Social Media Strategies for EFL Students: Enhancing Speaking Proficiency

Estrategias de redes sociales para estudiantes de EFL: mejorando la competencia oral

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Abstract

Social media is a communication tool that facilitates EFL students to improve their speaking proficiency as it enables them to fully engage in oral communication, exchange information, and form long-term bonds in this modern era. This study intended to investigate EFL students' social media as speaking strategies used vis-a-vis their speaking proficiency. A descriptive correlational design was used in this study. The participants were 70 English major students (second year and third year) at Wolkite University. To this end, data were collected using a questionnaire, the IELTS speaking proficiency test, and an interview to obtain reliable information. The findings showed that Facebook and YouTube were the most frequently used social media by learners, even though they felt less confident, more anxious, and less willing to communicate in English. The results also indicated that learners lacked awareness of how to purposefully use social media to address their speaking challenges. Conversely, the findings of this study showed that there was a positive correlation between the students' use of social media and their speaking proficiency (r=0.461, p=.000, p>0.05). However, the students' speaking proficiency was very poor because learners didn't use social media for educational purposes, especially speaking skills. This might be because the learners did not use social networks effectively to promote their speaking proficiency. Therefore, it is suggested that in the learning of speaking skills, more attention should be paid to investigating the use of social media as a speaking strategy.

Keywords: EFL learners; social media; speaking skills; speaking test; Wolkite University

Resumen

Las redes sociales son una herramienta de comunicación que facilita a los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) mejorar su competencia oral, ya que les permiten participar plenamente en la comunicación oral, intercambiar información y formar lazos duraderos en esta era moderna. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar el uso de las redes sociales como estrategias de habla en relación con la competencia oral de los estudiantes de EFL. Se utilizó un diseño correlacional descriptivo en este estudio. Los participantes fueron 70 estudiantes de inglés (de segundo y tercer año) de la Universidad de Wolkite. Para este fin, se recopilaron datos mediante un cuestionario, la prueba de competencia oral del IELTS y una entrevista para obtener información confiable. Los hallazgos mostraron que Facebook y YouTube fueron las redes sociales más frecuentemente utilizadas por los estudiantes, aunque se sentían menos seguros, más ansiosos y menos dispuestos a comunicarse en inglés. Los resultados también indicaron que los estudiantes carecían de conciencia sobre cómo utilizar las redes sociales de manera intencionada para abordar sus desafíos de expresión oral. Por otro lado, los hallazgos de este estudio mostraron que había una correlación positiva entre el uso de redes sociales por parte de los estudiantes y su competencia oral (r=0.461, p=.000, p>0.05). Sin embargo, la competencia oral de los estudiantes era muy pobre porque no utilizaban las redes sociales con fines educativos, especialmente para mejorar sus habilidades de habla. Esto podría deberse a que los estudiantes no usaban las redes sociales de manera efectiva para promover su competencia oral. Por lo tanto, se sugiere que en el aprendizaje de habilidades de habla se preste más atención a investigar el uso de las redes sociales como una estrategia de habla.

Palabras clave: estudiantes de EFL; redes sociales; habilidades de habla; prueba de expresión oral; Universidad de Wolkite

Resumo

As redes sociais são uma ferramenta de comunicação que facilita aos estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) melhorar sua competência oral, pois lhes permite participar plenamente da comunicação oral, trocar informações e formar laços duradouros nesta era moderna. Este estudo teve como objetivo investigar o uso das redes sociais como estratégias de fala em relação à competência oral dos estudantes de EFL. Foi utilizado um desenho correlacional descritivo neste estudo. Os participantes foram 70 estudantes de inglês (de segundo e terceiro ano) da Universidade de Wolkite. Para esse fim, foram coletados dados por meio de um questionário, do teste de competência oral do IELTS e de uma entrevista para obter informações confiáveis. Os resultados mostraram que Facebook e YouTube foram as redes sociais mais frequentemente utilizadas pelos estudantes, embora se sentissem menos seguros, mais ansiosos e menos dispostos a se comunicar em inglês. Os resultados também indicaram que os estudantes careciam de consciência sobre como utilizar as redes sociais de maneira intencional para enfrentar seus desafios de expressão oral. Por outro lado, os resultados deste estudo mostraram que havia uma correlação positiva entre o uso de redes sociais pelos estudantes e sua competência oral (r=0.461, p=.000, p>0.05). No entanto, a competência oral dos estudantes era muito baixa porque eles não utilizavam as redes sociais com fins educativos, especialmente para melhorar suas habilidades de fala. Isso pode ser devido ao fato de que os estudantes não usavam as redes sociais de forma eficaz para promover sua competência oral. Portanto, sugere-se que, no aprendizado de habilidades de fala, seja dada mais atenção à investigação do uso das redes sociais como uma estratégia de fala.

