



Exploring EFL students' preferences in self-directed listening with short social media videos

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Abstract:

The widespread use of short social media videos has reshaped how students practice listening independently outside the classroom. In self-directed learning contexts, learners have full control over selecting materials, making their preferences an important factor in understanding how they manage comprehension and engagement. This study aimed to explore students' preferences in self-directed listening using short social media videos. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, involving five English Education students who regularly used short-form videos for independent listening practice. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using qualitative data analysis procedures. The findings show that students demonstrated clear preferences regarding content type, video duration, topic familiarity, visual features, subtitle use, speaker delivery style, and accent. Participants preferred informal and authentic content, short videos lasting one to three minutes, and balanced multimedia features to support clarity and reduce distraction. These results indicate that learners actively regulate multimedia features to enhance comprehension and build confidence in self-directed listening.

Keywords:

self-directed learning, listening skill, short social media videos, student preferences

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1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) has become increasingly important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly in environments where learners have limited opportunities to use English in their daily communication. SDL refers to a learning approach in which learners take responsibility for managing their own learning process, including setting goals, selecting materials, and monitoring their progress (Knowles, 1975). Rather than depending entirely on teachers, learners actively make decisions about what and how they learn. SDL supports learner autonomy and motivation by allowing learners to control how and when they learn, which encourages sustained engagement beyond formal classroom instruction (Bonk et al., 2015; Tyas, 2022). In contexts where exposure to English is limited, SDL

provides learners with opportunities to continue developing their language skills independently.

Among the four language skills, listening plays a fundamental role in language acquisition. Listening enables learners to understand spoken language used in authentic communication and supports the development of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and overall communicative competence (Renukadevi, 2014). It also helps learners recognize language sounds and structures in real-life contexts (Yusra & Hanifa, 2023). Moreover, listening comprehension is essential for academic success and effective communication (AL-Harbi & Mirza, 2024). Despite its importance, many EFL learners face challenges in listening comprehension due to limited exposure to authentic spoken English outside the classroom (Sitorus, 2023). Without sufficient exposure, learners may struggle to develop their listening skills effectively (Rost, 2011). Additional difficulties include unfamiliar accents, rapid speech rates, and the tendency to forget information after listening (Muhammad Adi et al., 2021; Ulum, 2015). These challenges highlight the need for learners to actively seek listening input beyond classroom instruction.

In today's digital era, short social media videos have emerged as accessible sources of authentic listening input that can support self-directed learning. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts provide short, engaging, and replayable video content combining audio and visual elements. Social media enables users to access and share content without limitations of time and place, making it suitable for independent learning (Taprial & Kanwar, 2013). Short videos are also time-efficient and allow learners to focus on specific information within a limited duration (Indriana et al., 2023). Furthermore, previous studies indicate that short videos enhance learner engagement and foster creativity in language learning contexts (Wang, 2023; Mardiani & Syifa Ursila, 2024). These characteristics make short social media videos potentially valuable resources for self-directed listening practice.

However, learners do not engage with digital content uniformly. When practicing self-directed listening, students may show particular preferences regarding content types, delivery styles, subtitle use, and preferred accents. Preferences can influence learners' comfort, motivation, and sustained engagement. Learners tend to be more engaged when learning materials align with their personal interests (Fachrunnisa et al., 2023). In addition, awareness of one's preferred way of learning can enhance self-confidence and improve participation in learning activities (Fleming & Baume, 2006). Therefore, understanding learners' preferences is essential for explaining how they naturally manage their listening experiences in independent digital environments.

From a multimedia learning perspective, effective learning occurs when instructional materials are presented clearly and do not overload learners' cognitive capacity (Mayer, 2009). Learners process information through both visual and auditory channels, and each channel has limited capacity. In short social media videos, the combination of audio, subtitles, text overlays, and visual effects may influence how learners experience listening input. Learners may prefer videos with clear audio, manageable speech rates, supportive subtitles, or minimal distracting visual elements, as such features may help them focus on spoken language and manage

cognitive load more effectively. These preferences reflect how learners attempt to optimize their listening experience in self-directed contexts.

