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THE WAYS HOW TEENAGERS LEARN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

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Čestné prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma The ways how teenagers learn English language outside of the classroom vypracovala samostatně, a výhradně s použitím zdrojů uvedených v seznamu literatury.

V Olomouci dne 20. 4. 2023

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Nikol Skřepská

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Annotation

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to investigate the different methods learners use for studying English as a second language (ESL) with a focus on social media. Specifically, whether and to what extent do online platforms and social media mentioned in this work affect their language learning process. Next, it will assess language learning acquisition, and if the physical and psychological changes determine the teenagers' preferred learning style.

The practical part intends to explore the benefits and drawbacks of these methods from the teenagers' point of view. And additionally, whether they prefer studying English in their own free time rather than in a traditional formal way in classrooms.

Anotace

Cílem této bakalářské práce je prozkoumat různé typy metod, které pubertální žáci využívají ke studiu anglického jazyka jako jejich druhého jazyka. Konkrétně zda, a do jaké míry, online platformy a sociální sítě zmíněné v této práci ovlivňují jejich proces učení angličtiny. Následně se podívá na to, jestli fyzické, sociální a psychologické změny, kterými pubertální žáci prochází, rozhodují o jejich preferovaném stylu učení.

Praktická část se pomocí dotazníku zabývá zkoumáním výhod a problémů spojených s studiem anglického jazyka pomocí sociálních sítí z pohledu dotazovaných žáků. Dále, zda jim více vyhovuje učit se anglicky ve vlastním volném čase, nebo naopak tradičně ve školních učebnách.

Key words

Teenagers, social media, language acquisition, informal learning, online platforms

Klíčová slova

Pubescenti, sociální sítě, osvojování jazyka, neformální učení, online platformy

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Introduction

This bachelor thesis aims to investigate a variety of non-traditional methods, which teenagers use to acquire English as their second language. Out of the many available methods that were recorded up till now, this work will primarily focus on social media and examples of other online platforms designed specifically for language learning. Social media play an enormous role in the teenagers' lives and it is generally known they spend a big amount of their free time on these applications and websites. Digital media, and social media's usage in particular, rapidly increased since the first quarter of 2020, when the COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) pandemic erupted, and the population was forced to quarantine. Teenagers have been chosen as the focus group due to the fact that they are presumably the most active age group on social media.

This thesis is divided into two main parts. Theoretical and practical. Firstly, the theoretical part focuses on proper explanation of the terms used in this work. It deals with who a teenager is and what physical, social and psychological changes he or she may face throughout the growing up stage. Secondly, the work takes a look at informal learning, which plays a big part in studying the English language through online platforms, and together with that, sub-chapters about formal and non-formal learning styles are mentioned as well. To fully understand the concept of informal learning, learning acquisition has been briefly compared to language learning. The theoretical part ends with a list of digital media, including social media, which highly contribute to teenagers' intake of English.

The second part is practical. Its purpose is to analyse, how teenage pupils perceive social media as a language learning tool from their own perspective, and what they might consider as advantages and disadvantages of this method.

Up to this date, a lot of studies have addressed social media as a possible modern way how to teach and study languages, but not many of them focused solely on teenage pupils and rather have been conducted in a university environment.

Aloraini and Cardoso have done a research about how can particular social network sites (SNS), namely Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Twitter, help with language learning and what are the opinions on this topic from students attending university in Saudi Arabia. They have divided the students into a beginner group and advanced group and found out the opinions varied depending on their English level, desired skills they want to improve, and the purpose of the language usage. Beginner learners preferred WhatsApp for informal language learning

which they used mainly for communicating with relatives and friends and by that practiced their writing skills. More advanced students on the other hand heavily preferred Twitter for reading the newest actualities and training reading comprehension (Aloraini, et al., 2018 pp. 2-3).

