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Integrating Social Media Applications into EFL Instruction: Teachers' Perceptions, Practices and Challenges in Saudi Higher Education

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Abstract
The integration of social media applications into English as a foreign language instruction has attracted increasing attention in educational settings. This study examines teachers' perceptions of the use of social media applications in English language instruction at Saudi universities, focusing on instructional practices, perceived effects on students' English learning and language skills, and challenges related to their integration. By foregrounding teachers' perspectives through a quantitative lens, the study examines how instructional practices and institutional conditions shape the pedagogical use of social media in English language teaching. Adopting a descriptive quantitative survey design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 249 teachers of English as a foreign language lecturing at Saudi universities. The questionnaire gathered information on commonly used social media applications, teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical value, and perceived instructional and institutional challenges. Quantitative descriptive statistical analyses, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that teachers frequently use applications such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram as supplementary instructional tools and generally hold positive perceptions of their influence on students' motivation, engagement, and development of key language skills, particularly vocabulary and speaking. Teachers also reported challenges related to classroom management, limited professional training, and the need for sustained institutional support. The study concludes that while social media applications offer valuable pedagogical opportunities for English language instruction, their effective integration depends on purposeful instructional design, active teacher mediation, and institutional readiness. The study provides empirical evidence to inform instructional practices, teacher education, and policy decisions in higher education contexts.
Keywords: English as a foreign language instruction, English language skills, Higher education, Saudi universities, Social media applications, Teachers' perceptions

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Introduction

Social Media Applications (SMAs) are digital tools designed to facilitate communication, interaction, and content sharing among users. With their widespread adoption in educational and professional contexts, these applications have attracted increasing scholarly attention for their potential role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Social media sites are defined as web-based services that allow users to create public or semi-public profiles, establish connections, and access networks created by others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Research in language education has identified both pedagogical affordances and limitations associated with the instructional use of social media, underscoring the importance of pedagogically guided integration to support interaction, engagement, and positive attitudes toward language learning (Halitoğlu & Morallı, 2018).

In higher education contexts, applications such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and X (Twitter) are increasingly employed by EFL teachers as supplementary instructional tools. These applications provide access to authentic language input, multimodal resources, and extended opportunities for interaction beyond traditional classroom boundaries. From a teaching perspective, research indicates that EFL teachers generally hold favorable perceptions toward the instructional use of social media, particularly in supporting learner engagement and the development of language skills (Allam & Elyas, 2016; Hamad, 2024).

Within the Saudi higher education context, English is taught as a foreign language in public and private universities, where learners' exposure to English is largely confined to formal instructional settings. As part of national initiatives aimed at modernizing higher education and expanding digital transformation, Saudi universities have increasingly adopted technology-enhanced teaching practices (Alghamdi, 2022). Evidence from Saudi higher education suggests that the effectiveness of digital integration is closely linked to institutional readiness and the availability of technological infrastructure (Alfadhel et al., 2025). In this context, SMAs are commonly used to supplement classroom instruction, extend learning beyond contact hours, and facilitate teacher–student interaction (Allam & Elyas, 2016; Hamad, 2024). However, their pedagogical effectiveness remains contingent upon teachers' professional preparation, instructional practices, and sustained institutional support.

Despite the growing use of SMAs in EFL instruction, systematic empirical evidence examining teachers' perspectives on the specific applications they use, their perceived impact on students' English learning and language skills, and the challenges associated with instructional integration—particularly in Saudi higher education contexts—remains limited. Addressing this need, the present study investigates EFL teachers' perceptions of integrating SMAs into English language instruction at Saudi universities, with a focus on instructional practices, perceived learning outcomes, and institutional and pedagogical challenges. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What social media applications do EFL teachers commonly use to support English language instruction in Saudi universities?
2. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of the impact of SMAs on students' English language learning?
3. How do EFL teachers perceive the impact of SMAs on students' English language skills?
4. What challenges and institutional requirements do EFL teachers perceive in integrating SMAs into EFL instruction?