Several previous studies have explored self-directed learning and the use of digital platforms in English learning. Muslim and Sulistyningrum (2024) examined EFL students' difficulties and strategies in self-directed web-based listening activities; however, their study did not focus specifically on short social media videos as listening input. Rowiyah et al. (2025) investigated students' perceptions of using TikTok for self-directed English learning, yet their study emphasized general perceptions rather than listening-specific preferences. Berlin et al. (2025) reviewed the role of social media in self-directed English learning and identified both benefits and challenges, but the discussion addressed language learning broadly without examining self-directed listening practices in detail. Similarly, Assakhi and Fakhurriana (2022) highlighted the potential of short social media videos in supporting English learning beyond the classroom, but their study did not specifically analyze learners' natural listening preferences in self-directed contexts.

Previous studies have explored self-directed learning and the use of digital media in language learning. However, limited attention has been given to how learners make specific choices during the learning process, particularly in selecting listening materials through short social media videos. In this context, learners are required to independently select content that suits their needs, yet this selection process remains underexplored. In particular, there is still limited empirical research that examines students' preferences related to content characteristics such as topic, delivery style, subtitle use, and accent in independent listening contexts without instructional guidance. This gap warrants further investigation, as these preferences may influence learners' engagement and comprehension. Therefore, this study explores EFL students' preferences in selecting short social media videos for self-directed listening.

To guide this study, the following research question is addressed: What are EFL students' preferences in selecting short social media videos for self-directed listening? By examining learners' natural choices outside classroom settings, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of listening behavior in digital self-directed learning environments.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' preferences in self-directed listening using short social media videos. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand participants' perspectives and experiences in their natural learning contexts without manipulating variables or measuring outcomes numerically (Creswell & Creswell, 2012). Descriptive qualitative research was considered appropriate as it allowed the researcher to provide detailed and contextual descriptions of how students select and engage with short social media videos for independent listening practice.

The study was conducted at Universitas Negeri Padang and involved five English Education students who had completed Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Listening courses. Purposive sampling was applied to select participants who met specific criteria relevant to the research focus. The inclusion criteria were: (1) having completed formal listening courses, (2) having prior

exposure to English short form videos, and (3) actively using short social media videos for self-directed listening practice within the last three months. The use of five participants was considered appropriate for this qualitative study, as the research aimed to obtain in depth insights into learners' preferences rather than achieve statistical generalization. (DiCicco Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant was selected based on their relevant experience, allowing the researcher to explore the phenomenon in detail. Semi structured interviews were used to enable follow up questions and deeper probing of participants' responses. The interview protocol was organized based on key indicators of students' preferences, including content selection (type of video, length, topic familiarity, and visual features) and delivery aspects (presentation style, speech pace, and accent). Example questions included asking participants about the types of videos they preferred, how they selected topics, whether they used subtitles, and what kind of accents they found easier to understand. This approach allowed the researcher to explore how learners make decisions in self-directed listening contexts.

Data were collected through semi structured interviews to gain in depth insights into students' listening preferences. This method was chosen because it provides flexibility while maintaining focus on predetermined themes (Adeoye Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interview guideline was developed based on relevant theories related to self-directed learning and multimedia learning, particularly drawing on the concept of self-directed learning proposed by Knowles (1975) and multimedia learning principles proposed by Mayer (2009). The instrument was validated through expert judgment by a lecturer from the English Department to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After revision and approval, the finalized interview guideline was used for data collection.

Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted online via Zoom. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To enhance credibility, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts for confirmation and clarification. The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data condensation stage, the researcher selected and focused on relevant information related to students' preferences, while irrelevant or repetitive data were reduced. The condensed data were then coded by assigning labels to relevant parts of participants' responses based on the research focus. Similar codes were grouped into categories, and these categories were further organized into broader themes to identify patterns in students' preferences. In the data display stage, the categorized data were organized into thematic groupings to make the data easier to understand and interpret. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn and verified by cross checking the interpretations with the original transcripts to ensure that the findings accurately represented participants' perspectives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *EFL Students' Preferences in Self-Directed Listening Using Short Social Media Videos*

The research findings were obtained from semi-structured interviews with five English Education students at Universitas Negeri Padang who actively used short social media videos for

self-directed listening learning. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were coded as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. The findings are organized according to the main research focuses: students' preferences toward short social media videos in self-directed listening activities.

