

Informal Spaces, Formal Needs: Exploring EFL Students' Practices, Social Comparison, and Challenges in Academic Self-Assessment Through Social Media

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Abstract

Social media has become deeply integrated into students' daily lives, extending beyond social use into informal academic practices, including self-assessment. This study examines how EFL students at a university use social media to assess their own academic abilities, the extent to which they engage in academic social comparison through these platforms, and the difficulties they encounter in doing so. A mixed-methods approach was employed, using an online questionnaire comprising closed and open-ended questions administered to 133 students. Quantitative findings revealed that the majority of students used social media for academic self-assessment on a frequent basis, with YouTube and WhatsApp emerging as the most commonly used platforms. While social comparison was a common practice among students, it was not strongly associated with increased motivation or academic confidence. Qualitative findings further revealed that students primarily used social media for comprehension checks, language practice, and peer feedback, while also reporting challenges related to distraction, unreliable information, and negative social comparison. These findings suggest that social media functions as an informal, self-directed space for academic self-assessment, one that offers meaningful opportunities for reflection and feedback but also carries risks that may undermine effective learning if left unaddressed. The study is limited by its focus on EFL students at a single university and its reliance on self-reported data, and future research should extend to larger, more diverse samples across multiple institutions and disciplines. The findings nonetheless highlight the need for greater digital literacy support and suggest that educators consider ways to intentionally integrate informal social media practices into formal academic guidance.

Keywords: Academic self-assessment, EFL students, motivation, social comparison, social media.

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INTRODUCTION

The pervasive integration of social media platforms into daily life has profoundly reshaped various aspects of human interaction, including education. Students who have grown up in digitally connected environments increasingly use these platforms not only for social communication but also for academic purposes, creating new opportunities for autonomous learning and academic self-assessment. Through exposure to educational content, online discussions, and interactive learning environments, social media has become an important supplementary resource that may influence how students perceive and assess their academic abilities. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), social media use has been associated with enhanced motivation, engagement, and self-esteem, all of which play a significant role in students' academic development (Mandalika & Sulistyaningrum, 2024).

Traditional approaches to self-assessment have generally been associated with formal educational settings. However, social media introduces more flexible and continuous forms of academic self-assessment that occur beyond the classroom environment. Students may use social media to monitor their understanding of course content, reflect on their language proficiency, evaluate their study skills, and identify their strengths and weaknesses through engagement with educational materials and online learning communities. In this regard, web-based reflective practices have become valuable tools for EFL learners seeking to monitor their academic progress and support their learning process (Mandalika & Sulistyaningrum, 2024).

Beyond individual self-assessment practices, students may also engage in academic social comparison by observing peers' academic performances or learning experiences shared on social media platforms. Recent

research indicates that online social comparison can influence students' perceptions of academic pressure and self-perception, highlighting the psychological dimensions of social media-based learning environments (Gong *et al.*, 2025). While such comparisons may sometimes serve as a source of motivation, they can equally give rise to negative self-perceptions and diminished academic confidence (Le Blanc-Brillon *et al.*, 2025).

Despite these potential benefits, the use of social media for academic self-assessment is accompanied by several challenges. These platforms, while providing easy access to educational resources and collaborative opportunities, may also expose students to distractions, information overload, and negative self-perceptions associated with online comparison. However, limited research has examined how EFL students specifically navigate these challenges in the context of academic self-assessment, leaving this area largely underexplored. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the role of social media in students' academic self-assessment among EFL students at Moulay Ismail University. Specifically, the study investigates how students use social media for educational self-assessment, the extent to which they engage in academic social comparison through these platforms, and the challenges they encounter in this process.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of digital learning environments has positioned social media not only as a communication tool but also as a significant platform for academic self-assessment and self-regulated learning. This review examines how students utilize social media to assess their academic standing, monitor their learning progress, and engage in the critical processes of self-assessment.

Central to understanding how students assess themselves in digital spaces is the concept of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL). Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) propose that social media tools are instrumental in the creation of Personal Learning Environments (PLEs), which empower students to take control of their learning. Their pedagogical framework suggests that social media facilitates a three-level process—personal information management, social interaction and collaboration, and information aggregation—all of which require students to engage in constant self-monitoring and self-evaluation of their knowledge gaps and learning goals. By using social media to curate and share resources, students are inherently forced to assess the relevance and quality of information in relation to their academic needs, thereby strengthening their self-assessment skills.