Palavras-chave: estudantes de EFL; redes sociais; habilidades de fala; teste de expressão oral; Universidade de Wolkite

Introduction

English plays a pivotal role as an international language for communication around the world, and it is the key language for communication on the Internet. As stated by Mustafa (2018), English is the most commonly used language, accounting for 25.2% of technology users worldwide. Since it is the most widely spoken language, most learners want to improve their English by learning the language through global social platforms, podcasts, and blogs.

Social media is a technological learning strategy that can help learners master English in this modern era (Putri, 2022). The study shows that social media enables students to transcend geographic barriers, allowing EFL learners to interact with native speakers and connect with diverse cultures. Similarly, Al Qahtani (2018) stressed that social networks provide powerful information-sharing and meaning-making opportunities for EFL learners. It is an effective learning strategy that can develop learners' discourse, language structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation anywhere and anytime. In addition, Mitu (2020) states that social media provides advanced opportunities for improving speaking proficiency. Mitu's findings suggest that social media should be integrated with effective teaching strategies to enhance speaking skills. There, utilizing social media as a learning strategy can boost learners' self-confidence and reduce anxiety about speaking English in front of others.

Various social networks, such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram, provide learners with opportunities to share ideas with native speakers and build their confidence. The use of online homophones can further enhance learners' speaking skills (Seyede, 2017). Seyede's findings suggest that learners should focus on improving their pronunciation, language structure, and understanding of social context. Additionally, social networking plays a crucial role in language acquisition, as learners naturally interact verbally with one another (Kuning, 2020). According to Ravindran et al. (2022), EFL learners' speaking proficiency is closely tied to their exposure to the target language, making social media essential for creating an optimal learning environment. Therefore, social media serves as a powerful tool for improving the speaking proficiency of EFL students.

The social media learning strategy enables learners to access language resources, practice skills, and engage directly with proficient speakers of the language (Mustafa, 2018). Mustafa's findings indicate that social media provides students with opportunities to enhance their linguistic knowledge outside the classroom, fostering independence and competence in their learning. Consequently, it creates a supportive environment for effective English learning. Additionally, social media facilitates verbal two-way communication, allowing learners to practice speaking English with native speakers from around the world.

Nowadays, most learners are familiar with social media from an early age, and they most frequently use it for various purposes. Most students spend more time online each day for academic purposes and entertainment (Fidan & Debbag, 2018). The study has also found the impact of social media to be positive on mental well-being if it is practiced a little bit. It provides learners with a modern and innovative awareness of day-to-day activities, giving them more time to share information verbally. Moreover, social media learning strategies can help students to share thoughts and feelings orally in the target language in an interactive way. Thus, digital social media influences English speaking; it motivates learners to develop their speaking proficiency.

According to Ravezza et al. (2017), the use of social media for entertainment and social purposes can negatively affect learners' speaking performance. Conversely, there is some evidence about the use of social media learning strategies in convalescing learners' speaking proficiency. For example, Twitter could use curricular discussion that positively affects higher education learners' speaking proficiency. It contributes a lot to promoting learners' speaking proficiency because of its useful functions in interacting with people all over the world and giving freedom to convey meaning. It is also believed that this study opens the door to the use of new and unique methods and pedagogies that will enrich the field of English language teaching in the future.

Therefore, social media paves the way for improving higher education students' speaking proficiency. This study aims to investigate EFL students' social media use vis-a-vis their speaking proficiency.

