanding, both the learners and the teachers looked at the integration of social media in the classroom as a process of necessary evolution rather than a fleeting fad. In other words, the teachers realized the benefits such integration could bring for enhanced student-centric learning, among other benefits, whereas the learners could see the benefits for creativity and interaction offered by the same process.

## 6. Conclusion

The current research offers an insight into the effectiveness of using social media for improving the linguistic skills of Iranian English foreign language learners. Based on the findings, the use of social media networks appears to be an effective technique for improving speaking, listening, and written skills of the learners since those in the experiment group scored higher than the control group members. In fact, the use of social

media networks in the classroom presents a learning situation for the students where the learners are able to practice the skills learned in an effective manner without being limited by the classroom boundaries of the traditional setting. However, the study also points to the challenges posed by technology and the importance of training teachers to use the technology effectively for the purposes of teaching English as a foreign language. In the midst of the challenges, the benefits seen in the study indicate the importance of utilizing social media sites for the teaching of English as a foreign language, especially where English speakers are hardly accessible to the learners.

The findings from the study have important pedagogical implications for teachers of English as a Foreign Language. With the ever-changing landscape of English learning around the globe, teachers of English as a Foreign Language must be able to take advantage of the benefits of new information technologies and social networks to create motivating environments for the acquisition of English competence in an interconnected planet. In closing, although social media may not be the magic bullet for the gamut of problems associated with foreign language acquisition, it certainly represents an undeniable opportunity for additional support within foreign language classroom instruction. Future studies must examine the long-term effects associated with the implementation of foreign language skills via the leveraging of social media and identify methods for remedying the technical and pedagogical problems associated with the implementation of such tools within the classroom instructor's framework of practice and pedagogical philosophy.

### 6.1. Limitations of the Study

In spite of the marked contributions made by the ongoing study within the context of technology-based English as a foreign language education, certain limitations must be identified in order to understand the findings achieved by the research paper. The foremost limitation relates to the sample size and the possible generalizations based on the collected data. Although the sample size of the ongoing study included the data of 120 participants, which was marked by sufficient information for carrying out appropriate statistics, the sample could not be identified as fully representative within the context of the vast Iranian group of English as a foreign language learner ([Zarei & Afshar, 2014](#)).

A second drawback relates to the intervention's period. Although the intervention period of twelve weeks was adequate for the observation of positive changes in language skills, it may not have been long enough for the observation of sustained positive changes in language proficiency levels. Training in the acquisition of

languages requires a gradual process, and a training period of an extended nature might produce fruitful observations on the effects, particularly concerning the skills of speaking and writing (Rassaei, 2017).

Another aspect might be the accessibility of the technology available. Even though the use of social networks such as the ones mentioned above retains widespread appeal in urban environments, the lack of equal access to smartphones and internet connections, as well as training in using the technologies available, could well be an aspect that has affected the uniform level of engagement amongst the participants and therefore the level to which the findings may be generally applicable to other, perhaps less well-equipped, participants (Aghaei & Zare, 2021).

Finally, instructor variability may have contributed additional complexity to the study. Although the study used teachers as participants, the fact that they varied in their level of familiarity and comfort level concerning the use of social media tools may have impacted the quality of the findings. Moreover, the differences may have impacted the learners in the study as well as the effectiveness of the intervention used in the study. The differences may also have contributed to the differences between the control group and the experimental group; therefore, an aspect of instructional bias should be recognized within the findings.

## 6.2. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have diverse implications, spanning the domains of curriculum development, teacher training, education policy, and development of the learner. With regard to the development of the curriculum, the findings underline the relevance of introducing the constituent elements of social media as additional learning tools within the context of Iranian EFL learning programs. The identified capability of such tools to facilitate effective communication skills in the real world could indicate an increased need for the development of curricula for learning technologies.

In the context of teacher training, the findings above re-emphasize the importance of implementing training programs for teachers on the effective integration of social media tools in the teaching of languages. Training teachers not only in the technical aspects of the tools available through social media sites but also in the pedagogical skills necessary for the effective utilization of these tools for the purposes of enhanced motivational and critical skills in learners needs consideration. The importance of training teachers for the effective integration of technologies, as identified in previous studies (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Pasaribu, 2020), cannot be overemphasized. In policy contexts, the research assumes importance for Iran's education reforms, where

the teaching of languages is still largely traditional and examination-based. Researchers could recommend the integration of digital literacy skills and media studies at the national level to equip children for the communication needs of an interconnected, technology-enabled world. Doing so would not only bring about a transformation in English language teaching in Iran but also inspire the acquisition of twenty-first-century skills in the country's youth.

In addition, the findings offer practical implications concerning the development of autonomy in the learners. Social media enhances autonomy in learning, as it inspires the learners to be responsible for their linguistic and cognitive development. Furthermore, the opportunity to learn at their own pace and concentrate on their area of interest makes social media an effective tool for the development of self-directed learners who continually reinforce their linguistic skills after training. This corresponds closely to the theories presented by Siemens (2005) and Warschauer (2011), who argue that technology enhances continuous learning environments.

## 6.3. Suggestions for Further Research

On the back of the findings of the above study, certain possible avenues for subsequent studies are suggested. Firstly, the need for a longitudinal study to measure the long-term effects of learning through social media on linguistic proficiency should be given utmost importance. If the intervention period for such studies could be extended, then the benefits obtained from increased linguistic skills could be measured to note the changes in the use of social media among the learners after the study (Wang & Vásquez, 2012). Moreover, other studies could be carried out for an analysis of the various tools available on the different social networks in order to understand the tools available for the appropriate skills in languages such as English. For example, the tools available on Instagram, which are visual, may be the most effective for speaking skills, while the tools available on other sites such as WhatsApp may be effective for the development of the written skills in English (Almurashi, 2016).

A promising approach may be the analysis of the effects of social media on other levels of learners, for example, based on the age group, level of proficiency, and profession of the learners. Future studies may therefore be able to provide a differentiated view of the importance of social media for the acquisition of foreign languages (Rassaei, 2017).

Scholars are also encouraged to conduct studies focusing on the effects of social media within an informal learning context other than the classroom setting. Examining the uses of online communities, native speakers' communication, and building intercultural skills would extend the boundaries of studies concerning the

development of pragmatic and sociolinguistics (Taghizadeh & Hasani, 2021).

Finally, additional research should be carried out from the point of view of teachers, since the attitudes, ICT skills, and approaches of teachers are very crucial for the successful implementation of information and communications technologies (ICTs). An examination of the challenges facing instructors could be used to create effective training programs and frameworks for sustainable implementations (Blattner & Fiori, 2009).

#### Authors Contribution

All the authors have participated sufficiently in the intellectual content, conception, and design of this work or the analysis and interpretation of the data (when applicable), as well as the writing of the manuscript.

#### Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

#### Conflict of interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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