The effectiveness of these self-assessment practices is often linked to the explicitness of the assessment process. A meta-analysis by Yan *et al.* (2023)

on the effect of self-assessment on academic performance highlights that when students are provided with clear criteria and structured opportunities for self-evaluation, their academic achievement improves significantly. In the context of social media, this suggests that when platforms are used for structured peer-feedback or as a digital portfolio for learning artifacts, they provide the necessary "explicitness" for students to accurately judge their own performance. This structured self-assessment via social media helps students recognize their strengths and weaknesses more effectively than informal browsing.

Furthermore, the social nature of these platforms introduces a comparative element to self-assessment. While traditional self-assessment is often internal, social media-based self-evaluation is frequently influenced by social comparison. Yang and Robinson (2018) emphasize that students' social comparison orientation—specifically whether they focus on comparing abilities or opinions—affects their overall academic adjustment and self-perception. Their research indicates that while upward comparison (comparing oneself to more successful peers) can sometimes lower self-evaluation, it can also serve as a benchmark for students to monitor their own progress and set higher academic standards, provided they possess high self-efficacy.

The integration of social media into formal education also facilitates "alternative" assessment methods that promote self-awareness. Craig and Rehman (2023), in their systematic review of social media for peer assessment, found that platforms like Facebook and YouTube foster a "co-creation of knowledge" that naturally leads to enhanced self-awareness. By participating in peer-evaluation processes on these platforms, students are not only judging others but are also prompted to reflect on their own work and learning strategies. This reflective practice is a core component of self-assessment, allowing students to adjust their study habits and improve their academic outcomes based on the feedback and comparisons available in their digital social networks.

Finally, the impact of social media on self-assessment is moderated by emotional and relational factors. Gong *et al.* (2025) demonstrate that while high-frequency social media use can lead to negative outcomes like social anxiety and fear of missing out (FoMO), which may distort accurate self-evaluation, these effects can be mitigated by strong teacher-student relationships. This suggests that for social media to be an effective tool for academic self-assessment, it must be supported by a pedagogical environment that encourages healthy emotional regulation and provides a safe space for students to explore and evaluate their academic identities.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Self-Efficacy Theory, Self-Regulated Learning, and Social Comparison Theory, which together provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how students assess their academic abilities, engage in academic social comparison, and face challenges when using social media for educational purposes.

2.1 Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) explains that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities influence their motivation, persistence, and behavior. In academic contexts, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in learning tasks and interpret difficulties as opportunities for improvement. Importantly, such students are also more likely to engage in honest self-assessment, as they perceive weaknesses as manageable rather than threatening to their self-image. In social media environments, self-efficacy influences how students evaluate their academic abilities and interact with educational content online. This theory primarily informs Research Question 1, which focuses on how students assess their academic abilities through social media.

2.2 Self-Regulated Learning (Srl)

Self-Regulated Learning views learning as a cyclical process involving three phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2002). The self-reflection phase includes self-assessment, where learners evaluate their performance and adjust future learning strategies. In social media contexts, students must regulate their learning by setting goals, monitoring understanding, and evaluating progress based on digital content and interactions (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). SRL therefore primarily informs all three research questions, particularly in explaining how students engage in self-assessment practices (RQ1) and the challenges they encounter in managing their learning in digital environments (RQ3).

2.3 Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) explains that individuals evaluate their abilities by comparing themselves with others. In social media environments, students are frequently exposed to peer-generated academic content, which may lead to both upward and downward comparisons. These comparisons influence students' perceptions of their academic abilities and motivation levels. This theory directly informs Research Question 2, which investigates the extent to which students engage in academic social comparison on social media.

Together, these three theories provide a structured lens for analyzing students' academic self-assessment in social media environments. Self-efficacy theory explains how students form beliefs about their

academic abilities (RQ1), Social Comparison Theory explains how they evaluate themselves in relation to others (RQ2), and Self-Regulated Learning theory explains how they manage, monitor, and reflect on their learning processes, including the challenges they face (RQ3). In this way, social media is understood as a dynamic environment where self-assessment is shaped by personal beliefs, social influences, and self-regulatory processes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodological framework adopted in the study and explains the procedures followed to conduct the research. It provides an overview of the methods and approaches used to explore how EFL students use social media for academic self-assessment and the challenges they encounter in this process.

