

Indonesian EFL Students' Trust: English Teachers Educators' VS Educational Influencers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing Indonesian EFL Islamic University students' preference for educational influencers over their teacher educators. While social media has emerged as a significant source of information, there is a limited understanding of why students trust online influencers more than their formally qualified lecturers. The purpose of this study is to analyze and identify the specific reasons behind this comparative trust. Using qualitative interviews with five EFL students, data was collected via WhatsApp and analyzed through reduction, presentation, and verification. The findings reveal four main factors: (1) engaging and visually appealing video content, (2) relevance of topics to daily life, (3) entertaining and interactive teaching methods, and (4) perceived credibility enhanced by social media following. These results highlight the need for traditional educators to adapt teaching styles and integrate digital tools to better meet students' current learning preferences.

Keywords: Educational influencers, English teacher educators, Islamic university, interactive learning, teaching method

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INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, digital media and social networking platforms have profoundly changed human interaction and information dissemination. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok are no longer just tools for social connections. In the article Pujiono et al. (2022), said that social media can also be a source of learning, for example like YouTube. This widespread adoption reflects a fundamental change in the way individuals interact with the world, characterized by an increasing reliance on digital sources for a variety of needs.

This widespread digital shift has inevitably affected the educational landscape. In the research Bujuri et al. (2023), there is a teacher's statement saying that students actually use Tiktok social media as a learning medium not only as an entertainment medium. This is in line with the results of research by Yanthi (2024), which reveals that students find it easier to understand difficult material through videos on social media, besides that there are main factors that have influenced users to choose social media as a learning resource, namely because of the ease of accessing learning resources through social media. Furthermore, Rizqiyah (2024), explains that the use of social media can improve students' English skills, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking. As a result, these platforms have encouraged the emergence of non-traditional educators and informal learning environments.

In this evolving educational environment, the influence of social media personalities as a source of knowledge and motivation in various sectors is becoming more significant. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube allow educational influencers to connect

with a wider audience. Bahri et al. (2022) in her research found that learning videos on TikTok are interesting and easy to understand. In contrast, there is little research on the relationship between educational influencers and social media users. The relationship of educational influencers with other social media users is fundamental to the success of educational influencers marketing. Therefore, it is important to investigate the factors that influence educational influencers' relationships with other users. With the concept of information relevance, this study presents a model that links various attributes of content produced by educational influencers with emotional attachment and information quality to examine the relationship between educational influencers and other social media users. In the findings of Bahri et al. (2022), said that TikTok content creators provide learning videos in an interesting, easy-to-understand way, and the subjects explained are also specific, clear, and not monotonous. In addition, students tend to be more comfortable with social media because of its flexible nature, allowing access anytime and anywhere. So this makes students tend to prefer learning through learning videos on social media rather than the traditional way provided by English teachers educators.

The evolution of learning through social media presents new challenges for English teachers educators in higher education. Students prefer to learn through content created by educational influencers rather than classroom explanations. Teacher educators tend to rely on traditional teaching methods (Aka, 2017). This makes students feel bored and is not in line with students' learning preferences in today's digital era. The traditional methods used by English teacher educators cause difficulties in maintaining student engagement during formal learning. As a result, students' engagement in class tends to be less interesting, as they prefer informal learning methods such as those offered by educational influencers.

Previous research, in Wibowo and Ellysinta (2022), revealed that students believe Instagram social media has improved their English language skills. Nasution (2023) argues that Instagram significantly enhances English learning by improving vocabulary, communication, and writing skills. Instagram's English content encourages students to engage in positive and creative multimodal learning experiences. Research from La'biran et al. (2024) explains that Instagram influences users' vocabulary search, diverse content, and interaction with advanced users, thus improving vocabulary acquisition for English Education. Syachsalsabillah and Hamid (2024) stated that social media such as Instagram can increase students' learning motivation. In addition to increasing learning motivation, it can improve students' writing skills. Hussein and Khalaf (2023) research shows that individuals who create content on social media platforms significantly influence language learners' vocabulary acquisition while substantially improving their English skills. Kaur and Sulaiman (2023) explained that TikTok has a positive impact on English speaking ability. Social media content provided by educational influencers has benefits for students.

