



INVESTIGATING THE STUDENTS' CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SELF-DIRECTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT: A CASE STUDY OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM SCHOOL

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Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti tantangan dan peluang yang dihadapi oleh siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris secara mandiri melalui konten media sosial dalam kerangka sekolah Kurikulum Merdeka. Wawancara semi-terstruktur dilakukan dengan lima siswa sekolah menengah pertama menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Analisis konten tematik mengungkapkan beberapa tantangan utama, seperti kesulitan dalam memilih konten yang sesuai, gangguan dari materi non-akademis, dan kurangnya bimbingan. Namun, siswa juga mengidentifikasi peluang penting, seperti waktu dan tempat belajar yang fleksibel, peningkatan motivasi, akses ke berbagai sumber daya, serta kesempatan untuk berinteraksi dengan penutur asli dan teman sebaya dari latar belakang yang berbeda. Hasil penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya strategi dan pedoman yang lebih terstruktur untuk membantu siswa memanfaatkan media sosial secara efektif dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

Abstract

This study examines the challenges and opportunities encountered by students in self-directed English language learning through social media content within the framework of Merdeka Curriculum schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five junior high school students using a qualitative approach. The thematic content analysis reveals several key challenges, such as difficulties selecting appropriate content, distractions from non-academic material, and a lack of guidance. However, students also identified important opportunities, such as flexible learning times and places, increased



motivation, access to various resources, and opportunities to interact with native speakers and peers from different backgrounds. The results of this study highlight the importance of more structured strategies and guidelines to help students effectively utilize social media in English language learning.

Keywords: *Self-directed learning; challenges; opportunities; social media; Merdeka Curriculum.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapidly growing digital technology has brought about significant changes in all aspects of life, especially in education. One of the most significant changes is the presence of social media as a potential learning tool. Social media has now also become an effective platform for self-directed learning (SDL) of English, not just serving as a means of communication and entertainment (Liton, 2021). In this context, according to (Morris & Rohs, 2021) due to the widespread access to the internet and the abundance of digital content containing language learning, SDL is increasingly becoming very relevant in the current era.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is a method or approach to learning where a learner or student takes charge of their education, such as taking the initiative to analyze their learning needs, identify learning resources, formulate their goals, and evaluate their learning outcomes (Joshi & Dixit, 2020). Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is supported by many easily accessible online resources in today's digital era, including social media that offers various types of content, ranging from educational videos to articles and discussions with learning communities around the world (Murniati et al., 2023). With social media, students gain the opportunity to learn English in a more natural and dynamic environment, interact directly with native speakers, and utilize authentic content that aligns with their interests and needs (Solmaz & Reinhardt, 2024).

The Merdeka curriculum implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture is a strategic step towards creating more flexible and independent learning. This curriculum is designed to give students more choices and to organize learning materials according to their interests and abilities, in line with the principles of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) (Rosa et al., 2024). In this context, social media allows students



to connect with educational resources from around the world without limitations of time and place (Agustina et al., 2023).

However, in its implementation, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) greatly depends on the ability of teachers and students to optimally utilize digital technology. Widyastuti (2022) conducted a study showing that although the Merdeka curriculum offers more freedom and flexibility to students, many teachers are still not fully willing to support this technology-based independent learning. Suppose the optimal potential of social media in Self-Directed Learning (SDL) can be achieved. In that case, the lack of adequate training and resources is the main barrier that must be addressed (Widyastuti, 2022).

In addition, it is important to note that some students have varying access to the internet and technology. This technological gap can pose a significant barrier in efforts to utilize social media as a tool for self-directed English language learning (Lai et al., 2022). Therefore, this research will explore how inclusive educational policies and broader technological support can address these challenges.

This study aims to deepen the understanding of the challenges and opportunities in self-directed English language learning through social media content among students in schools that implement the Merdeka curriculum. By delving into this context, this research seeks to provide insights into how students can use social media as an effective medium of self-directed English language learning, as well as convey a clear picture of the challenges and opportunities they face. This research aims to address the gap in the literature by analyzing whether social media can be more effective than traditional methods in supporting independent English language learning. Specifically, the research questions guiding this study are: (1) What are the challenges faced by students when using social media in self-directed English language learning? (2) What are the opportunities that students can take advantage of self-directed English language learning through social media?



METHODS

In this study, researchers used a qualitative approach to explore more deeply the challenges and opportunities faced by students in self-directed English language learning through social media content with a focus on case studies at schools with Merdeka curriculum to obtain data. Researchers use a qualitative approach because it is possible to understand students' perspectives and experiences in depth, which cannot be achieved with quantitative methods. Creswell & Creswell (2017) state that the qualitative approach "prioritizes the collection of data directly from participants and gaining an understanding of issues from their perspective". Merriam & Tisdell (2015) state that qualitative research is very ideal for studying social processes and individual experiences, in this context, self-directed English language learning through social media is an example.