3.1 Research Problem

The extensive integration of social media into daily life has extended its influence into educational contexts, with students increasingly using these platforms for learning-related purposes. Social media now functions as a space for accessing educational content, sharing academic resources, engaging in discussions, and supporting independent learning. Although these platforms provide valuable opportunities for collaborative and informal learning, their influence on students' academic self-assessment remains insufficiently explored. Traditional models of self-assessment often assume structured learning environments with limited social interaction, whereas social media introduces highly interactive, public, and dynamic learning spaces that may shape how students perceive and assess their academic abilities.

Despite the growing educational use of social media, limited attention has been given to understanding how students assess their academic abilities through these platforms. Students are continuously exposed to educational videos, peer discussions, academic achievements, and learning experiences shared online, all of which may influence their perceptions of their own strengths, weaknesses, and learning progress. Within the framework of Self-Regulated Learning, self-assessment is considered an essential component of learners' ability to monitor, reflect on, and regulate their learning processes. However, the mechanisms through which social media contributes to these self-evaluative practices remain unclear. Consequently, there is a need to explore how students use social media as a means of reflecting upon and evaluating their academic performance.

In addition, social media environments may encourage students to compare their academic abilities and achievements with those of others. Through constant exposure to peers' accomplishments, learning strategies,

and educational content, students may engage in academic comparisons that influence their perceptions of competence and progress. This perspective can be partially understood through Social Comparison Theory, which explains how individuals assess themselves in relation to others. While such comparisons may motivate some students, they may also contribute to feelings of pressure, inadequacy, or reduced academic confidence for others.

Furthermore, students may encounter several difficulties when using social media to assess or improve their academic performance. These challenges include information overload, distraction, difficulties identifying reliable educational content, and the emotional effects associated with academic comparison in online environments. Such difficulties may hinder effective self-reflection and negatively influence learners' confidence and motivation. From the perspective of Self-Efficacy Theory, students' beliefs about their academic capabilities can significantly affect their motivation, persistence, and learning behaviors. Therefore, understanding the difficulties students experience while engaging with educational social media is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of students' academic self-assessment practices in digital learning environments.

Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate how students assess their academic abilities through social media, whether they compare themselves academically with others on these platforms, and the difficulties they encounter in this process. By exploring these issues, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of students' self-assessment practices within contemporary digital learning environments.

3.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the role of social media in shaping students' self-assessment of academic abilities. Specifically, it seeks to:

- RO1.** Examine how students assess their academic abilities through social media for educational purposes.
- RO2.** Explore the extent to which students engage in academic social comparison on social media platforms.
- RO3.** Identify the challenges students encounter when using social media to assess their academic performance.

3.3 Research Questions

Based on the aim of this study, which is to investigate how social media influences students' self-assessment of their academic abilities, the following research questions are proposed:

- RQ1.** How do students use social media for the purpose of assessing their academic abilities?

- RQ2.** To what extent do students engage in academic social comparison when using social media for educational self-assessment?

- RQ3.** What challenges do students face when using social media to assess their academic performance?

3.4 Research Design

This study adopts an exploratory mixed-methods research design. This design is considered appropriate because the aim of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how students use social media for academic self-assessment, how they engage in academic comparison, and the challenges they encounter in this process. The exploratory nature of the design allows for investigating a relatively underexplored area and generates insights that can inform further research in the field. The mixed-methods framework further strengthens the study by integrating both numerical trends and personal perspectives within a unified research design.

3.5 Research Approach

The study combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The quantitative component is used to identify general patterns related to students' use of social media for academic self-assessment, while the qualitative component provides deeper insights into students' experiences by elaborating on the patterns identified through the quantitative analysis. This convergent approach ensures that the two components complement each other, allowing for a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the research problem.

3.6 Study Sampling

The study uses purposive sampling to ensure the relevance of the collected data. Participants will be selected based on their active use of social media for educational purposes, as only students with such experience can meaningfully contribute to the research objectives. The study focuses specifically on EFL students at Moulay Ismail University, ensuring that the sample is contextually appropriate and aligned with the research focus. The final number of participants will be determined during the data collection phase.

3.7 Research Instrument

Data will be collected using an online questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section consists of structured items related to students' use of social media and their self-assessment of academic abilities. The second section includes open-ended questions that allow participants to describe their experiences in using social media for assessment purposes. This structure ensures that both structured responses and narrative data are collected within a single instrument.

3.8 Analysis Procedure

The quantitative data gathered from the structured section of the questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify frequencies, percentages, and general patterns. The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions will be analyzed using thematic analysis to gain deeper insights into students' experiences and further elaborate on the patterns identified through the quantitative analysis. This convergent approach ensures that the qualitative findings enrich and contextualize the quantitative results rather than serving as a separate line of inquiry.