Statement of the Problem

The digitization of technology has made social media an essential tool for developing mutual interactions in educational settings. As a result, English teachers should understand the kinds of applications that can be used to overcome students' English problems. Learning English through social media plays a key role in learners' oral production and interactions with others in a more advanced way (Mohammed, 2021; Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019). In this case, it is seen as a complementary component of the pedagogical process of learning speaking skills. AlSaleem (2018) points out that speaking is a complex skill; therefore, learners should focus on performing live oral expressions and discourse. This implies that learning speaking skills needs an individual's interest and courage to practice verbally in the target language.

In Ethiopia, learners of English as a foreign language are continually seeking to improve their speaking proficiency, as English instruction primarily focuses on grammar and structure. This emphasis often results in less attention being given to speaking skills. Consequently, the need to address students' speaking challenges has prompted the integration of digital technologies to keep pace with contemporary learning methods.

From the researchers' observations and experiences, students often fear speaking English orally in front of their classmates. As a result, they feel nervous when asked to participate and are reluctant to engage in speaking activities. During debates, oral presentations, and other speaking opportunities, they lack the confidence and motivation to share information in English. Furthermore, students are often unaware of how to use various social media platforms to practice their English-speaking skills, preferring instead to use these platforms for entertainment in their native language (Nkhi, 2023; Ravindran et al., 2022). This highlights that students' speaking proficiency is a significant concern that requires serious attention to ensure global competence.

Based on the above considerations, we can conclude that there are several reasons why most Ethiopian students do not improve their speaking proficiency. First, students may not know how to use social media to solve their speaking problems. Second, teachers limited awareness of using technological digitalization to teach speaking lessons authentically and facilitate their use of effective social media to practice speaking English. Third, some students may not have access to smartphones and the internet; they lack the knowledge and information to use social media for educational purposes, especially speaking English. Fourth, exposure to the learning environment is another problem that affects students' purposeful use of social media. Finally, book-oriented teaching methods may not be able to incorporate different social media in the teaching process. The use of modern teaching methods in the speaking classroom may not be efficacious.

Therefore, little attention has been paid to the use of technological speaking strategies to learn speaking skills, especially social media (Rizqiningsih & Hadi, 2019). This study points out that effective strategies are implemented to improve the speaking ability of students, resulting in new ways of using digital technology to keep pace with the times. EFL learners do not intentionally use social media as a learning strategy to overcome their speaking problems.

Although social media for learning speaking skills has been studied in the EFL context, it does not seem to have been studied in the Ethiopian context. Such research can also promote a more serious reflection on the levels of students' speaking proficiency. Furthermore, to the researchers' knowledge, no study has adequately focused on the use of social media learning strategies by EFL students in relation to their speaking proficiency within the context of Ethiopian public universities. This study also aims to provide empirical evidence of students' social media use in relation to their speaking proficiency. To this end, the current study sought to answer the following basic research questions:

1. Which social media platforms do Ethiopian higher education students most frequently use to improve their English-speaking skills?

2. What relationship exists between Ethiopian students' use of social media learning strategies and their speaking proficiency?

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, a descriptive-correlational design was employed to collect, process, analyze, and interpret data. This design was primarily used to identify the social media platforms most frequently utilized by EFL students to improve their speaking proficiency. Additionally, it aimed to determine the relationship between students' use of social media as speaking strategies and their speaking proficiency.

Setting

This study was conducted at Wolkite University (WKU), situated in Wolkite town in the Central Ethiopia Region. Established in 2012 by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), WKU is classified as a third-generation public university. The university was selected for this research because the researchers are affiliated with its English Language and Literature department. Data collection took place from February to June 2022.

Participants and sampling techniques

The participants in this study were 70 English major students at Wolkite University, consisting of 42 third-year students (20 males and 22 females) and 28 fourth-year students (23 males and 5 females), with ages ranging from 19 to 24. To ensure representation across different educational stages and disciplines, a purposive sampling technique was employed. All participants had completed the Spoken English I & II and Advanced Speech courses.

Instruments

Questionnaire

The aim of this questionnaire was to identify the social media platforms EFL students use as speaking strategies. It assessed the types and frequency of these platforms employed in learning speaking skills, specifically investigating how many students utilize social media for educational purposes. To achieve this, the researcher developed the questionnaire based on a literature review to understand Ethiopian students' use of social media as a speaking strategy. The questionnaire comprised 31 closed-ended items focused on students' use of social media for developing speaking skills. Designed as a self-report tool, it featured straightforward questions that were appropriate for learners at the Ethiopian university level. The questionnaire primarily targeted the frequency of social media use in addressing speaking challenges. Participants rated their usage on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The average scores for each social media platform were interpreted using an adjusted reporting scale.