Literature Review

Social Media in Education: Opportunities and Challenges

The widespread adoption of social media technologies has significantly reshaped communication and information-sharing practices in educational contexts. Researchers have increasingly explored the potential of social networking applications as instructional tools that extend learning beyond traditional classroom boundaries. Early conceptual work framed social media as a flexible learning resource capable of supporting access to information, interaction, and learner autonomy in educational settings (Liu, 2010). Paul et al. (2012) argued that social media could serve as an effective educational technology when instructors are adequately trained to integrate it into curricular practices. Similarly, Osharive (2015) emphasized that social media should be intentionally employed for instructional purposes, recommending the creation of academic-focused spaces within social networking applications. Supporting this view, Alsuraihi et al. (2016) highlighted the pedagogical value of social media when embedded in well-designed, interactive learning activities. More recently, research syntheses on digital and emerging technologies in university-level English learning have continued to highlight the expanding pedagogical space created by online applications —while emphasizing that learning benefits depend strongly on pedagogically purposeful integration rather than mere exposure (Klimova et al., 2023).

Empirical studies have reported both positive and negative outcomes of social media use in education. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) demonstrated that social media environments can facilitate collaborative learning and peer interaction by supporting communication, knowledge sharing, and learner autonomy,, while Mao (2014) reported positive student attitudes and behaviors toward learning through social media engagement. Wohn et al. (2013) further demonstrated that social media played a critical role in supporting first-generation college students by enabling access to academic information through broad social networks. Consistently, Amin et al. (2016) noted that web-based media supports students' learning processes and contributes to improved academic performance. More recent evidence suggests that the academic impact of social media is complex and mediated by factors such as usage patterns, learner self-regulation, and instructional purpose (Essien, 2025).

However, concerns have also been raised regarding potential drawbacks. Mingle and Adams (2015) cautioned that excessive reliance on social media may negatively affect students if not properly monitored. Karpinski et al. (2013) identified a negative association between social networking site use and students' GPA, while Lin et al. (2013) reported that online discussions could lead to off-task behavior, particularly among female and older learners. These findings underscore the importance of structured guidance and institutional support, including staff training, to ensure effective educational implementation of social media. These findings underscore the importance of structured guidance and institutional support, including staff training, to ensure effective educational implementation of social media. More recent evidence suggests that the impact of social media on academic performance is complex and influenced by moderating factors such as usage patterns and learner self-regulation (Essien, 2025). In the Saudi EFL context, empirical research further indicates that institutional support and sustained professional development play a critical role in shaping teachers' readiness to integrate digital tools effectively (Alshehri, 2025).

Social Media, Academic Collaboration, and Learner Engagement

A substantial body of research has emphasized the role of social media in promoting academic collaboration and learner engagement. Casey (2013) reported that social media's interactive communication features enhance student engagement by enabling continuous interaction with peers and instructors. Similarly, Butler and Matook (2015) argued that social media facilitates learning by connecting individuals and supporting collaborative learning strategies. Using quantitative methods, Khan, Wohn, and Ellison (2014) demonstrated that informal social media use positively contributed to students' academic performance.

Further evidence was provided by Henderson et al. (2013), who found that social media introduces new instructional perspectives and learning strategies in classroom environments, although it does not entirely prevent non-academic use. Abdulgalil and Abuelgasim (2018) also reported that students use social media to search for information, share academic resources, and solve learning-related problems, thereby enhancing engagement with academic tasks. Collectively, these studies suggest that social media plays a vital role in supporting collaborative learning, provided that its use is pedagogically guided. More recent synthesis work on WhatsApp for English language learning likewise shows that messaging-based interaction can support engagement and collaboration, but also highlights recurring challenges (e.g., informal/slang language, misalignment with learning goals, and assessment issues) that require clear instructional design and monitoring (Syairofi et al., 2023).