3.9 Research Ethics

The study ensures that all participants provide informed consent prior to participation. Participants will be fully informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary involvement. In addition, anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained throughout the research process, ensuring that no personal identifying information is collected or disclosed. These ethical measures are essential to protect participants' rights and ensure the integrity of the study.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected for the study, organized into three parts that correspond to the research objectives outlined above. The analysis begins with an overview of participants' demographic characteristics, providing context for interpreting the findings that follow. It then turns to the quantitative data, examining patterns in how students assess their academic abilities through social media (O1) and the extent to which they engage in academic social comparison on these platforms (O2). Finally, the qualitative data are analyzed to explore the challenges students encounter when using social media for academic self-assessment (O3) and to provide deeper insight into the experiences underlying the quantitative results.

4.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Gender

Gender	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Male	56	42.1
Female	77	57.9
Total	N = 133	100.0

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of the study participants. Of the 133 respondents, 77 (57.9%) were female and 56 (42.1%) were male, indicating a higher representation of female students in the sample. While this distribution is not heavily skewed, it suggests the findings may lean somewhat toward female perspectives. Nonetheless, the inclusion of both genders allows the study to capture a range of experiences relevant to academic self-assessment on social media.

Table 2: Distribution of Participants by Age

Age Group	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
18-20 years	68	51.1
21-25 years	41	30.8
26-30 years	24	18.1
Total	N = 133	100.0

Table 2 presents the age distribution of the study participants. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents, 68 participants (51.1%), were between 18 and 20 years old. Students aged 21 to 25 years formed the second-largest group, accounting for 30.8% (41 participants), while those aged 26 to 30 years represented the smallest proportion of the sample at 18.1% (24 participants). Overall, these results indicate that the sample was predominantly composed of younger university students, suggesting that the findings largely reflect the experiences and perceptions of students in the early stages of their higher education studies.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis

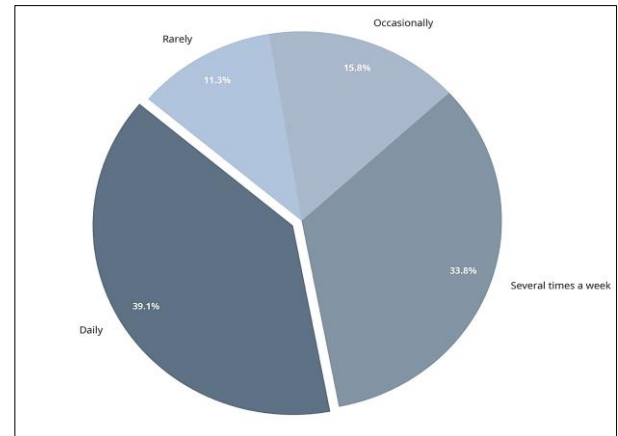


Fig. 1: Frequency of Social Media Use for Self-Assessment

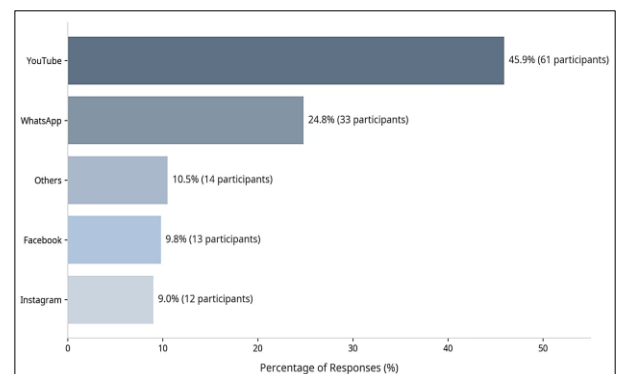


Fig. 2: Most Frequently Used Platform for Self-Assessment

The data presented in Figure 1 reveals a pronounced trend toward the routine integration of social media platforms into the educational self-assessment practices of the surveyed population. A significant

majority of respondents, totaling 72.9%, reported using these digital tools either daily or several times a week. The fact that the “Daily” usage category represents the largest single cohort at 39.1% (52 participants) suggests that social media is no longer merely a supplementary resource but has become a foundational element of the modern learner’s daily workflow. This high level of engagement indicates that learners are increasingly comfortable leveraging the real-time feedback and diverse content available on social platforms to monitor their own academic progress and identify knowledge gaps.