Previous studies often discuss the influence of social media use on learning but rarely examine the factors that cause students to trust educational influencers rather than English teachers educators. This gap proves that further research is needed regarding why students trust educational influencers more than English teachers educators. This study aims to analyze and identify the factors that cause students at Indonesian Islamic University to trust educational influencers more than their English teachers educators. By focusing on the context of English language education in higher education, this research explores the underlying reasons behind students' changing preferences for educational influencers over English teacher educators. By uncovering these factors, this research can provide a more precise and deeper understanding of the shifting patterns of trust in the educational environment in this digital era.

This study has both academic significance and practical implications for university teacher educators. By knowing the factors that make students trust educational influencers rather than their English teacher educators, teachers can better adjust their teaching methods or styles to suit today's students' expectations and needs. The results of this study are expected to provide insights into how teacher educators can increase student engagement in the

classroom by adopting more interactive, flexible, and relevant learning styles of the digital generation.

Educational Influencers and Source Credibility in Media Social

This research focuses on why university students trust educational influencers more than English teachers educators. To understand this change in preference, the theoretical studies outlined are related to credibility and trust in educational influencers, English language learning through social media, and educational influencers on social media. The theoretical foundation is expected to help uncover the factors that influence university students' perceptions of trust in educational influencers rather than their English teachers educators in the current era.

Source Credibility Theory by Hovland and Weiss (1951), states that people more easily believe in sources that are considered credible. Hovland and Weiss (1951) divided source credibility into three main elements: 1) competence, which includes competence, knowledge, expertise, and qualifications. 2) trustworthiness which includes integrity and trustworthiness. 3) appearance which includes self-presentation and attractiveness. Educational influencers build personal relationships with their audiences through interactive and engaging content. In contrast, English teachers educators are often perceived as less attractive due to their rigid way of following a formal curriculum, this makes them appear distant and impersonal. People therefore use the credibility of information to assess whether the information obtained is in line with their expertise and knowledge. Educational influencers often use a casual and visually appealing presentation style very well. Students are helped in understanding learning concepts better by using TikTok as an application with a visual approach (Alvianto et al., 2024). In addition, research by Syahira et al. (2024), revealed that using social media to learn English positively improved English speaking skills, particularly pronunciation, vocabulary and confidence. Therefore, well-edited and visually appealing videos can increase trust, while traditional text-based lectures or monotonous presentations by English teacher educators often fail to capture students' attention.

Perloff (2017) argues that Persuasion Theory is a communicator carrying out a symbolic process by convincing others to change their attitudes about an issue through message delivery and free choice. In persuasion theory, people are free to choose whether to accept the message or reject it. In English language learning, students understand concepts more effectively when they see educational influencers applying language skills in real-life situations, providing concrete examples to follow, and making the learning process more relevant and engaging. Students can ask questions in the comments section or participate in the Q&A session, which encourages active engagement in the learning process. Educational influencers who use informal language and relevant communication styles more effectively capture students' attention and improve their understanding. Bahri et al. (2022) further emphasized that interesting intonation is one of the preferred appeals of users in learning English. So students are more motivated to learn from influencers because their content, such as practical tips to improve English speaking skills, is entertaining, engaging and directly relevant to their needs.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a case study research design to explore in-depth the factors influencing Indonesian EFL Islamic University students' trust towards educational influencers compared to their teacher educators. A case study approach allows for a detailed investigation into a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, which is suitable for understanding the subjective experiences and perspectives of the selected group of students regarding their learning preferences and trust in different educational sources.

Participants

The participants of this study were five students (n=5) from the English Education Department at Indonesian Islamic University. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria: they were currently enrolled as 7th-semester students in the English Education Department, who actively follow English content from educational influencers on social media (such as Instagram and TikTok), and voluntarily agreed to participate in the interview. Initially, ten students were invited via WhatsApp, resulting in five individuals who met the criteria and consented to participate. The background information of the participants is summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Participant Profile

No	Participant	Gender	Age	Role	Social Media Preferences
1.	Participant 1	Female	21	Student	Instagram and TikTok
2.	Participant 2	Male	21	Student	TikTok
3.	Participant 3	Female	22	Student	TikTok
4.	Participant 4	Female	21	Student	TikTok and Instagram
5.	Participant 5	Female	21	Student	Instagram and TikTok