Psychological and Affective Dimensions of Social Media Use

Beyond academic outcomes, researchers have examined the psychological and affective implications of social media use in educational settings. Malisuwan et al. (2015) investigated the behavioral aspects of social media use and found that it influences users' self-esteem, confidence, and emotional well-being. In a related study, Kao and Craige (2014) explored the relationship between social media use, personality traits, and achievement in learning English as a foreign language, concluding that individual differences shape learners' experiences and outcomes. These findings suggest that while social media may enhance motivation and confidence, its psychological impact requires careful consideration, particularly in language learning contexts where anxiety and self-perception play crucial roles. More recent experimental evidence indicates that structured Instagram-based activities can improve vocabulary learning while simultaneously influencing learners' affective experiences—such as reducing technostress and increasing online engagement—suggesting that emotional outcomes may improve when social media use is pedagogically guided and goal-oriented (Almohesh & Altamimi, 2024).

Social Media and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning

Within EFL contexts, social media has been widely recognized as a valuable resource for both informal and formal language learning. Khan et al. (2011) and Chelliah et al. (2015) identified online applications as among the most effective sources for informal English learning, while Jurkovic (2019) reported that learners prefer accessing online materials to develop both receptive and productive language skills. Across diverse contexts, studies have consistently shown positive learner perceptions toward social media–assisted English learning. For instance, Sakkir et al. (2016) found that university students demonstrated strong motivation and positive attitudes toward using social media in English writing classes, despite contextual challenges. Broader analyses further indicate that learners' engagement with social media is shaped by instructional design,

learner autonomy, and institutional expectations (Singer, 2024). In addition, large-scale reviews of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) have highlighted the role of out-of-class digital engagement in supporting language development while emphasizing the contextual conditions influencing learning outcomes (Guo, 2023).

A growing body of research has also documented the effectiveness of specific social media applications in enhancing EFL skills. Eren (2012) reported that Facebook created new opportunities for English language learning, while Suthiwartnarueput (2012) showed that social media supported vocabulary, punctuation, and grammatical development. Faizi et al. (2014) similarly reported gains in reading, speaking, and listening skills through web-based programs. Studies focusing on Facebook use have further demonstrated increased learner participation, improved writing performance, and enhanced confidence (Sakkir, 2018; Sirivedin et al., 2018), alongside positive effects on academic performance (Shukor, 2014). Application-focused research in Saudi Arabia has also examined Instagram use in relation to vocabulary development, reflecting sustained interest in the skill-specific affordances of particular social media applications (Alotaibi, 2023).

Research conducted in Middle Eastern and Asian contexts reinforces these findings. Allam and Elyas (2016) reported that Saudi academic communities acknowledged the educational value of social media for English learning when appropriately regulated. Al-Mubarak (2016) and Belal (2014) found that social media use enhanced Saudi and tertiary-level EFL learners' achievement in speaking and writing, while Al-Tamimi et al. (2018) demonstrated improved writing performance and vocabulary development among Jordanian university students using Facebook. Khan et al. (2016) further reported positive effects of applications such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Flickr, and Skype on multiple language skills. Similar outcomes have been observed in other contexts, including Indonesia (Anwas et al., 2020) and WhatsApp-supported learning environments (Hamad, 2017). Learner perceptions also remain largely favorable, with students identifying social media as an effective tool for English learning (Duffy Bayuong et al., 2019). Importantly, recent teacher-focused research highlights instructors' perspectives on how social media can be pedagogically optimized, aligning directly with the focus of the present study (Hamad, 2024), while teacher education research underscores the role of professional preparation in shaping effective classroom integration (Hafour, 2022).

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research approach using a questionnaire-based survey to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of social media applications in English language instruction. This approach was considered appropriate as it enables the systematic collection and numerical description of teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and evaluations of instructional practices across a relatively large sample. Descriptive survey research is particularly suitable for identifying patterns and trends in participants' responses and for providing an overall picture of perceptions within specific educational contexts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Participants

The population of this study comprised male and female EFL teachers lecturing in English departments at Saudi universities. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, combining maximum variation sampling and convenience (easily accessible case) sampling, in accordance with the procedures outlined by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013).

