

## Slang-ing into Digital Age: Exploring the appeal for EFL students

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**Abstract.** This study explores the appeal and sources of slang among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the digital age. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that acronym-based slang, such as LOL (Laughing Out Loud), IDK (I Don't Know), TBH (To Be Honest), and NGL (Not Gonna Lie), is the most popular, with 54.8% of participants reporting frequent use. Other types include clipping (29%), imitative slang (25.8%), and fresh and creative slang (19.4%). Students perceive slang as appealing because it is easy to use (48.4%), helps them appear trendy (29%), and facilitates communication with peers (22.6%). In terms of digital platforms, Instagram and TikTok were the most frequently cited (64.5%), followed by WhatsApp (22.6%). These findings suggest that integrating slang into language learning activities and instructional materials may enhance student engagement and make learning more relatable and interactive in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** slang; EFL students; social media

### RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In this digital age, technology has changed the way we communicate today, especially in the use of English globally, especially among young people. The way people communicate with each other has changed thanks to technology. Social media is not only a platform for communication but also a place for learning, especially English language learning. Learning through social media, according to Anggraini and Ubudiah in the Jurnal written by Lestari and Setiawan (2025), has become an increasingly popular phenomenon in modern education. Social media is an online platform where people can share their thoughts, works and post various things like images and texts (Qadir, 2024). Today, in the age of technology, the use of slang is increasingly widespread through various social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Social media is not only a place where people can communicate and interact with each other, but also a platform where new words and languages are created and spread, such as slang. For students learning English as a foreign language, using platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and X to view English-language content has become a relaxing way for them to learn. In this context, social media not only serves as a communication platform, but also as a space for the creation and dissemination of new language forms, including slang. EFL learners are often immersed in slang through English-language media on various social networking sites such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Sociolinguistically, the use of slang is closely related to the construction of identity and the strengthening of social ties in the digital world, where language acts as a marker of identity.

Although the use of slang is now very common and there are many platforms available, there remains a lack of understanding regarding which types of slang are most popular and which platforms are frequently used by learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), as well as the reasons why they prefer and frequently use these platforms. Although learners may encounter various types of slang across different platforms, the specific characteristics that make certain types of slang more popular or preferred over others remain unclear to this day.

Several studies have examined the use of slang among young people. Muattarxon (2025), conducted a study examining the use of slang by young people from a sociolinguistic perspective. The study showed that slang helps to build identity, demonstrate a sense of belonging, and shape patterns of communication in the digital age. Consistent with this, (Jose et al., 2025), conducted research on slang, noting that it is widely used because it contains language that is easy to understand, thereby creating a relaxed atmosphere of communication. Furthermore, (Madani et al., 2025), highlighted that slang is heavily influenced by digital communication and social media interactions.

Although previous studies have examined the functions and influence of slang, their primary focus has remained on general usage. However, few have investigated the appeal of slang to students or examined the reasons for students' interest in using slang in a learning context. Therefore, further research is needed to explore students' interest in slang and the platforms on which they adopt it. In line with this, the study seeks to answer two main questions: What types of slang are most appealing to EFL students in the digital age? And through which digital platforms do EFL students encounter and adopt slang? By addressing these questions, the research aims to provide insight into students' use of informal language and the digital contexts that facilitate its adoption.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Slang is increasingly recognized as a dynamic form of informal language that evolves rapidly, particularly in digital environments. Recent research highlights that slang is closely associated with linguistic creativity and social interaction, especially among younger generations. A study by Chyrvonyi (2024), found that modern slang is shaped through processes such as blending, compounding, and abbreviation, reflecting how users adapt language to fit fast-paced digital communication

From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang plays a crucial role in identity construction and social belonging. Recent studies indicate that slang is widely used by young people to construct and express their identities in digital environments. Research by Fransisca et al. (2025) shows that slang functions as a tool for teenagers to navigate social relationships and build their online identities through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Similarly, Durahman & Arifbillah (2025), found that slang reflects creativity, identity construction, and peer solidarity among Gen Z users across social media platforms.