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted digitally via the chat feature of the WhatsApp application. Interviews were conducted using the WhatsApp application because students considered it a technology that was easy to use and access (Gibson, 2020). Interviews, as a core qualitative method, facilitate the gathering of rich, detailed information by allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives in response to open-ended questions (Knott et al., 2022). The interviews specifically investigated factors influencing students' perceptions of trust in the influencer's credibility compared to the teaching teacher and students' experiences when watching English learning content from the influencer.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide served as the primary data collection instrument. This guide consisted of a list of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences learning English from both teacher educators and social media influencers. The questions specifically probed into their reasons for following educational influencers, their perceptions of the teaching styles and content provided by both sources, factors influencing their trust in each source, and the perceived relevance and impact of the content on their learning.

Data Analysis

The collected interview data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis framework. The analysis process involved three iterative phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction began with transcribing the WhatsApp chat data, followed by reading through the transcripts to identify and code relevant information related to students' preferences, trust factors, and comparisons between influencers and teacher educators. Data display involved organizing these initial codes into emerging themes and categories, presenting them in a systematic way to facilitate the identification of patterns and core findings. This was done by grouping related responses and identifying key reasons consistently mentioned by participants. Conclusion drawing and verification involved interpreting the identified themes, understanding the underlying meanings of participants' responses, and comparing findings across the five interviews to

identify common experiences. Verification of findings was done by revisiting the original transcripts to ensure the themes accurately reflected the participants' statements and by linking the findings to relevant literature and theoretical concepts like Source Credibility Theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the qualitative interviews with five Indonesian EFL Islamic University students, several key factors emerged explaining their tendency to trust English language education influencers more than their teacher educators. These factors, which significantly influence students' preferences and perceived credibility of learning sources in the digital era, are discussed in detail below, supported by participant insights and connected to relevant literature:

1. Interesting Videos

One of the main reasons students prefer learning from educational influencers over traditional classroom methods is the engaging nature of videos. In today's digital era, short, visually appealing videos have become an essential tool for education. Bahri et al. (2022) states that most of the content is explained concisely, interestingly, and easily understood. In research by Anggraini and Saputra (2023), it was also found that video-based learning significantly provided good results, such as students who could pronounce English vocabulary well. In addition, TikTok videos that combine images, backsound, and editing filters can help users' English comprehension (Warini et al., 2020). Students often struggle with long lectures due to information overload and lack of engagement. However, videos provide a solution by presenting educational content in a more digestible and interactive format.

In line with this, Participant 1 (P1) stated that videos are more interesting because they are simple, visually appealing, and provide clear explanations. This statement is in line with the findings of Bahri et al. (2022) which stated that interesting TikTok videos help users understand English material because the videos are short, not monotonous, and the material is delivered clearly. This is in accordance with the findings of Serlyana and Zuhdi (2024) who argue that students' English vocabulary tends to increase and remember the vocabulary by learning through videos. The following is data from P1:

Excerpt 1

"Interesting and simple videos, with clear explanations that are relevant to everyday life. In addition, influencers must have credibility, otherwise they would not dare to provide educational content, for example, slang language style material."
(P1, Personal Interview)

One of the main reasons students prefer videos created by influencers is that the format is engaging and easy to understand. Participant 1 (P1) emphasized that the videos are engaging, simple and provide clear explanations, making them more effective than traditional classroom lectures. This is supported by Serlyana and Zuhdi (2024), who argues that learning through videos can help students in understanding English vocabulary. The videos prevent students from feeling overwhelmed by breaking down complex topics into smaller, manageable parts. The use of visuals and structured explanations ensure that learning remains engaging and efficient.

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who stated that interesting TikTok videos help users understand English material because the videos are short, not monotonous, and the material is delivered clearly. In addition from Serlyana and Zuhdi (2024) argue that learning through videos can help students understand English vocabulary. The videos prevent students from getting bored by breaking down complex topics into smaller, easier-to-understand parts. The use of visuals and structured explanations ensures that learning remains interesting and efficient.