Furthermore, the distribution of responses highlights a clear shift away from traditional, infrequent assessment methods toward more continuous and self-directed digital evaluation. Only a small fraction of the participants, approximately 11.3%, indicated that they rarely use social media for such purposes, while those using it occasionally accounted for just 15.8%. This downward trend in participant numbers as frequency decreases suggests that once learners begin to utilize social media for educational self-assessment, they tend to adopt it as a consistent habit. The overarching implication is that the interactive nature of social media facilitates a more dynamic and personalized learning experience, enabling individuals to engage in formative self-assessment at their own pace and convenience.

The data presented in Figure 2 highlights a clear preference for video-based and interactive platforms in the context of educational self-assessment, with YouTube emerging as the dominant tool used by 45.9% of participants. This significant lead suggests that learners prioritize visual demonstrations, comprehensive tutorials, and the ability to pause and replay instructional content when evaluating their own understanding of a subject. The popularity of YouTube likely stems from its vast repository of diverse educational content, which allows individuals to find specific explanations tailored to their unique learning needs, thereby facilitating a more effective and personalized self-assessment process compared to traditional text-heavy resources.

In addition to the dominance of video content, the substantial reliance on WhatsApp (24.8%) indicates that collaborative and peer-to-peer communication plays a vital role in how learners gauge their academic progress. Unlike the passive consumption of content on other social media, WhatsApp’s high usage suggests that many participants engage in group discussions, share resources, and seek immediate feedback from peers to validate their knowledge. When combined with the usage of other platforms like Facebook and Instagram, the findings underscore a broader trend where learners are moving away from centralized educational systems toward a decentralized, multi-platform ecosystem. This shift allows for a more flexible and continuous form of

self-evaluation that integrates seamlessly into the digital social lives of the modern student.

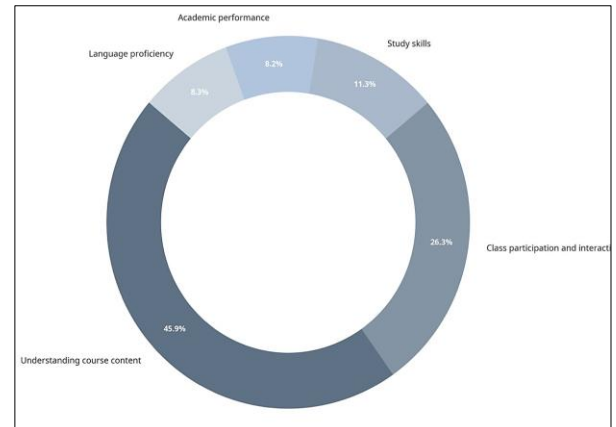


Fig. 3: Academic Abilities Assessed through Social Media

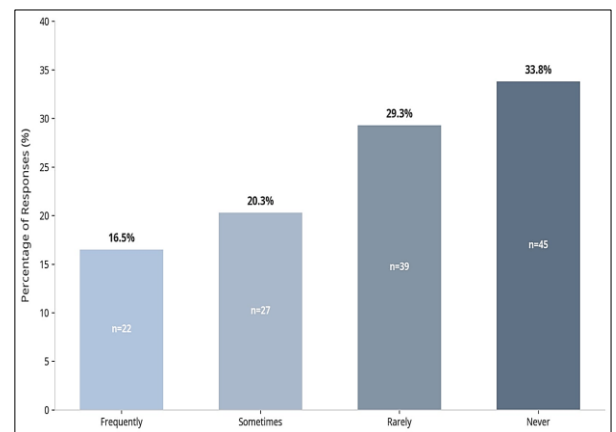


Fig. 4: Frequency of Academic Comparison on Social Media

An analytical review of participant responses reveals that the pursuit of conceptual clarity is the primary driver for social media engagement, with nearly half of the cohort prioritizing the “Understanding of course content.” As illustrated in Figure 3, this dominant trend of 45.9% suggests a fundamental shift in the educational landscape, where students no longer rely solely on institutional lectures but actively seek out supplementary digital discourse to demystify complex academic topics. By leveraging the vast, decentralized knowledge available on social platforms, learners are effectively bridging the gap between theoretical instruction and practical comprehension, transforming social media into a vital auxiliary for formative self-assessment.