In terms of communication, slang contributes to both efficiency and expressiveness in digital interaction. A study by Firah et al. (2025) found that slang is used not only to simplify communication but also to express emotions, humour, and youth culture in online interactions. This indicates that slang functions as a communicative strategy that enhances interpersonal interaction, especially in informal digital contexts.

The development and spread of slang are strongly influenced by social media. Recent research shows that platforms such as TikTok and Instagram play a significant role in shaping and accelerating the evolution of slang. Rintaningrum et al (2025) found that social media contributes to changes in language structure and promotes the rapid dissemination of slang among users. In addition, Apriliana and Rugaiyah (2025) highlight that TikTok serves as a major platform for the emergence and spread of new slang expressions due to its viral and repetitive content exposure.

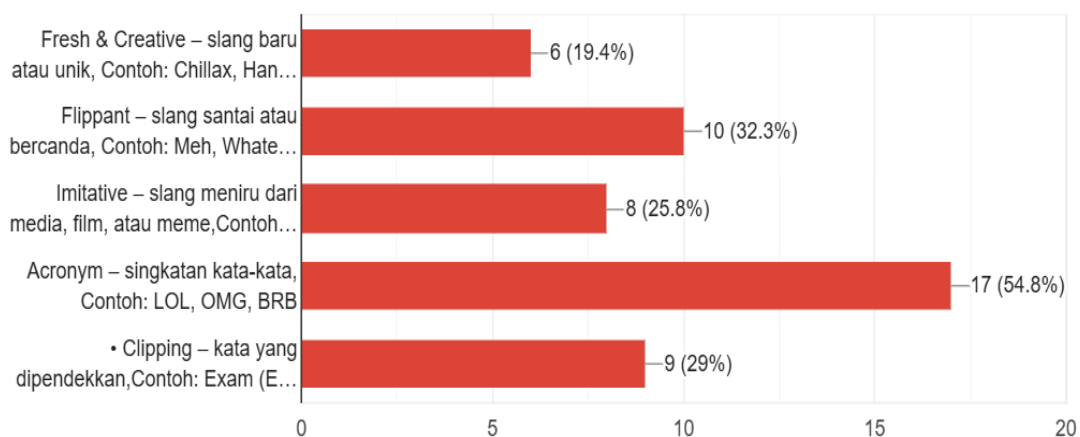
From a broader linguistic perspective, slang is also associated with creativity and language change. Recent studies suggest that slang evolves rapidly due to its frequent use in digital communication and its adaptability to new contexts. Research on Gen Z language practices shows that slang reflects ongoing linguistic innovation and may create communication gaps between different generations due to its fast-changing nature.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design complemented by qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of EFL students' engagement with slang in the digital age. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to 28 purposively selected participants to examine their demographic characteristics, preferences for different types of slang, and the digital platforms through which they encounter and adopt slang. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding slang usage, providing richer contextual insights. The quantitative data were analyzed using frequency distribution and descriptive statistics to identify patterns in students' demographic backgrounds and slang usage, while the qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis to identify, categorize, and interpret recurring themes across participants' responses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Types of Slang Most Appealing to EFL Students