Further supporting this idea, Participant 5 (P5) stated that videos made by influencers are better than traditional classroom lectures because the videos are visually enhanced with illustrations, animations, and concise explanations. This reflects research (Warini et al., 2020), TikTok videos that combine images, background, and editing filters can help users' English comprehension. In addition, Ali and Baig (2022) found that video-based learning increases student motivation. According to P5, the conciseness and clarity of these videos help students stay focused and prevent boredom. In addition, according to students, influencers share English learning tips and tricks that make learning easier:

Excerpt 2

*"Initially, I was interested in following English education influencers on social media because they often share practical tips and tricks that are easy to understand. Many of them present their materials **in the form of short videos or interesting illustrations** that make learning English feel lighter and more fun."*

(P5, Personal Interview)

Participant 5 (P5) stated that videos made by influencers were preferred because they featured short videos, interesting illustrations, and concise explanations. This is in line with the findings of Ali and Baig (2022) who stated that video-based learning increases students' motivation. This is in line with Bahri et al. (2022) who stated that videos attract students' interest in learning English. Combining interesting visuals and concise explanations helps students stay focused while allowing them to recall content at their own pace.

2. Topics that are Relevant to Everyday Life

English Education influencers typically design their content to address students' daily activities, which aids in enhancing the comprehension and retention of the material. Focusing on content directly related to real-life experiences makes students more likely to find learning engaging and applicable. The relevance of topics to everyday life is crucial, as it not only makes the content more accessible but also encourages students to apply their learning immediately. As highlighted by Participant 3 like this:

Excerpt 3

*"Initially I opened TikTok and accidentally fyp influencer whose videos were about English material. For example about tenses, grammar etc. **The use of example sentences given is also relevant to everyday life.** In addition, the video is very interesting and easy to understand, so it makes me watch until the end of the video"*

(P3, Personal Interview)

The relevance of educational content to everyday life plays an important role in students' learning experience. Participant 3 (P3) stated that videos made by

influencers are relevant to everyday life, making them more relevant and easy to understand. This is supported by the theory of source credibility by Hovland and Weiss (1951) which says that audience trust depends on whether the audience considers the communicator's statement valid or not. Audiences consider a statement valid because educational influencers provide real examples that are relevant to everyday life so that audiences assume that educational influencers understand the needs of the audience not just the needs of academic formalities. Therefore, the application of educational content in the real world significantly increases student engagement and retention. When students see a direct connection between lessons and everyday activities, they are more likely to apply what they have learned, resulting in better understanding and long-term knowledge recall.

This view supports that when content is relevant to everyday life, students engage more meaningfully with the material. Educational content that is based on real-world applications improves student motivation and learning outcomes. Students are more likely to practice language skills when the material is aligned with their daily experiences. In addition, Participant 5 shared a similar view, noting that:

Excerpt 4

*"In addition, they also **often discuss topics that are relevant to everyday needs**, so I feel like I can directly apply what I learn. And there is no need to doubt the credibility of the influencers because they are mostly educated people too so I am very sure and believe in the videos they deliver."*
(P5, Personal Interview)

Like P3, Participant 5 (P5) highlighted that the topics covered in the influencer videos were relevant to their daily needs, thus making learning more meaningful. Students who learn through content related to their personal lives show improved communication skills and a more remarkable ability to use language effectively in real-world situations. Educational Influencers increase understanding and motivation by creating educational content that can be applied to students' everyday experiences, ensuring that students remain engaged.

3. *Exciting and Interesting Delivery Method*

One important factor that makes the delivery method used by English language education influencers more attractive is their engaging and captivating approach, which contrasts with the traditional and often monotonous teaching methods of lecturers that sometimes make students feel sleepy. Students prefer the delivery style of influencers, which tends to be enthusiastic and captivating. The delivery style of educational influencers like this transmits students' enthusiasm for learning, in addition to discussing viral topics that add to their appeal to students. This was clearly expressed by Participant 3, who emphasized that the interesting and exciting nature of the material delivered by influencers made the learning process far from boring:

Excerpt 5

*"The delivery from English education influencers is **more interesting, exciting, not boring**, sometimes discussing viral topics, the explanations are easy to understand. One of the reasons is because the way influencers deliver the material is more interesting and not boring. They often create exciting content, with light language and sometimes discuss trending viral topics. This makes the explanation feel easier to understand and relevant to my daily life as a student. On the other hand, lecturers' explanations*

can feel more formal and difficult to digest. In addition, there is also a time limit so that it is not easy to ask about material that is not yet understood."