This sampling approach was considered appropriate for the aims of the study, as it allowed the researcher to capture diverse perspectives from EFL teachers working in different institutional contexts, while ensuring feasible access to participants across multiple universities. Maximum variation sampling was used to represent teachers from a wide range of Saudi universities, thereby enhancing the breadth of institutional viewpoints, whereas convenience sampling facilitated timely data collection from accessible participants willing to contribute to the study.

Regarding participant distribution, Table 1 presents the distribution of participating EFL teachers across Saudi universities, indicating broad institutional representation consistent with the study's sampling strategy.

Table 1. *Distribution of participants by university (N = 249)*

University	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Al-Baha University	56	22.5
King Abdulaziz University	48	19.3
King Saud University	42	16.9
Imam Mohammad Bin Saud Islamic University	34	13.7
Taif University	31	12.4
Qassim University	19	7.6
University of Tabuk	12	4.8
Other Universities	7	2.8
Total	249	100

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the participating EFL teachers in terms of gender, nationality, and teaching experience.

Table 2. *Demographic characteristics of the participants (N = 249)*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	150	60.2
	Female	99	39.8
Nationality	Saudi	138	55.4
	Non-Saudi	111	44.6
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	42	16.9
	5–10 years	76	30.5
	11–15 years	68	27.3
	More than 15 years	63	25.3
Total		249	100.0

Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, developed by the researcher to gather EFL teachers' perspectives. The questionnaire items were newly developed specifically for the purposes of the present study, informed by an extensive review of the relevant literature on social media use in EFL and higher education contexts. No existing instrument was adopted in its entirety; rather, item formulation was guided by recurring themes and constructs identified in previous studies.

To assess the clarity of the items and capture diverse viewpoints, the instrument was initially administered to a pilot group of ten EFL teachers. Based on the feedback obtained from this pilot administration, the questionnaire items were refined, and the instrument was finalized for the main data collection phase.

After obtaining the contact information of EFL teachers, the finalized questionnaire was distributed electronically to the participants. The instrument comprised three main sections. The first section collected demographic information about the respondents. The second section elicited EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of Social Media Applications (SMAs) in enhancing students' English learning, addressing both their overall impact and their influence on specific language skills. The third section examined teachers' perceptions of the challenges and institutional requirements associated with integrating SMAs into EFL instruction.

In addition, the questionnaire included a multiple-response item designed to identify the SMAs most commonly used by EFL teachers for teaching English, allowing participants to select more than one application from a predefined list.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

The content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review by a panel of ten specialists, including six experts in EFL and four experts in educational technology, who evaluated the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the items with the study objectives. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made to the instrument. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using quantitative descriptive statistical procedures. Responses to the Likert-scale items were coded numerically on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of SMAs in English language instruction.

The descriptive statistical results were examined to identify prominent patterns and trends across the three sections of the questionnaire: impact on students' English learning, impact on specific language skills, and perceived challenges and institutional requirements. The findings were then interpreted in relation to the study's research objectives and relevant literature. This approach allowed for a systematic and coherent interpretation of teachers' perceptions while remaining consistent with the descriptive quantitative nature of the study.

Findings

This section presents the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire and reports the key findings related to EFL teachers' use and perceptions of SMAs in English language instruction. The results are organized in accordance with the structure of the research instrument and the study objectives. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, are first used to identify the SMAs most commonly employed by EFL teachers for teaching English. These findings provide contextual grounding for the subsequent analysis of teachers' perceptions regarding the overall impact of social media on students' English learning, its influence on specific language skills, and the perceived challenges associated with its instructional use.