The participants in this study are five junior high school students from a school in Medan that has implemented the Merdeka curriculum. They were selected based on the criterion that they actively use social media as a tool to assist in their self-directed English language learning process. They were chosen because these five students represent diverse social backgrounds and levels of engagement in social media use, allowing for different perspectives and varied experiences. Patton (2014) states that purposive sampling is very important in qualitative research because it serves to select participants who are most qualified to provide information about the phenomenon being studied.

Semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection method in this research. By using this method, researchers are given the flexibility to explore topics that arise directly during the interview and to ensure that the main themes are still covered (Kallio et al., 2016). Using these semi-structured interviews, allows the students to share their experiences more openly while still maintaining focus on the predetermined research questions.

The data analysis used by the researchers is Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), following the guidelines provided by Braun & Clarke (2006). This Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) approach was chosen because this approach is very effective for analyzing and identifying qualitative data. Braun & Clarke (2006) say that Thematic



Content Analysis (TCA) not only provides a structure for understanding data but also allows researchers to remain open to the atmosphere and complexity of participants' experiences. This analysis process uses six steps, namely: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and finally (6) preparing the final report.

Through the approach chosen by the researcher, this study is expected to explore more deeply the challenges and opportunities experienced by female students in learning English independently through social media content, and also how they face various obstacles in the process.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to investigate the challenges and opportunities experienced by students in independent English language learning through social media content in schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Through interviews conducted with five students from a school in Medan which have been transcribed and coded, the researcher obtained several important themes that can represent the challenges and opportunities in the use of social media content for self-directed English language learning. Researchers use quotes from respondents that have been translated into English to provide evidence for each existing theme. The following is an in-depth analysis of the interview findings combined with a review of the latest literature.

Challenges in Self-Directed English Language Learning Through Social Media

Difficulty in Choosing the Right Content

The first main challenge faced by the five students is the difficulty in selecting content that matches their needs and skill levels. In this regard, MA said, “*Sometimes I get confused choosing content that suits me because there are so many videos and photos, but not all of them are appropriate for my level*”. Ma's statement indicates that although social media provides a wealth of information, not all of it meets their learning needs.

In this case, the students are experiencing a phenomenon known as information overload, where they are confronted with an excess of information and struggle to choose



what is truly beneficial for them at the moment. According to research conducted by Lam et al. (2023), information overload can lead to stress, confusion, and poor decision-making, especially in the context of education. Students often spend their time more on selecting suitable materials rather than truly studying the content. This poses a significant challenge for students who do not yet have strong critical skills in finding appropriate materials. This challenge becomes more prominent in the context of the Merdeka curriculum, which encourages student independence, as students are expected to have greater control over their learning processes.

Distractions from Non-Academic Content

The next challenge faced by the students is distraction caused by non-academic or non-English learning content on social media. In this case, WA said, *“Often whenever I want to study, suddenly other content appears which makes me so distracted”*. This is a particularly annoying challenge as students are often easily distracted and lose focus by content that is not relevant to their learning goals, such as entertainment videos, advertisements, or even viral news.

According to research conducted by Pérez-Juárez et al. (2023), it was found that social media has the ability to unify various types of content on a single platform. Although in this case it also means providing various types of information, the side effects are unavoidable disturbances. When students encounter non-academic content, their attention is often easily diverted, which reduces their learning effectiveness. This shows that one of the main challenges in using social media for learning is how students can maintain focus on their learning goals amidst the flood of information that is irrelevant to their objectives.

Lack of Guidance in Self-Directed Learning

One of the main challenges ahead is the lack of clear guidance in self-directed English learning through social media content. NA expressed that *“sometimes I am confused about where to start and how to learn English correctly on TikTok”*. This shows that many students feel lost without a clear purpose or direction, especially those in a self-



directed learning environment. Without proper guidance, students will likely struggle to find effective learning methods.

Greenhow & Lewin (2019) emphasize that although social media has great potential as a learning medium, the success of self-directed learning heavily depends on the presence of supportive structures. Students who do not receive guidance will feel lost in their learning and this will result in inefficient education. This research shows that to optimize the potential of social media, having clear guidelines is very important to help students channel their efforts. This can take the form of study plans, tutorials, and can even include feedback from peers that can help students stay on the right track.

Limitations of Feedback

Another challenge often faced by students in self-directed learning through social media content is the lack of feedback from teachers or peers. RI said, "*Sometimes I don't know if I really understand the material or not because there's no one to tell me*". Students often feel insecure about their understanding because, without direct feedback, this can delay their learning progress.

Feedback and direct interaction are essential elements in language learning, especially in English. Hwang et al. (2024) state that continuous and immediate feedback is crucial for helping students understand more complex concepts. For example, when students learn English, they need to receive immediate corrections for their pronunciation or grammar mistakes. However, when they use social media content for learning, they often do not receive immediate feedback, which may leave them unaware of their mistakes or unsure of how to correct them. This indicates that feedback on social media as a learning tool needs to be provided as an additional mechanism to make the learning process more effective.

Opportunities in Self-Directed English Language Learning Through Social Media

Flexible Time and Place for Learning



Although facing various challenges, students also recognize several opportunities available to learn English through social media content. One of the biggest opportunities is the flexibility of time and place in learning. AI expressed that, *"I can learn anytime and anywhere, not bound by time and place"*. This flexibility allows students to learn English at their own pace without the constraints of time and location, unlike the arrangements found in traditional classrooms.