The interpersonal dynamics of education are also prominently featured in the data, as the focus on “Class participation and interaction” accounts for 26.3% of the responses. This emphasis indicates that students are increasingly conscious of their collaborative footprint and utilize digital interactions as a reflexive

mirror to evaluate their communicative efficacy. When viewed alongside the assessments of study skills (11.3%) and linguistic competence (8.3%), it becomes clear that social media functions as a multifaceted developmental dashboard. This helps students look at all the different parts of their academic life. It allows them to focus on building useful skills for the future, rather than just worrying about getting high test scores.

A closer look at the data reveals a notable tendency toward academic independence, with the largest segment of participants (33.8%) stating that they never compare their abilities with others on social media. This suggests that a significant portion of the student body prioritizes their own personal learning journey and internal benchmarks over external social validation. As evidenced in Figure 4, the combined percentage of those who “Never” or “Rarely” engage in such comparisons reaches a substantial 63.1%, indicating that for many,

social media remains a tool for individual growth rather than a platform for competitive peer evaluation.

Despite this leaning toward independence, a meaningful portion of the cohort still experiences the social pressures of the digital age, with 36.8% of respondents admitting to comparing themselves with peers at least “Sometimes” or “Frequently.” This behavioral pattern reflects the inherent nature of social platforms as spaces where academic achievements are often visible, potentially triggering a reflexive self-assessment against the perceived success of others. While the majority maintain a more isolated focus, the presence of this active comparison group suggests that social media still plays a complex role in shaping the academic self-concept of a considerable number of students, either as a source of motivation or a cause for self-doubt. This suggests that while social media does not universally foster competitive comparison among students, it continues to influence the academic perceptions of a substantial minority.