Table 1. EFL Students' Preferences Using Short Social Media Videos for Self-Directed Listening Learning

| Preferences Category | Preferences | Source |
|------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Type of video content | Daily conversations, vlogs, short dialogues, motivating videos, and mini-lessons | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 |
| Video Length | around 1–3 minutes, up to under 5 minutes | P1, P2, P3, P5 |
| Topic Familiarity | Familiar topics supported comprehension, unfamiliar topics supported vocabulary expansion | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 |
| Visual Features | Simple visuals reduced distraction, visually attractive visuals increased interest | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 |
| Subtitle Preference | Full subtitles for confirmation, selective or no subtitles for listening practice | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 |
| Speaker Delivery Style | Friendly/semi-formal style supported engagement, formal style supported academic learning | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 |
| Accent Preference | American English supported clarity, British English supported comfort, exposure to multiple accents | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 |

1. Preferred Types of Content

The findings indicate that students demonstrated clear preferences when selecting short social media videos for self-directed listening practice. Regarding content type, participants preferred informal and authentic videos such as daily conversations, vlogs, short dialogues, motivating content, and short lesson videos, as these were considered more natural and relatable than long academic lectures. This preference can be seen in Participant 1, who mentioned daily conversations, vlogs, and mini lesson videos as suitable content for listening practice, stating, *“Maybe like daily conversation, vlog, or mini lesson”* (P1). Similarly, Participant 2 preferred vlogs and daily life content because the language felt more natural and not strongly focused on formal study, as reflected in her statement, *“I prefer vlogs, daily life content. It is more natural and not focused on studying”* (P2). In addition, Participant 4 emphasized the usefulness of conversational videos that show natural interaction between speakers, explaining, *“Conversation videos are easier to understand because the language follows the flow of daily conversation”* (P4). These findings suggest that students favoured real life communication contexts that felt practical and easier to follow.

2. Preferred Video Length

Video length was another important factor influencing students' preferences. Most participants preferred short videos, generally ranging from one to three minutes and up to under five minutes, as they were more suitable for self-directed listening. Short videos were considered easier to manage and could fit well into daily routines. They also helped students stay focused and avoid boredom during listening practice. Participant 1 chose short videos because listening activities were usually done in spare time. *"I choose one to two minutes video because I do it in my free time"* (P1). Similarly, Participant 2 explained that short videos helped her stay engaged and avoid boredom. *"If the video is short, I do not get bored easily"* (P2). Participant 5 also preferred videos under five minutes and explained that longer videos could cause confusion as shown in the statement *"I prefer under five minutes because long videos make me confused"*. These responses indicate that time availability, maintaining focus, and avoiding confusion were important reasons why students preferred short videos.

3. Topic Familiarity

In terms of topic familiarity, two patterns emerged. Some students preferred familiar topics because they helped them understand the content more easily and maintain focus. Others intentionally chose unfamiliar topics to learn new vocabulary and gain new knowledge. For example, participants 1 and 2 stated, *"I prefer the familiar ones, I got more focused and easier to understand about the topic"* (P1). *"I tend to choose familiar topics because they are easier to understand"* (P2). In contrast, Participant 4 expressed interest in learning new things through unfamiliar topics. For example, Participant 4 stated, *"I like topics that I do not know yet because I want to learn something new"*. This shows that learners made purposeful decisions based on their personal learning objectives.