Speaking Proficiency Test

The purpose of this test was to assess students' levels of speaking proficiency. To achieve this, the standardized academic IELTS speaking test was employed. The questions were adapted from Li's (2019) IELTS speaking proficiency test and consisted of three parts. The first part focused on self-introduction, including family, interests, and hobbies, lasting 3 to 5 minutes. The second part required students to engage in 3 to 4 minutes of self-talk on familiar topics, such as university life, Ethiopia's green legacy and tree planting, and descriptions of their hometowns or villages. The final part involved a two-way discussion between the interviewer and the student on the topic introduced in the second part, lasting another 3 to 5 minutes.

The IELTS test duration for each participant was 11 to 14 minutes and was administered through face-to-face interviews. It incorporated the four scoring criteria of the IELTS speaking assessment: fluency and coherence, pronunciation, lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy. These benchmarks were adapted from the University of Cambridge's (2019) IELTS Speaking Proficiency Test. To evaluate learners' oral performance and enhance the reliability of the assessment, the researchers rated the students' speaking proficiency collaboratively. This approach minimized grading bias and ensured a more objective evaluation of the students' speaking proficiency.

Finally, each student's IELTS speaking proficiency was assessed using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): Learning, Teaching, and

Assessment (Athiworakun et al., 2018). This framework classifies language proficiency into three levels: proficient users (C2 level or a score of 9, and C1 level or band scores of 7-8), independent users (B2 level or scores of 5.5-6.5, and B1 level or scores of 4-5), and basic users (A2 level or a band score of 3, and A1 level or scores of 1-2). Consequently, the results of the students' IELTS speaking proficiency tests were evaluated according to CEFR guidelines, utilizing the 0-9 IELTS scoring system to determine their proficiency levels.

Semi-structured Interview

The purpose of this interview was to corroborate the data obtained from the questionnaire and the IELTS speaking proficiency test. It also aimed to gather information that might not be available through these methods. Out of 70 participants, six students were randomly selected for the interview, which lasted 10 to 15 minutes for each interviewee. The data were collected in English, focusing on the learners' awareness of using digital technology and the role of social media as strategies for developing their speaking proficiency.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Before the main study, the instruments were validated by two experts (Ph.D. in TEFL) who work at Wolkite University. The experts had 15 and 16 years of working experience teaching English in Ethiopian public universities. They then evaluated the content and face validities of the questionnaire items, the IELTS speaking proficiency test, and the interview. Not only that, but they also commented on format specifications, items, applicability to participants, and the extent to which the data collection tools measure what the researcher really intended to measure. The researchers gained constructive insights on content and face validity, as well as the relevance of the items (including the wording, language and format of the three tools). Finally, the tools were modified and revised based on the comments given by the experts.

The researchers carried out a pilot study to test the dependability of the data collection instruments, notably the questionnaire, the IELTS speaking proficiency test and interview, and the administrative procedures. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.889, indicating a high level of reliability. This shows that the items are both effective and dependable in recognizing students' usage of social media as a speaking strategy.

To verify the reliability of the IELTS speaking proficiency test, the results from two raters were analyzed using inter-rater reliability. Both raters actively participated in the

evaluations and independently assessed the students' spoken performances. Cohen's Kappa was employed to calculate the scores, confirming the consistency of their ratings. This study found significant agreement between the two raters (k = 0.724), highlighting the test's strong reliability.

The researchers prepared a short-term training manual and conducted an eight-hour training session to enhance students' understanding of the IELTS test and its importance for their future careers. To minimize subjectivity in scoring, the researchers evaluated the tests and recorded each interviewee's responses using assigned codes. Ultimately, each student's speaking proficiency was assessed according to the IELTS band scales, ranging from 0 to 9.

The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants to ensure the credibility of the data. Additionally, the interview transcripts were independently coded and categorized to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire and speaking proficiency test results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the most frequently utilized social media, including mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequency. Additionally, Pearson correlation (r) was employed to examine the relationship between students' social media use and their speaking proficiency.