(P3, Personal Interview)

The style of content delivery created by educational influencers is another major factor in their effectiveness. According to Participant 3 (P3), these videos are more interesting, exciting, and not boring, which makes learning fun. Interactive and interesting teaching methods increase student participation and learning outcomes. This is in line with the findings of Bahri et al. (2022) which stated that delivering material with facial expressions and gestures used, loud voice intonation makes users enthusiastic about paying attention to the material being explained. Unlike traditional lectures that can be monotonous, influencers use an energetic and dynamic approach to maintain student interest, so they tend to stay engaged and absorb the material effectively.

This insight underscores that educational influencers utilize an energetic style that fosters a more enthusiastic and engaging atmosphere, which allows students to remain motivated and attentive throughout their learning experience. In addition, Participant 4 provided similar feedback, agreeing that the influencers' methods are not only engaging but also use simple language that all groups can easily understand. This makes learning more accessible, as students from different backgrounds can easily follow along, regardless of their proficiency level. Participant 4 said:

Excerpt 6

*"The methods delivered by influencers are **more fun and use simple language that can be understood by all groups**, not just students, while the methods delivered by lecturers are too difficult to understand the sentences, and their delivery sometimes makes you sleepy, not as fun as influencers."*

(P4, Personal Interview)

Participant 4 (P4) reinforced this idea, stating that influencer videos are more fun and use simple language that all groups can understand. The use of simple and clear communication in education makes learning more accessible to a wider audience. Educational influencers use an engaging tone and inclusive language to create a learning environment where students of all proficiency levels can benefit. This approach ensures no one is left behind and makes educational content more understandable and enjoyable.

The simple language and engaging tone used by educational influencers creates a more inclusive learning environment, ensuring that all students can benefit, regardless of their prior knowledge or experience with English. This method appeals to a wide audience, ensuring that no one feels left behind, and makes the content easier to understand and fun for all learners. With interesting TikTok learning videos, it is easier for students to understand (Bahri et al., 2022). The ability of educational influencers to maintain this engaging approach is key to creating a positive and impactful learning environment.

4. Influencer Credibility

Credibility plays a significant role in the effectiveness of educational content, especially when it comes to influencers in English education. Educational influencers are considered credible because students believe they have a background in English. Having an educational background is an important element because it shows their competence and expertise. This is what makes educational influencers trusted by

students. The results from Participant 2 highlighted how credibility in their field allows influencers to deliver information that students can trust. According to Participant 2:

Excerpt 7

*"I believe in influencers because if someone is called an influencer, **they must have credibility**. An influencer must also be more careful with the English content they provide because they have influence, if the information they provide is wrong, it will mislead many people. One more thing, I believe if the influencer's background does have a field in English."*
(P2, Personal Interview)

Influencer credibility is an important factor that influences students' trust in their content. Participant 2 (P2) highlighted that influencers have credibility, so their educational content is more reliable. In line with the theory of source credibility by Hovland and Weiss (1951) that communicators are considered credible if they show dimensions of expertise. Students who perceive content creators as knowledgeable and trustworthy are more likely to rely on their materials for learning. Students also believe that educational influencers who have an educational background in English have acquired English language skills when they study in formal or non-formal education so that the information provided is considered valid by students.

Furthermore, Participant 1 stated that influencers are from educated people and influencers also have many followers on social media, this can also reflect their credibility. A large number of followers serves as social proof, indicating that many people have validated their content. Audiences tend to follow educational influencers if the information provided by the educational influencer is considered valid. Participant 1 noted:

Excerpt 8

*"They are people from the educated class and **have many followers on social media**"*
(P1, Personal Interview)

In addition to credibility, Participant 1 (P1) indicated that influencers are from educated people and also have many followers on social media, this further strengthens their reliability. In this case, influencers are considered to be from educated people, meaning that this can be seen as evidence of the competence or expertise possessed by influencers. Judging from the concept of the Hovland and Weiss (1951) theory, one dimension of credibility is having competence. When educational influencers present material that is in accordance with academic material, this adds evidence that educational influencers deserve to be respected and trusted as a source of learning. In addition, a large number of followers function as social proof, indicating that many people have validated their content. Audiences choose to follow the person if they feel confident about the information presented. Influencers build reputations by building a strong online presence that encourages students to trust and engage with their educational videos. This finding shows that credibility in the digital era is not only about quality message content but also the identity and social perception of the messenger.