Social Media Applications Used by EFL Teachers to Support English Teaching

Table 3. *Social media applications used by EFL teachers to support English teaching (N = 249*)

Rank	Social Media Applications	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	YouTube	182	73.1
2	WhatsApp	173	69.5
3	Telegram	146	58.6
4	Instagram	112	45.0
5	TikTok	97	39.0
6	X (Twitter)	83	33.3
7	Facebook	34	13.7
8	Other applications	13	5.2

As shown in Table 3, YouTube and WhatsApp emerged as the most frequently used SMAs for supporting English teaching, reported by 73.1% and 69.5% of the participants, respectively. These applications were followed by Telegram and Instagram, indicating a strong preference for tools that facilitate multimedia content sharing and interactive communication. Moderate levels of use were reported for TikTok and X (Twitter), while Facebook was the least utilized applications among the respondents. Overall, the findings suggest that EFL teachers tend to favor SMAs that support visual input, flexible communication, and ease of instructional integration.

Impact of Social Media Applications on Students' English Learning

Table 4. *Impact of social media applications on students' English learning (N = 249)*

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Level
1	Social media applications increase students' interest in learning English in Saudi EFL contexts.	4.21	0.71	High
2	Social media applications accelerate students' learning of English.	4.08	0.76	High
3	Social media applications facilitate the promotion of cultural awareness among EFL students.	3.94	0.82	High
4	Social media applications contribute to the overall improvement of students' English language skills.	4.15	0.69	High
5	Social media applications provide a supportive environment that encourages students to speak English.	4.12	0.73	High
6	Social media applications help students gain information related to daily life and real-world communication.	4.05	0.77	High

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

As shown in Table 4, EFL teachers reported generally positive perceptions regarding the impact of SMAs on students' English learning. All items recorded high mean scores, indicating strong agreement among participants. The highest mean score was observed for increased student interest in learning English, suggesting that social media plays a motivational role in EFL contexts. Similarly, teachers perceived social media as effective in enhancing overall language skills and fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages students to use English. These findings reflect a broadly favorable view of social media as a pedagogical tool for promoting English language learning.

Impact of Social Media Applications on Specific English Language Skills

Table 5. *Impact of social media applications on specific English language Skills (N = 249)*

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Level
7	Social media applications have a positive effect on students' speaking skills and pronunciation.	4.18	0.70	High
8	Social media applications have a positive effect on students' listening skills and comprehension.	4.12	0.74	High
9	Social media applications have a positive effect on students' reading skills.	3.96	0.79	High
10	Social media applications have a positive effect on students' writing proficiency.	4.05	0.76	High
11	Social media applications have a positive effect on students' vocabulary development.	4.23	0.68	High

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

Table 5 illustrates EFL teachers' perceptions of the impact of SMAs on specific English language skills. The results indicate consistently high mean scores across all skill areas, reflecting strong agreement among teachers regarding the positive role of social media in language development. Vocabulary development and speaking skills received the highest mean ratings, suggesting that SMAs are perceived as particularly effective in enhancing lexical knowledge and oral communication. Listening, writing, and reading skills were also rated positively, indicating that SMAs contribute to the development of both receptive and productive language skills. Overall, these findings highlight the perceived pedagogical value of social media in supporting comprehensive language skill development in EFL contexts.

Perceived Challenges and Institutional Requirements

Table 6. *EFL teachers' perceptions of challenges and institutional requirements in using social media applications (N = 249)*

No.	Statement	Mean	SD	Level
12	Integrating social media applications into EFL instruction requires adequate teacher training.	4.29	0.65	High
13	Managing students' use of social media applications during instruction can be challenging.	4.11	0.72	High
14	Institutional support is necessary for the effective use of social media applications in EFL teaching.	4.35	0.61	High

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

As shown in Table 6, EFL teachers expressed strong agreement regarding the challenges and institutional requirements associated with integrating SMAs into English language instruction. The highest mean score was recorded for the need for institutional support, indicating that teachers perceive administrative backing and infrastructural provision as essential for effective implementation. Similarly, participants emphasized the importance of adequate teacher training, highlighting the need for professional development to ensure pedagogically sound use of social media. Managing students' use of social media during instruction was also identified as a notable challenge. Collectively, these findings suggest that while teachers view social media as a valuable instructional tool, its effective integration depends on structured training, institutional support, and classroom management strategies.