The data from the interviews were analyzed using a systematic procedure. First, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and formatted in conversation style to accurately capture the interviewees' responses. Second, the transcripts were coded and categorized separately to facilitate further analysis.

Findings

Results of the Questionnaire

The frequency of students' learning strategies is identified mainly through the mean (M) values: mean scores ranging from 3.5 to 5.0 indicate a higher strategy user who usually or almost always uses strategies, while mean scores in the range of 2.5 to 3.4 indicate a medium strategy user who sometimes uses strategies, and mean scores from 1.0 to 2.4 indicate a lower strategy user who does not usually use strategies (Oxford, 1990). Since speaking strategies are a subset of LLSs, the following data were analyzed by considering the mean (M) scores of students' speaking strategies used

(social media). The students' responses to the questionnaire were categorized based on the above criteria.

Students' response to the first research questionWhich social media platforms do Ethiopian higher education students most frequently use to improve their English-speaking skills?

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the frequency use of Social Media

Strategies	Mean (M)	SD	Level of strategy use	Frequency of use	Rank
Facebook	4.00	0.933	High	Usually used	1st
YouTube	3.81	0.828	High	Usually used	2nd
Telegram	2.53	0.785	medium	Not usually used	3rd
Google+	2.22	0.545	Low	Not usually used	4th
WhatsApp	2.20	0.528	Low	Not usually used	5th
Twitter	2.18	0.514	Low	Not usually used	6th
Skype	1.01	0.511	Low	Not usually used	7th
Blogs	0.84	0.470	Low	Not usually used	8th
Grand total	2.35	0.0.718	Low	Sometimes used	

Table 1 presents the mean scores of students' use of social media for learning speaking skills, which ranged from a high of 4.00 to a low of 0.84. Respondents indicated that they used various social media platforms less frequently, including Blogs (M = 0.84), Skype (M = 1.01), Twitter (M = 2.18), WhatsApp (M = 2.20), and Google+ (M = 2.22). Telegram (M = 2.30) was used at a moderate level. In contrast, Facebook (M = 4.00) and YouTube (M = 3.81) were employed at a high level. These results indicate that students most frequently use Facebook and YouTube as social media platforms to learn speaking skills.

Table 2. Purposes of using Social Media in Learning Speaking Skills

Item	Social purposes		Educational purposes	
I most commonly use social media	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
	67	95.7	3	4.3

As shown in Table 2, there was a strong preference for using social media for social purposes rather than educational ones in the context of learning speaking skills. Specifically, 95.7% of respondents reported using social media primarily for social interactions, while only 4.3% used it for educational purposes. This suggests that social

media was predominantly utilized for personal communication and leisure rather than for enhancing speaking skills or engaging in educational.

Students' responses to the second research question: What kind of a relationship is there between Ethiopian students' use of social media learning strategy and their speaking proficiency?

Table 3. Self-rating Speaking Proficiency

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very good	1	1.43	1.43
Good	5	7.14	7.14
Fair	18	25.72	25.72
Poor	46	65.71	65.71
Total	145	100.0	100.0

Table 3 shows that according to their self-rating, most students were not proficient speakers of the target language. In this case, 65.71% and 25.72% of the respondents rated their speaking proficiency as poor and fair, respectively. In contrast, 7.14% and 1.43% of the participants said that their speaking proficiency was good and very good, respectively. These results indicated that most students were not comfortable with their speaking proficiency.

Results of the IELTS Speaking Proficiency Test

According to the University of Cambridge (2019), the score on the IELTS speaking proficiency test scale includes 9 (expert user), 8 (very good user), 7 (good user), 6 (competent user), 5 (modest user), 4 (limited user), 3 (extremely limited user), 2 (intermittent user), 1 (no user) and 0 (did not attempt the test). In addition, students' speaking proficiency was determined by considering the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): learning, teaching, and assessment. This means that proficient users (C2 or 9 scores and C1 or 7-8 scores), independent users (B2 or 5.5-6.5 scores and B1 or 4-5 scores), and basic users (A2 or 2-3 scores and A1 or 0-1scores) (Athiworakun et al., 2018). Hence, the results of the students' IELTS speaking proficiency test were defined using CEFR guidelines to determine their proficiency levels by using scales 0-9.