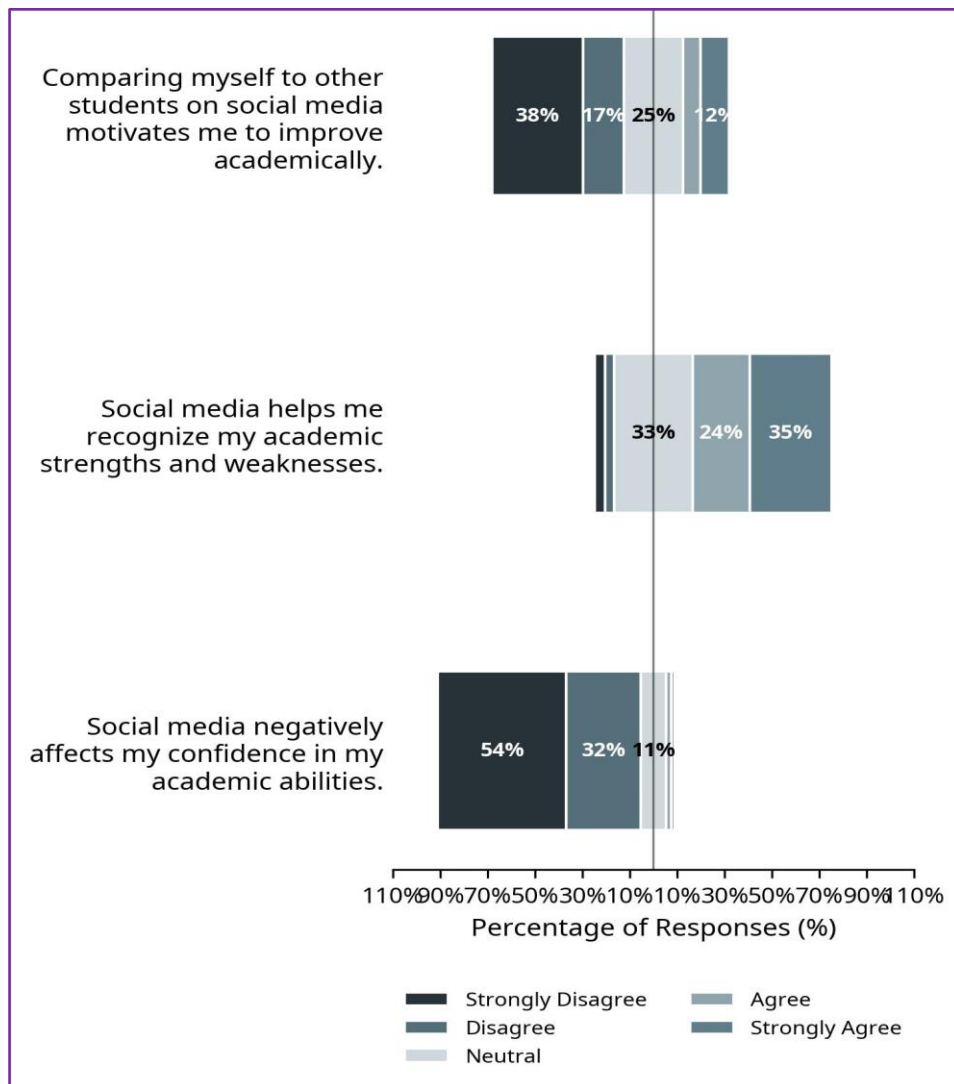


Fig. 5: Social Media's Effects on Academic Self- Assessment

The analysis regarding motivation presents a notable split in student perceptions, with a slight lean toward disagreement. Combined, 55.6% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that comparing themselves to other students on social media motivates academic improvement (38.3% and 17.3% respectively), compared to only 19.5% who agreed or strongly agreed (7.5% and 12%), while 24.8% remained neutral. This suggests that for most students in the sample, social comparison does not function as a strong motivational driver for academic improvement, and may instead be experienced as a neutral or even discouraging influence for a majority of respondents.

A different pattern emerges around self-awareness, where responses leaned strongly toward agreement. A combined 58.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media helps them recognize their academic strengths and weaknesses (24.1% and 34.6% respectively), while only 8.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 33.1% remained neutral. This indicates that, despite social comparison not being widely perceived as motivating, students still find social media useful as a tool for self-reflection and gaining insight into their own academic standing.

The clearest pattern among the three items concerns emotional impact, with a strong majority of respondents disagreeing that social media affects their confidence in their academic abilities. A combined 85.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed (54.1% and 31.6% respectively), while only 3.8% agreed or strongly agreed, and 10.5% remained neutral. This suggests that most students do not perceive social media as having a significant effect on their sense of academic confidence, which stands in contrast to common assumptions about social comparison and self-esteem in digital spaces.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis

The final section of the online questionnaire comprised two open-ended questions designed to capture richer, qualitative insights into students' use of social media for academic self-assessment. The first question asked students to describe how they use social media to assess their own academic abilities, providing examples to illustrate their responses.

Several students described using social media as a tool for self-testing and checking comprehension of academic content. This often involved interacting with educational material in ways that required active engagement rather than passive viewing, allowing students to gauge their own understanding in real time. One student explained, "I watch educational reels and pause them to answer questions before the explanation appears," while another noted using "social media polls and mini-tests to evaluate my knowledge in specific subjects."

Language-related self-testing also featured prominently among students, with one participant sharing that they "take online quizzes shared on Instagram pages to check grammar and vocabulary level," and another describing how they "record myself speaking English and share it with online language communities to receive feedback." These responses suggest that students value the interactive and immediate nature of social media content, using it not just to consume information but to actively test their own retention and comprehension.

A second prominent theme centered on peer comparison and social interaction as a means of academic self-assessment. Some students described comparing their performance, understanding, or skills with those of classmates or other social media users to gauge their own academic standing. One student noted that they "use WhatsApp for group discussions and compare myself to my classmates," while another described using "Telegram study channels to practice past exam questions and compare my scores with others."

Social validation also emerged as a meaningful form of self-assessment, as illustrated by one student's comment that when they can help others in Facebook study groups, they know they understand the topic well. Similarly, a student described comparing pronunciation skills, stating that they "compare my pronunciation with English speakers on TikTok and YouTube." Together, these responses indicate that for many students, academic self-assessment through social media is not a solitary activity but one embedded in social interaction, where peer comparison and feedback serve as informal benchmarks for academic confidence and competence.

The second question asked students about the difficulties they experienced when using social media for self-assessment.

Distraction and time management emerged as the most frequently cited difficulty among students. Many admitted to losing focus due to entertainment content and platform recommendations, with one explaining that they "spend too much time scrolling instead of focusing on studying," and another noting they get "distracted easily by entertainment content while studying." This was closely linked to procrastination, as one student observed that social media "can encourage procrastination, especially during exam preparation." These responses suggest that the same features that make social media engaging also make it difficult for students to stay focused on academic goals.

A second theme concerned the reliability and quality of information available online. Several students struggled to distinguish accurate content from misleading material, with one noting that "fake or

incorrect information can confuse me,” while others described feeling overwhelmed, stating that “there is too much information, which can feel overwhelming.” Inconsistent content quality was also raised, with some explaining that educational material was “not always organized in a clear way.” These difficulties suggest that despite the abundance of content available, students often lack reliable ways to filter and verify it.