Discussion

Overview of Key Findings

This section discusses the main findings of the study in relation to the research questions and situates them within the existing literature on social media use in EFL instruction. The discussion focuses on EFL teachers' reported practices and perceptions regarding the use of Social Media Applications (SMAs), their perceived impact on students' English learning and language skills, and the challenges and institutional requirements associated with integrating these tools into instructional contexts at Saudi universities.

The findings indicate that EFL teachers hold largely positive perceptions toward the pedagogical use of SMAs, report frequent use of selected applications, and emphasize both their instructional benefits and the need for institutional support and professional training. Teachers reported frequent use of applications—most notably YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram—as supplementary tools for English language instruction. They also perceived SMAs as having a positive impact on students' motivation, engagement, and development of key language skills, particularly vocabulary and speaking. At the same time, teachers emphasized that effective integration depends on adequate professional training, classroom management strategies, and sustained institutional support.

Social Media Applications Used by EFL Teachers

In response to research question 1, the findings show that EFL teachers most commonly use YouTube and WhatsApp to support English language instruction, followed by Telegram and Instagram. This pattern reflects teachers' preference for applications that facilitate multimodal input, asynchronous access, and interactive communication, all of which are pedagogically valuable in EFL contexts. YouTube was perceived as a particularly powerful resource for exposing learners to authentic audiovisual input, while WhatsApp and Telegram supported ongoing interaction and information sharing beyond classroom boundaries.

These findings are consistent with earlier research indicating that SMAs offering rich multimedia content and communication affordances are more likely to be adopted for instructional purposes (Casey, 2013; Butler & Matook, 2015). Studies further suggest that video-based and messaging applications are especially effective when teachers use them strategically to supplement classroom instruction rather than replace it (Klimova et al., 2023; Syairofi et al., 2023). The prominence of these applications also aligns with findings from Saudi EFL contexts, where teachers have reported favorable attitudes toward accessible and user-friendly digital tools (Allam & Elyas, 2016; Hamad, 2024).

Perceived Impact on Students' English Learning

Addressing research question 2, EFL teachers reported strong agreement regarding the overall positive impact of SMAs on students' English language learning, particularly in terms of motivation, engagement, and communicative participation. High mean scores across all related items suggest that teachers view social media as an effective means of enhancing learners' interest in English and encouraging active language use.

These perceptions align with research showing that social media can foster learner motivation, participation, and positive attitudes toward learning when embedded within purposeful instructional practices (Abd et al., 2018; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Halitoğlu & Moralli, 2018). Importantly, the emphasis on student engagement supports arguments that the pedagogical value

of social media lies not in technological novelty but in its ability to create interactive, learner-centered learning environments (Paul et al., 2012; Klimova et al., 2023).

At the same time, these positive perceptions should be interpreted within a broader understanding that the academic impact of social media varies according to how it is used. Essien (2025) emphasizes that social media contributes positively to academic outcomes when its use is purposeful, regulated, and aligned with instructional goals. In this regard, the favorable perceptions reported in the present study likely reflect teachers' selective and pedagogically guided use of SMAs, underscoring the importance of teacher mediation

Impact on Specific English Language Skills

With regard to research question 3, teachers perceived vocabulary development and speaking skills as the English language skills most positively influenced by the use of SMAs, followed by listening, writing, and reading. These findings suggest that teachers associate social media use with skills that benefit from repeated exposure, interaction, and authentic language input.

This pattern is consistent with studies demonstrating that SMAs provide frequent exposure to contextualized vocabulary and expanded opportunities for oral interaction (Suthiwartnarueput, 2012; Alotaibi, 2023). The strong emphasis on vocabulary development aligns with research showing that structured and semi-structured digital environments support lexical acquisition when learning activities are pedagogically mediated by teachers (Guo, 2023; Alghasab, 2025). Research on Informal Digital Learning of English further highlights how out-of-class digital engagement contributes to lexical growth and communicative competence (Guo, 2023; Lee & Dressman, 2021).