This is in line with Abednego et al. (2021) who said that influencers with many followers are considered to have credibility. Furthermore, Hovland and Weiss (1951) said that audience trust depends on whether the audience considers the communicator's statement valid or not. In an educational setting, a large online audience provides validation that the content is valuable, thus encouraging more students to engage with it. The relationship between social media metrics and

perceived credibility is especially important in the digital age, where social validation plays a major role. Credibility in online education is increasingly determined by metrics such as number of followers, engagement rate, and positive feedback, which directly correlate with students' trust in the material presented.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that students tend to trust educational influencers more than their English teachers educators for several key reasons. Analysis of each quote showed that factors such as engaging content delivery, relevance to students' daily lives, simplicity of language, credibility and social proof all shaped this preference. These factors can be examined through the lens of the Source Credibility Theory by Hovland and Weiss (1951), which states that the acceptance of information depends on the credibility of the source. Each excerpt provides insight into how these factors influence students' trust in social media educators.

One of the main reasons why students trust English influencers is their engaging and simple way of presenting educational content. Excerpt 1 shows that students appreciate "interesting and simple videos and clear explanations" (P1, Personal Interview). Excerpt 2 also highlights this point, emphasizing that influencers present material through "short videos or interesting illustrations" (P5, Personal Interview). The use of engaging visuals enhances comprehension and helps maintain students' attention. Serlyana and Zuhdi (2024) argue that learning through videos can help students understand English vocabulary. High-quality video editing increases audience engagement, making viewers more likely to watch and absorb information. In line with Bahri et al. (2022), with interesting TikTok learning videos, it is easier for students to understand. Warini et al. (2020) supports that, TikTok videos that combine images, background, and editing filters can help users' English comprehension. This is in line with Source Credibility Theory, which states that the acceptance of information depends on the credibility of the source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Influencers build credibility and make learning more fun by using well-structured and visually appealing videos.

Another important factor that influences students' trust is the relevance of the content to their daily experiences. Excerpt 3 states that the influencer's content is "relevant to daily life" (P3, Personal Interview), while Excerpt 4 reinforces this by mentioning "topics relevant to daily needs" (P5, Personal Interview). This is supported by Hovland and Weiss (1951), who state that the acceptance of information depends on the credibility of the source. Influencers provide videos that are relevant to students' daily lives so that students feel these relate to the students. Influencers tailor their lessons to real-world applications, such as conversational English or social media trends, making students feel the knowledge is practical and valuable.

In addition, students find influencers' content more engaging and fun than traditional lectures. Excerpt 5 reveals that students describe lessons led by influencers as "more interesting, exciting, not boring" (P3, Personal Interview). This is in line with the idea that engaging delivery will increase the perceived credibility of the source. Bahri et al. (2022) which stated that delivering material with facial expressions and gestures used, loud voice intonation makes users enthusiastic about paying attention to the material being explained. Hovland and Weiss (1951) argue that audiences are more likely to trust sources that present information in an engaging manner. Teacher educators, who may rely on rigid teaching methods, may struggle to engage students as effectively as influencers. Another reason why students trust influencers is the simplicity of their language. As stated in Excerpt 6, influencers use "more fun and simple language that can be understood by all groups" (P4, Personal Interview). This suggests that influencers are skilled at adapting their communication style to different audiences, making complex linguistic concepts easier to understand.

Credibility itself is an important factor in why students trust influencers. Excerpt 7 directly addresses this by stating that an influencer "has credibility" (P2, Personal Interview). Credibility as a combination of expertise and self-presentation (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Many English language influencers have a strong educational background, certification, or years of experience in language teaching. Thus, students are more likely to trust educators who openly display their credentials and expertise. Students who perceive influencers as knowledgeable

and competent are more likely to trust their content than traditional academic sources. Excerpt 8 states that an influencer “has a large following on social media” (P1, Personal Interview). Social proof also plays an important role in students’ trust in influencers. Abednego et al. (2021) who stated that influencers with large followings are perceived as having credibility. Supported by Hovland and Weiss (1951), stating that audience perceptions of credibility are influenced by self-presentation and Attractiveness.