Finally, students described emotional and social difficulties tied to their social media use. Some respondents linked their experience to negative comparison, admitting they “sometimes compare myself negatively with other students online,” while others raised concerns about cyberbullying, discouraging comments, and privacy when sharing academic work.

5. KEY FINDINGS

This section summarizes the key findings of the study in relation to its three research objectives.

RO1: How students assess their academic abilities through social media

- 72.9% of students use social media daily or several times a week for academic self-assessment.
- YouTube (45.9%) and WhatsApp (24.8%) were the most frequently used platforms.
- Students primarily use social media for self-testing, comprehension checks, and language practice.
- 58.7% agreed social media helps them recognize their academic strengths and weaknesses.

RO2: Extent of academic social comparison on social media

- Peer comparison was a prominent qualitative theme, used as an informal benchmark for academic standing.
- Only 19.5% agreed that comparison motivates academic improvement; 55.6% disagreed.
- 85.7% disagreed that social media affects their academic confidence.

RO3: Challenges students encounter using social media for academic self-assessment

- Distraction and poor time management were the most commonly reported difficulties.
- Many students struggled to verify the reliability and quality of educational content.
- Negative comparison, discouraging comments, and privacy concerns were also reported.

6. DISCUSSION

The high frequency of social media use for academic self-assessment, with the majority of students

engaging in this practice daily or several times a week, suggests that these platforms have become deeply embedded in how students monitor their own learning, often informally and outside the structure of traditional classroom assessment. This has implications for educators and institutions, who may benefit from acknowledging and even incorporating these informal practices into formal pedagogy, for example by guiding students toward higher-quality educational content or integrating platforms like YouTube into structured learning activities, rather than treating social media use as separate from academic life.

The finding that social comparison was commonly practiced but not strongly linked to motivation or confidence is also notable. While students frequently compared their performance and understanding with peers online, this did not appear to translate into a strong motivational or emotional effect, which contrasts with assumptions in some prior literature linking social comparison to either heightened motivation or diminished self-esteem. This suggests that students may engage in comparison primarily as an informational or reflective practice rather than an emotionally charged one, and that interventions aimed at leveraging peer comparison for motivation should be approached with caution. Relatedly, the challenges identified, particularly distraction, information overload, and difficulty verifying content reliability, point to a need for greater digital literacy support, since students appear largely self-directed in navigating these difficulties without formal guidance.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The study was conducted with EFL students at a single university, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations across different academic disciplines, institutions, or cultural contexts. The sample size of 133 participants, while sufficient for identifying patterns within this context, restricts the extent to which these findings can be confidently extended beyond the studied population. The data also relied on students' self-reported behaviors and perceptions, which are subject to recall bias and social desirability bias, and the cross-sectional design captures only a single snapshot in time, limiting insight into how students' use of social media for self-assessment may evolve over the course of their academic studies.

Future research could address these limitations by extending this line of inquiry to larger and more diverse samples, including students from multiple universities, disciplines, and language backgrounds, to examine whether the patterns observed here hold across different educational contexts. Longitudinal research would also be valuable in capturing how students' use of social media for academic self-assessment changes over time, while incorporating observational or behavioral

data rather than relying solely on self-report would provide a more objective account of actual usage patterns. Finally, given the mixed findings regarding social comparison's limited link to motivation and confidence, further research exploring the specific conditions under which social comparison becomes either beneficial or detrimental to students would help clarify this relationship.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that social media occupies a meaningful, if informal, space in how EFL students assess their own academic abilities. While these platforms offer accessible and flexible means of self-assessment, allowing students to test their understanding, seek feedback, and engage with diverse educational content on their own terms, they also expose students to distractions, unreliable information, and forms of social comparison that may, if left unaddressed, undermine rather than support genuine learning. What emerges most clearly from this study is that social media has not replaced traditional academic assessment for these students, but has instead carved out its own informal space alongside it, one defined by immediacy, peer interaction, and self-direction rather than structure or oversight.

This duality is precisely what makes the issue worth continued attention. These insights underscore the importance of fostering digital literacy and critical evaluation skills among students, equipping them not simply to use these platforms, but to use them discerningly. They also point to the potential value of integrating informal social media practices more intentionally into formal educational support, rather than treating them as separate from, or at odds with, the classroom.

Future research extending beyond a single institution and language-learning context would help build a fuller understanding of how these dynamics unfold across diverse student populations, but even within the scope of this study, one conclusion stands out: students are already assessing themselves constantly, the question is no longer whether they will use social media to do so, but how well-equipped they are to do it wisely.

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