Table 4. Students' IELTS Speaking proficiency Test Result

Students	IELTS Scores
S1	3.25
S2	3.38
S3	2.75
S4	2.63
S5	2.38
S6	2.75
S7	2.50
S8	3.25
S9	3.75
S10	3.38
S11	2.75
S12	3.25
S13	3.38
S14	2.63
S15	3.38
S16	2.88
S17	2.63
S18	4.00
S19	3.50
S20	3.75
S21	3.63
S22	4.63

S23	3.25
S24	3.50
S25	4.13
S26	4.00
S27	3.25
S28	3.50
S29	2.75
S30	2.88
S31	4.88
S32	4.00
S33	4.38
S34	2.50
S35	3.25
S36	4.13
S37	3.38
S38	3.07
S39	2.50
S40	2.75
S41	3.00
S42	3.38
S43	3.25
S44	2.75
S45	2.13
S46	3.25

S47	3.25
S48	2.88
S49	2.88
S50	2.50
S51	3.00
S52	3.00
S53	2.88
S54	3.38
S55	3.00
S56	3.13
S57	2.88
S58	3.00
S59	3.13
S60	3.00
S61	3.25
S62	3.50
S63	2.38
S64	3.50
S65	2.50
S66	2.75
S67	3.50
S68	2.75
S69	3.38
S70	3.00

As stated above, students had limited knowledge of using digital technology to improve their speaking proficiency. The results also indicated that students used social media primarily for entertainment and social purposes in their native language rather than in English. Additionally, two informants provided the following insights:

"In my spare time, I enjoy watching movies, recording videos and playing games in my native language. It motivates me to watch videos for fun and different social purposes. I never use social media to learn to speak English." (S4)

"I love the jokes and pranks there on social media. However, I do not use social media for educational purposes instead, I use it for social purposes. This means that students use their native language most often when using social media." (S5)

"Awareness of using social media to learn speaking skills is low. I have never used social media to improve my speaking skills. I mainly use Facebook and YouTube for watching movies and doing different social activities in my native language." (S6)

Students were not purposefully using social media learning strategies to communicate with each other in the target language in and out of the classroom. If these purposes were achieved in the target language, the students' English proficiency would significantly improve.

The results of this interview supported the findings of the questionnaire. Most students did not use different social media as a learning strategy to solve their speaking problems. However, Facebook and YouTube were most frequently used for different social purposes rather than educational purposes. Therefore, students are not using social media as a learning strategy to solve their speaking problems.

Discussion

The most frequently used Social Media by Students

The aim of this study was to pinpoint the social media most frequently used by EFL students to improve their speaking proficiency. Questionnaires and interviews were used to discover the social networks used by students.

The findings indicated that among all social media platforms, Facebook (M = 3.83) and YouTube (M = 3.50) were the most frequently employed by students, while Telegram (M = 2.97) was used at a moderate level. In contrast, blogging, Skype, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Google+ were the least utilized for developing speaking skills. The results revealed that social media was not primarily used to enhance speaking proficiency. Additionally, the interview results supported the questionnaire findings, showing that students used Facebook and YouTube mainly for socializing and entertainment, likely due to easy access for non-educational purposes. Students were generally unaware of how to leverage social media to improve their speaking

skills. The findings also highlighted that the lack of social networking integration in the language curriculum contributed significantly to the underutilization of these strategies for speaking practice. More importantly, the results indicated that learners faced challenges related to their educational background, social factors, and exposure to language learning environments

The convergence between the results obtained via questionnaire and interview could give us a reliable picture of students' use of Facebook and YouTube for social purposes rather than educational purposes. The students thought that social platforms helped them to relax and interact with one another, but they again reported that their understanding of it was poor because they did not take it in any spoken English courses or repeat and reflect on it. These results showed that learners' awareness of using social media in learning speaking skills in a class was very low. There was no contribution of social media learning strategies in improving students' linguistic knowledge.