The accessibility of content on social media further strengthens students' preference for influencers over teacher educators. Unlike university lectures, which are limited to class hours, influencer videos are available on demand. This allows students to learn independently, review lessons whenever needed and students do not need to doubt the content of the videos provided by educational influencers because by accessing the videos directly, students can also assess the validity of the video content. This is in line with the Source Credibility Theory by Hovland and Weiss (1951) which states that people are more likely to trust sources that are considered credible, based on the 3 main elements mentioned: competence, trustworthiness, and appearance. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram are social media that are easily accessible to students, so students can easily evaluate the content of videos made by educational influencers. This accessibility allows students to assess the competence of educational influencers through the way they explain the material and the educational background of educational influencers. The element of trust can also be assessed by students through the suitability of the material presented with academic material. The delivery style and self-presentation of educational influencers can also be assessed by students directly by watching the videos presented. Influencers are becoming a more attractive option for students seeking language education by providing flexible learning opportunities. Additionally, students appreciate the interactive nature of influencer content. Many influencers actively engage with their audience by responding to comments, answering questions, and conducting live sessions. This creates a sense of community, making students feel heard and valued. Accessibility makes it easier for students to access videos from educational influencers whose credibility can be assessed immediately.

Finally, educational influencers are often perceived as more relevant and transparent than English teacher educators, many of whom share personal experiences, challenges, and learning journeys that resonate with students. Educational influencers create an emotional connection with their audience by presenting themselves as individuals who have overcome language learning difficulties. Thus, this quote analysis reveals that students trust educational influencers more than their English teacher educators due to their engaging content delivery, relevance, simple language, credibility, social proof, accessibility, interactivity, and relatability. All of these factors align with the Source Credibility Theory, which divides credibility into 3 main elements including competence, trustworthiness, and appearance (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). By meeting these criteria, educational influencers successfully position themselves as credible educators in the eyes of their followers.

CONCLUSIONS

This study successfully identified key factors explaining why students at Universitas Islam EFL Indonesia trust educational influencers more than their English teacher educators. Qualitative analysis revealed four main reasons driving this preference: engaging and visually appealing content, relevance of topics to students’ daily lives, entertaining and interactive delivery methods, and perceived credibility, which was significantly supported by their large social media following. These factors collectively create a perception among students that educational influencers offer accessible, relevant, and enjoyable learning experiences, in contrast to the often perceived traditional and less dynamic methods of some English teacher educators.

In the digital contexts explored, students attribute credibility to educational influencers based not only on the quality and relevance of their content but also on their ability to deliver it in an engaging manner, engage with their audience, and gain social validation through their

number of followers. This suggests that students evaluate credibility in the digital world using criteria that are different from, or in addition to, traditional academic measures.

The insights gained from this study carry significant implications for various stakeholders in English language education:

1. For University English Teacher Educators and Institutions: These findings underscore the urgent need to acknowledge and adapt to contemporary student learning preferences. English teachers educators are encouraged to explore and integrate digital tools and platforms into their teaching, incorporating more visually engaging content, interactive elements, and topics relevant to students' real-life contexts. Professional development programs focusing on digital pedagogy, online content creation, and leveraging social media for educational purposes could be highly beneficial. The goal is to complement the academic depth of traditional instruction with dynamic and accessible delivery methods that resonate with digital natives, thereby enhancing student engagement and perceived relevance of classroom learning.
2. For Students: The study highlights students' initiative in seeking diverse learning resources. However, it also implicitly suggests the importance of developing critical digital literacy skills to effectively evaluate the credibility and academic accuracy of online educational content from various sources. Balancing informal learning from influencers with the structured knowledge and critical thinking fostered in formal education is crucial.
3. For Future Research: This study, with its specific context and small sample size, provides a foundation for further investigation. Future research could employ larger sample sizes, explore different educational settings (e.g., high school, non-Islamic universities), or use mixed-methods approaches to quantify the impact of these factors. Comparative studies on the learning outcomes of students primarily using influencer content versus traditional instruction, or research on effective strategies for integrating influencer-like pedagogy into formal curricula, would be valuable contributions.

In conclusion, as the digital landscape continues to shape learning behaviors, understanding why students are drawn to and trust educational influencers is vital for the evolution of pedagogical practices. By strategically integrating the strengths of digital platforms and adapting teaching strategies to align with student expectations, educators and institutions can strive to create more engaging, relevant, and effective learning environments that bridge the gap between traditional academic rigor and the dynamic world of digital learning, ultimately enhancing the English language learning experience for students.

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