Although the present study focuses on teachers' perceptions rather than direct learner outcomes, empirical evidence reporting improvements in tertiary students' writing performance through social media use lends indirect support to teachers' favorable views (Zarate, 2025). Teacher-focused research also indicates that instructors' beliefs, prior experiences, and pedagogical training shape how SMAs are transformed into effective instructional resources (Alharthi et al., 2020).

Challenges and Institutional Requirements

In response to research question 4, teachers identified inadequate professional training, challenges in classroom management, and limited institutional support as the primary obstacles to integrating SMAs into EFL instruction. The highest ratings were assigned to the need for institutional support and teacher training, highlighting that effective implementation depends on more than individual teacher initiative.

These findings corroborate studies emphasizing that insufficient training and limited institutional infrastructure constrain the pedagogical effectiveness of digital tools (Alsuraihi et al., 2016; Hafour, 2022). They also align with Saudi-based research indicating that sustained professional development is central to teachers' readiness to integrate technology into instructional practices (Alshehri, 2025). Concerns related to managing students' social media use further echo earlier findings that, without clear pedagogical guidelines, SMAs may contribute to distraction or off-task behavior (Karpinski et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2013). Consistent with Zhang and Zou (2022), the present findings suggest that successful integration of SMAs in EFL instruction requires teacher mediation, institutional policies, and purposeful instructional design.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that EFL teachers perceive SMAs as valuable supplementary tools for English language instruction, while simultaneously recognizing the conditions necessary for their effective use. Teachers reported frequent use of selected applications and emphasized their positive impact on students' motivation, engagement, and development of key language skills, particularly vocabulary and speaking. At the same time, they highlighted that successful integration depends on adequate teacher training, sustained institutional support, and clear pedagogical guidance. These findings confirm and extend existing research by underscoring the central role of teacher mediation in shaping the instructional value of social media in higher education EFL contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined EFL teachers' perceptions of integrating social media applications (SMAs) into English language instruction at Saudi universities. Drawing on questionnaire data, the findings revealed that teachers generally hold positive views toward the pedagogical use of social media as supplementary instructional tools. Applications such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram were reported as the most frequently used, reflecting teachers' preference for applications that support multimodal input, flexible access, and interactive communication.

The results further indicated that teachers perceive SMAs as having a positive impact on students' English learning, particularly in enhancing motivation, engagement, and the development of key language skills. Vocabulary development and speaking skills emerged as the areas most strongly associated with perceived benefits, highlighting the value of authentic input and extended opportunities for language use beyond the classroom. At the same time, the study underscored that successful integration of social media in EFL instruction is contingent upon adequate teacher training, effective classroom management strategies, and sustained institutional support.

By focusing on teachers' perspectives, this study contributes to the growing body of research on social media in EFL contexts and provides empirical evidence from Saudi higher education. The findings confirm that while social media holds considerable pedagogical potential, its instructional value depends largely on purposeful integration and teacher mediation rather than technology use alone.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. The findings are based on self-reported data reflecting teachers' perceptions rather than direct classroom observations or measured student outcomes. In addition, the focus on Saudi university EFL teachers limits the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating classroom observations, learner performance data, or comparative and mixed-methods designs.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study highlight important implications for EFL teaching practice, teacher education, and institutional policy. Given teachers' positive perceptions of Social Media Applications (SMAs), EFL instructors are encouraged to integrate selected applications strategically as supplementary instructional tools aligned with specific learning objectives. Applications that support authentic language exposure and interaction, such as video-sharing and messaging tools, appear particularly effective for enhancing vocabulary development and oral communication.

The strong emphasis on teacher training underscores the need for professional development programs that address not only technical skills but also pedagogical integration, classroom management, and assessment in social media–supported learning environments. Additionally, the findings point to the critical role of institutional support. Universities should establish clear policies, provide appropriate infrastructure, and formally recognize the instructional use of social media to ensure alignment with curricular goals and minimize potential challenges.

Overall, the integration of SMAs into EFL instruction should be guided by pedagogical purpose, teacher expertise, and institutional readiness. When these conditions are met, social media can meaningfully enrich English language teaching and learning in higher education contexts.

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