4. Visual Features of Videos

Regarding visual features, participants showed preferences for visuals that support comprehension without causing distraction. Participant 1 preferred simple visuals without excessive effects. For example, Participant 1 stated *"I prefer simple visuals without too many effects"*. Similarly, Participant 4 emphasized that visuals should not interfere with understanding the spoken message. Participant 4 stated, *"I prefer videos that are visually clear but not too much animation because sometimes it makes me lose focus"*. Meanwhile, Participant 5 mentioned that attractive visuals were helpful as long as they were relevant to the content, saying, *"If the visuals match the topic, it helps me understand better"*. These responses indicate that students valued balanced visual presentation that enhances attention rather than distracts from listening.

5. Subtitled Preference

In terms of subtitle preference, participants demonstrated flexible choices depending on their listening confidence. Participant 3 preferred watching without subtitles to train listening skills, as shown in the statement *"I prefer videos without subtitles because it trains my listening"*. Meanwhile, Participant 4 preferred English subtitles to confirm unfamiliar vocabulary. Participant 4 explained, *"I usually turn on English subtitles if I don't understand some words"*. Participant 5 added that subtitles were helpful only in difficult parts, stating, *"I don't always use"*

subtitles, only when the speaker talks too fast". These findings indicate that the participants used subtitles strategically in self-directed listening learning. Rather than relying on one fixed subtitle mode, they adjusted subtitle use based on their listening confidence, level of understanding, and learning goals.

6. *Speaker Delivery Style*

Regarding speaker delivery style, most participants preferred moderate speaking speed and a friendly tone. Participant 2 mentioned preferring a friendly speaker, for example *"I prefer a friendly speaker with moderate speed"* (P2). Participant 4 similarly stated, *"If the speaker talks too fast, it is hard to follow"*. Participant 5 emphasized that friendly speakers were better at adjusting themselves to the audience, explaining, *"I like speakers who pronounce words clearly and not too fast"*. These findings show that clarity and comfortable pacing were central to students' listening preferences.

7. *Accent Preference*

Accent preference showed that American English was the most frequently chosen accent due to familiarity and clarity. This preference can be seen in Participant 1 explained that American English was easier to understand and more familiar for Indonesian learners. For example, *"I think American is easy to understand and Indonesian too, because American is more familiar to Indonesian learners more than British"* (P1). Similarly, Participant 2 and Participant 3 preferred American English for learning purposes because of its clarity. Participant 2 and 3 *stated "If I want to learn, I prefer American English because it's clearer"* (P2) and *"I prefer American accent"* (P3). In addition, Participant 5 explained that American English was more familiar in academic settings, saying, *"During my learning process, I like to listen American English because I think in university also, we more use American English. So that's why I just like more familiar with the accent rather than British English"* (P5). These responses indicate that familiarity and clarity were key reasons for choosing American English.

3.2. Discussion

This study explored students' preferences in self-directed listening using short social media videos and found that learners make deliberate choices regarding content type, video length, topic familiarity, visual design, subtitle use, speaker delivery, and accent. These findings indicate that learners actively regulate multimedia features to manage comprehension, attention, and cognitive load in autonomous learning environments.

Students' preference for informal and authentic content, such as vlogs and daily conversations, reflects the importance of conversational style in facilitating comprehension. This aligns with Mayer's (2009) Personalization Principle, which suggests that conversational language enhances learning. It is also supported by Wang (2023) and Mardiani and Ursila (2024), who found that authentic and informal videos increase engagement and motivation in language learning. In self-directed contexts, learners appear to prioritize relatability and natural communication over formal academic presentation.

The strong preference for short videos (one to three minutes) further demonstrates learners' awareness of attention span and cognitive processing limits. This finding supports

Mayer's (2009) Segmenting Principle and is consistent with Indriana et al. (2023), who reported that short-form videos improve concentration and time efficiency in independent learning. By selecting shorter videos, students reduce cognitive overload and sustain focus during listening practice.

Topic familiarity revealed flexible goal-oriented behavior. Students who preferred familiar topics benefited from activating prior knowledge, which aligns with Mayer's (2009) Pre-training Principle and is supported by Ovilia (2019), who found that topic familiarity positively influences listening comprehension. Conversely, students who selected unfamiliar topics demonstrated a desire for cognitive challenge, which can be explained through the concept of desirable difficulties (Bjork & Bjork, 2020). This suggests that learners balance comfort and challenge depending on their learning objectives.