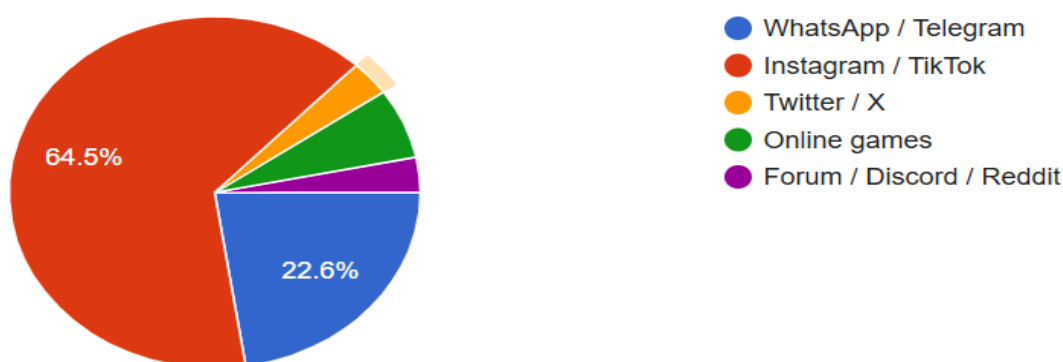
EFL students exhibit a clear preference for acronym-based slang, such as LOL (Laughing Out Loud), IDK (I Don't Know), TBH (To Be Honest), and NGL (Not Gonna Lie), with 54.8% of participants reporting frequent use. Other types of slang include clipping (29%), imitative slang (25.8%), and fresh and creative slang (19.4%). Slang is perceived as appealing because it is easy to use (48.4%), helps students appear trendy (29%), and facilitates communication with friends (22.6%). These preferences suggest that students favor slang that is concise, practical, and widely recognized across digital platforms, while expressive or creative slang adds novelty and playfulness.

Among students, acronyms are the most widely employed, with abbreviations like *lol* or *idk* favored for their brevity and convenience in rapid digital communication. Following this, fresh

and creative slang is valued for making interactions lively and trend-conscious, with students describing it as “brief, practical, and relaxed.” Flippant slang, such as *nahh* and *whatever*, is appreciated for its familiarity and ease of pronunciation. Imitative slang is chosen for casual and accessible communication, while *no cap* is preferred in interactions with peers who understand its meaning. Across all participants, slang was reported to enhance social closeness, self-expression, and playful interaction, reflecting its role as both a linguistic tool and a social medium.

The findings are consistent with previous studies. Alyssa Nur R. & Novi Susanti (2023) reported that slang is widely adopted because it is easy to understand and fosters a relaxed communication atmosphere. Sabbila & Mansyur (2021) described slang as an informal, non-standard language variation commonly used in daily interactions. (Muattarxon, 2025) emphasized that slang functions as a marker of identity, allowing young people to demonstrate belonging and strengthen social bonds within peer communities.

## 2. Digital Platforms for Encountering and Adopting Slang



Regarding digital platforms, Instagram and TikTok were the most frequently cited by participants (64.5%), followed by WhatsApp (22.6%). Interview responses highlight that TikTok is particularly influential, serving as a primary source for trending slang via short-form videos, while Instagram provides exposure through captions, stories, and comments. WhatsApp, by contrast, is used for personal and contextualized slang use in direct interactions with friends. Participants reported adjusting the type of slang depending on the platform; for example, simpler acronyms are used on WhatsApp, whereas trendier and creative slang is used on Instagram and TikTok.

These findings align with the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Aldamen et al., 2025), which suggests that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners receive comprehensible and repeated input in low-anxiety contexts. Social media platforms offer such exposure, allowing students to acquire slang incidentally while engaging with entertaining and socially meaningful content. Additionally, the playful and humorous nature of slang lowers the affective filter, facilitating informal learning and natural integration of slang into students' online communication. Overall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data reveals that students' slang preferences are shaped by both the characteristics of the slang itself conciseness,

expressiveness, and social appeal and the social and technological contexts of different digital platforms. The findings demonstrate that EFL learners actively negotiate their slang use depending on audience, platform, and social context, highlighting the dynamic and interactive nature of digital language learning. This finding suggests that social media plays a significant role in shaping students' informal language use.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate the appeal and sources of slang among EFL students. The result showed that acronym-based slang such as LOL, IDK, TBH, and NGL is the most frequently used and preferred type among EFL students, followed by clipping, imitative slang, and fresh & creative slang. Slang is perceived as appealing because it is easy to use, helps students appear trendy, and facilitates communication with friends. In terms of digital platforms, Instagram and TikTok are the most frequently cited, followed by WhatsApp. Additionally, slang contributes to social closeness, self-expression, and playful interaction among students, highlighting its role as both a linguistic and social tool.

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