Jia et al. (2022) state that this flexibility gives students the freedom to adjust their learning processes to meet their personal needs. This becomes very important in the context of language learning where each student has a diverse learning pace. Without time and place restrictions, students can learn at times and in places they consider most productive, review difficult material, and accelerate their learning process if they feel ready. Self-directed learning is highly emphasized in the Merdeka curriculum, where this flexibility greatly supports the effective development of students' skills.

Increasing Learning Motivation

In addition to flexible time and place, social media can also help students enhance their learning motivation. MA said, *"I can learn anytime and the content is also interesting, so it makes me feel more enthusiastic about studying"*. This motivation arises from social media, which allows students to learn in an active and engaging environment. Social media can provide a more flexible and dynamic learning experience compared to conventional learning methods, which tend to be flat or unchanging.

Manca & Ranieri (2016) state that one of the main capabilities of social media in learning is its ability to create an engaging learning environment. Through social media, students can learn anytime and anywhere according to their schedules and priorities. This provides students with greater freedom to manage their own study time, which can, in turn, enhance their motivation. The increase in student motivation within the Merdeka curriculum, where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, is a key factor that supports their success.



Access to a Variety of Learning Resources

One of the biggest opportunities ahead is easy access to various learning resources. WA said, *"I enjoy learning through social media because there are many interesting videos and images that help me understand the material better"*. By using social media, students can access various forms of content that suit their learning styles, such as tutorial videos or articles that explain English grammar in a way that is easier to understand.

Purwanto et al. (2023) state that, compared to traditional learning methods, social media allows students to access a wider variety of resources. In English language learning, it is very important that perceptions of various forms of language use can enhance students' understanding. Access to these various resources is crucial in the context of the Merdeka curriculum, which emphasizes independent learning for students. Students can choose materials based on their desires and needs, which ultimately can enhance their motivation and engagement in the learning process.

Opportunities to Interact with Native Speakers and Other Students

The main opportunity identified in the use of social media content for self-directed English learning is the chance to interact with native speakers and other students from various countries. NA, one of the interviewed students, shared her experience, *"I once joined an English study group that included students from abroad, and this motivated me and helped me in learning English"*. By using social media content, students can not only access a variety of learning materials but also have the opportunity to interact with native speakers, which can accelerate their learning process.

De Wilde et al. (2020) state that social interaction is one of the important components of learning, especially when students learn from those who are more knowledgeable, such as native English speakers. Through this interaction, students can explore their English language skills beyond what they can learn on their own by receiving immediate feedback from individuals who possess better language skills than they have learned independently.



Research conducted by Sun & Yang (2023) shows that social media can serve as a practical platform for students to connect with a global learning community. Interaction with native speakers is not only beneficial for language mastery but also provides cultural insights that enrich their learning experience. In addition, social media also allows students to establish networks worldwide that can assist their learning in the future.

Discussion forums or online study groups on social media are beneficial for students to share experiences, ask questions, and receive feedback from various perspectives. In English language learning, this is very important, where the use of language in real situations is a key factor in improving communication skills. Through interactions with native speakers or fellow students from diverse backgrounds, students can practice their listening and speaking skills in more varied and natural situations that are not always found in traditional classrooms. In addition, interactions like this also enhance student engagement in the learning process, as they feel more motivated to learn when with peers who share the same goals. This motivation is driven by the fact that students should not only learn from textbooks but also from experiences and direct communication that are more vibrant and profound.

The findings of this research highlight that although there are various challenges in using social media content for learning English, there are also opportunities that students can take advantage of. Challenges such as difficulties in selecting the right content, distractions from non-academic content, lack of guidance, and limited feedback explain that the use of social media content for self-directed English language learning requires a more structured and clear strategy. On the other hand, opportunities such as flexible learning time and place, increased motivation to learn, access to a variety of learning resources, and interaction with native speakers and other students show that social media also has great potential to encourage self-directed English language learning.

In the context of the Merdeka curriculum, which focuses on independence and innovation in learning, the results of this research provide important knowledge. To be able to use and choose social media content more effectively, students need to be equipped with good digital literacy skills. In addition, the development of specific guides



or modules that can help students direct social media for educational purposes. This can include training on how to avoid distractions, filter content, and how to receive good feedback from the online community. This research also emphasizes the importance of integrating social media into learning strategies in schools, and as an integrated component that can make a real contribution to English language learning. In the Merdeka Curriculum, project-based learning using social media can be integrated as a form of learning.

CONCLUSION

Overall, self-directed English language learning through social media content in schools implementing the Merdeka curriculum has challenges and opportunities that need to be taken seriously. The data above highlights the fact that social media is like a double-edged sword. Social media is indeed beneficial for students to enhance their language skills, but they also need to be equipped with appropriate guidance and strategies to tackle the existing challenges. Policymakers and educators must continuously observe and develop learning approaches that optimize the potential of social media while minimizing its negative impacts so that students can learn more independently and effectively.

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