Preferences regarding visual features also reflect cognitive considerations. Students favored visuals that were clear and supportive but not excessive. This finding aligns with Mayer's (2009) Coherence Principle and is reinforced by Catrysse et al. (2023), who found that less distracting visual backgrounds enhance information processing. Similarly, Gritz et al. (2025) reported that high visual complexity can interfere with attention and increase interaction difficulties. Thus, learners appear sensitive to how visual design affects listening concentration.

Subtitle preferences demonstrated strategic flexibility. While some students preferred full subtitles for comprehension support, others limited subtitle use to strengthen auditory skills. This aligns with Mayer's Modality and Signaling Principles and is supported by Fadhilah (2023), who found that subtitles improve listening comprehension, and Chodijah (2024), who argued that subtitles function as supportive tools rather than fixed requirements. These findings suggest that learners regulate subtitle use based on confidence and learning goals.

Regarding speaker delivery style, students preferred moderate speech rate and friendly tone, which supports Mayer's Voice and Personalization Principles. This is consistent with Hayati (2010), who demonstrated that natural speech rate significantly improves listening comprehension compared to overly fast or slow delivery. Moderate and conversational delivery appears to reduce listening difficulty and enhance engagement in self-directed learning.

Finally, accent preference was strongly influenced by familiarity and exposure. Most participants favored American English due to perceived clarity and frequent exposure through media, which aligns with Utami et al. (2026), who found that exposure to General American increases perceived comprehensibility. However, openness to other accents indicates that some learners intentionally seek variation to improve their listening flexibility. This suggests that accent preference is shaped by both ease of comprehension and long-term learning goals.

Overall, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that multimedia learning principles and listening-related factors operate not only in structured classroom environments but also in learner-controlled digital spaces. Students act as self-regulated learners who intentionally select video features that align with their cognitive capacity, comprehension needs, and personal learning goals. Pedagogically, these findings imply that EFL teachers should not only focus on teaching listening skills but also guide students in selecting appropriate digital materials for self-directed learning. Teachers can support learners by recommending short, authentic videos, encouraging flexible use of subtitles, and exposing students to a variety of

accents and delivery styles. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of multimedia learning by showing that Mayer's principles remain relevant in informal, self-directed contexts, where learners independently regulate input to optimize comprehension and engagement.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored students' preferences in self-directed listening using short social media videos and found that learners demonstrate clear and purposeful patterns in selecting listening materials. Their preferences span content type, video length, topic familiarity, visual design, subtitle use, speaker delivery style, and accent. These choices reflect learners' efforts to regulate comprehension, maintain attention, and manage cognitive load in autonomous learning contexts. Students favoured informal and authentic content for its relatability, preferred short videos to sustain concentration and integrate learning into daily routines, and adjusted topic familiarity based on whether they sought easier understanding or greater challenge. Together, these patterns indicate that learners strategically align video features with their individual listening goals.

Multimedia-related preferences further reveal learners' sensitivity to how design elements affect comprehension and comfort. Balanced visuals, moderate speech rate, selective subtitle use, and familiar accents were chosen to reduce distraction and enhance clarity. Accent preference, particularly toward American English due to exposure and perceived comprehensibility, illustrates how media consumption shapes listening comfort in digital environments. These findings contribute to research on autonomous and digital language learning by showing that preferences function as part of learners' self-regulation processes. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that in self-directed listening, learners are not passive consumers of online content but active decision-makers who shape their own listening development through informed and strategic preferences.

However, this study was limited to exploring students' preferences and strategies in self-directed listening using short social media videos within a specific context and a limited number of participants. The findings were mainly based on students' self-reported experiences, which may not fully capture all aspects of their actual learning behaviors. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine self-directed learning using short social media videos in broader contexts and across different language skills, such as speaking, pronunciation, or vocabulary learning. Further studies may also employ mixed-method designs, learning diaries, or observation techniques to gain deeper and more comprehensive insights into learners' self-directed listening behaviors over time.

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