Furthermore, the results of this study are inconsistent with findings from previous research on EFL students' use of social media for learning strategies (Alrasheedi, 2020; Aristiawan, 2022; Piannu & Rosita, 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2023; Seyede, 2017). These earlier studies indicate that social media can offer students greater opportunities to communicate with native speakers through various platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram. According to Putri (2022), students frequently utilize different social media both inside and outside the classroom to express themselves. Similarly, Choirunnisa and Sari (2021) note that students often use Facebook and Instagram to communicate with native speakers for educational purposes despite experiencing psychological barriers related to oral communication. The findings of the current study align with Wulandari (2019), who emphasizes that students should consistently use social media as a learning strategy to enhance creativity, critical thinking, and effective oral communication in the target language. Additionally, it aids in the development of linguistic skills and discourse at a more advanced level. Therefore, social media plays a significant role in boosting students' self-confidence and reducing anxiety and shyness when speaking English verbally. It also provides opportunities for improving pronunciation, vocabulary, and language structure.

It was unexpected that Ethiopian students did not utilize Facebook and YouTube as learning strategies for educational purposes, particularly in developing speaking proficiency. This may be attributed to teachers' failure to recognize the potential of effective social platforms in conjunction with traditional, book-oriented teaching methods. Additionally, English teachers may not have trained or introduced their students to the use of various social media both inside and outside the classroom, resulting in a lack of awareness about how to consciously leverage these tools to enhance speaking proficiency. The issue seems to stem from limited exposure to environments where the target language can be practiced as a means of communication. There are few opportunities for students to engage with English in real-world contexts. Moreover,

As Table 4 shows, the results of this test showed that students were limited users (4), extremely limited users (3), and intermittent users (2). Their test scores were below the requirements for the IELTS speaking proficiency test, indicating that they were not proficient speakers of the language.

Table 5. The Relationship between the use of Social Media Learning Strategy and Speaking Proficiency

		Social media	Speaking proficiency
Social media	Pearson Correlation	1	.461**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	70	70
Speaking proficiency	Pearson Correlation	.461**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	70	70

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5 showed a significant positive relationship between students' use of social media and their speaking proficiency (r = 0.461, p=.000, p>0.05). The results indicated a moderate relationship between the two variables, reflecting a linear association. Furthermore, the findings suggested that as students increased their use of social media, their speaking proficiency tended to improve.

Results of the Interview

The results of the interview showed that students did not use social media as a learning strategy to develop their speaking proficiency. Based on this, most interviewees indicated that they lacked awareness of using social media as speaking strategies. S1 said, "Not only students but also teachers do not use social media for educational purposes, especially for speaking skills." This means that teachers are not using different social media when teaching speaking skills in the classroom. Besides, two informants said:

> "I always use social media to have fun. Therefore, I like to watch movies and different pictures released in my native language instead of English." (S2)

> "I don't use social media to learn English speaking skills. I always use Facebook and YouTube just for fun and to connect with friends, but most of my social media use is not to learn speaking skills." (S4)

the new educational curriculum did not encourage the use of digital technology and diverse social media to promote speaking proficiency, possibly because it did not differ significantly from the previous curriculum.

Students primarily used Facebook and YouTube for entertainment and social purposes rather than for educational purposes, particularly in developing speaking skills. Teachers also lacked awareness of how to utilize digital technology to enhance their speaking courses. Therefore, it is believed that the limited use of social media in an educational context in Ethiopia restricts learners' opportunities to practice speaking in English.

The relationship between students' use of social media as a speaking strategy and their speaking proficiency.

This study examined the relationship between students' use of social media as speaking strategies and their speaking proficiency. To achieve this objective, the results from the questionnaire and the IELTS speaking test were utilized.

The findings of this study indicated that students' IELTS speaking test scores were limited users (4), extremely limited users (3), and intermittent users (2). This means that the students' speaking proficiency levels were independent users and basic users. These survey results showed that the scores of the students were lower than the requirements of the proficiency test. In addition, the results of the Pearson correlation showed that there was a linear relationship between students' use of social media and their speaking proficiency ($r=0.461$, $p=.000$, $p>0.05$). These results indicated that the social media learning strategy did not contribute to the level of students' speaking proficiency. It could partly be because of students' limited awareness of social media use for educational purposes, their speaking proficiency lying at an alarmingly low level.

After identifying that learners' speaking proficiency was at an unexpectedly low level, several factors were considered, including learners' background knowledge, infrequent use of social media for oral practice, teaching methods, and psychological factors. Additionally, interview results revealed that many students attributed their challenges to the university system, which often assigns students to the English department without considering their interests. This misalignment may contribute to a negative attitude toward the program. Furthermore, students did not effectively utilize digital technology, such as social media, both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, learners did not intentionally use social media as a strategy to address their speaking difficulties.

The relationship between social media as a learning strategy use and speaking proficiency was positive, but it was weak. Weak ties indicate that students are not using social media as a learning strategy to improve their speaking proficiency. As a result,

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it is possible to help students develop their understanding and use of effective social media to improve their speaking proficiency. It is also essential for English teachers to combine social media with a book-oriented method to teaching speaking English.

Furthermore, the findings of the present study are inconsistent with those of previous studies (Choirunnisa & Sari, 2021; Kuning, 2020; Mohammed, 2021; Putri, 2022; Yükselir & Kömür, 2017), which provided evidence of a significant relationship between social media use and speaking proficiency. Specifically, Ilyas and Putri (2020) highlight that the level of learners' speaking proficiency determines the frequency with which they use appropriate social networking platforms to practice oral communication. They demonstrated that social media positively influences students' speaking proficiency. Similarly, Mitu (2020) found a significant correlation between EFL students' social media usage and their speaking proficiency test scores (r=0.935, p=0.000, p<0.05), reinforcing the idea that a strong relationship exists between these two variables. Additionally, Bahtiar et al. (2020) suggest that increased self-confidence in students using speaking strategies leads to improved speaking performance. As Seyede (2017) further points out, effective social media models can assist students in becoming proficient in English. The use of learning strategies is concurrently linked to speaking proficiency. Overall, the findings indicate that students who are proficient in spoken language tend to use social media learning strategies more frequently for educational purposes, both in and out of the classroom.

It was expected that there was a significant relationship between social media learning strategy and speaking proficiency. However, the findings of the present study indicated that the correlation between the two variables was weak. First, one possible reason for the weak correlation between the two variables could be that students were unaware of using effective social media as a learning strategy to solve their speaking problems. Second, students had limited exposure to using social media to verbally express meaning in the target language. It can be considered that the students' speaking proficiency was influenced by other factors by students in and out of the classroom. Finally, in Ethiopia, it might be because the English curriculum (i.e., book-oriented) was not integrated with technology (social media) to teach spoken English courses.

Conclusion

This study showed that learners utilized social media learning strategies the least frequently to improve their speaking skills. Additionally, it found that students at Ethiopian universities primarily use Facebook and YouTube for socializing and entertainment. Although they engage with social media daily, they rarely use it to converse with native speakers. The findings indicated that they predominantly used social media in their mother tongue rather than in English, suggesting that social

networking did not effectively promote their English-speaking skills. Furthermore, the results revealed that students did not employ digital technology strategies to enhance their speaking proficiency and were largely unaware of how to use these learning strategies to address their speaking challenges.

Moreover, the present study indicated a significant relationship between speaking proficiency and the use of social media. This suggests that due to the lack of intentional use of social media as a speaking strategy, learners' speaking proficiency remained low. Consequently, students are not integrating social media with traditional book-oriented learning strategies to enhance their overall English proficiency, particularly in speaking.

Based on the conclusions drawn, several recommendations can be made. English teachers should encourage and train students to use social media as a learning strategy for developing speaking skills. Additionally, they should modernize their instructional methods by incorporating digital tools, such as social media, to enhance students' speaking proficiency. Students, in turn, should become aware of how to effectively use social media to improve their speaking abilities. Furthermore, educational curricula should integrate social media as a strategy for teaching English skills, particularly speaking. The university administration should ensure the provision of necessary resources and infrastructure, such as internet access and language laboratories, to support spoken English courses. Lastly, EFL teachers should employ modern teaching methods while still valuing traditional book and module-oriented approaches; this integration can maximize English language skills and foster greater student engagement in learning speaking skills.

This study was conducted at WKU and focused exclusively on English major students. The findings highlight the necessity for further research involving large-scale surveys and diverse sample sizes across various contexts. Such studies would provide more comprehensive insights into all public and private universities in Ethiopia, thereby enhancing our understanding of the generalizability of these results.

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