Another example is a study by Kumar and Syed, who discovered that *“the ESL learners in Sindh believe Facebook as a language learning environment helps to enhance language skills including reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar.”* (Kumar, et al., 2018 p. 1). Social media, including Facebook could be addressed with caution, because of many risks regarding the user’s safety, and also the need for the learner to have an access to the internet, but even with these things in mind, Kumar and Syed’s study proved that the students take it as an appropriate learning technique and overall, the results of this research has been positive (2018).

Theoretical part

1 Teenage learners

Before getting into the topic more in depth, it is necessary to explain the basic terminology. As this thesis deals with teenagers and their preferences on how to study the English language, it would be most appropriate to start by defining who a teenager is.

1.1 Defining a teenager

Most authors conclude that a teenager is essentially a “*young person between the ages of approximately twelve and nineteen.*” (Lewis, 2007 p. 6). Macek (2003 p. 10) agrees that this period of life functions as a pillar to help people pass between childhood and adulthood. A division which would consider the correct ages is a particularly hard task to accomplish (Kabiček, et al., 2014 pp. 18-19), however according to Lewis and the majority of other experts, this age group is most often divided into the three following categories:

- “*Young teenagers, aged 12-14*”
- “*Middle teenagers, aged 14-17*”
- “*Late teenagers, aged 17-19*” (Lewis, 2007 p. 6)

The characteristics of each of these age groups highly differ due to the overall process of growing up and definitely brain development. Lewis claims that young teenagers and middle teenagers might be the best groups for acquiring a new foreign language, taking into account a quick learning tempo and efficiency. He suggests it is like that as a consequence of the transient period between being a child and an adolescent. At this age, learners are still playful, and it can be easier to grab their attention while they are also starting to gain critical thinking skills and can hypothesize like an adult. On the other hand, late teenagers are more similar to adults, and many of them are already leading an independent life.

1.2 Changes in teenagers' lives

Adolescence may be generally classified as a relatively challenging phase of life because of many factors. A lot of conflicts, external and internal, happen daily, and most of the time it is given by the variety of changes teenagers have to go through. In the following sub-chapters, the physical, social and psychological changes will be explained.

1.2.1 Physical changes

Children's physical development is without any doubt the most prominent change to witness, even though it is slowing down at this age, and the cognitive functions are evolving faster to form a balance. As Lewis mentions (2007 p. 7), the tempo of growing up is not the same for each gender and therefore has to be differentiated and respected equally. As Binarová says, a child's body slowly transforms and gets the adult appearance. The internal organs are growing in size to accommodate the body changes, and it is easier to gain muscles. Another change happening in puberty is a voice mutation, which is characteristic primarily for males, whose voices get deeper during these years. When it is viewed from the educational point of view, it results in them not wanting to read aloud and sing in lessons, because of possible embarrassment in front of their peers (Čížková, et al., 1999 p. 106).

1.2.2 Social changes

Puberty makes teenage children seek after independency. Binarová mentions that at this time, they tend to have different opinions on situations revolving around them and feel the desire to express these opinions (Čížková, et al., 1999 p. 109). It often leads to a clash between them and their parents, teachers or other authorities who appear in their lives. Teenagers may want to distinguish themselves from adults. Sometimes they could disagree with their words and actions and feel opposing emotions than the rest does.

However, despite the sudden need for individuality, students of this age form groups whose members lean to the similar ideas and end up heavily influencing each other's values and lives in general. That could concern their daily routines, clothing style, and behaviour (1999 p. 109). Under the purpose to fully belong and be accepted into those groups, Binarová also suggests that in this case they incline to certain behaviour traits of adults, like higher drinking or smoking.

1.2.3 Psychological changes and cognitive thinking

Learning, and the amount of information teenagers remember, is highly influenced by their interests. When they learn about a topic they like, there is a much higher chance more facts will stay in their memory (Čížková, et al., 1999 p. 106). Piaget also supports this in his theory of cognitive development. Concretely, this concerns the fourth stage of the development – the formal operational stage (Pakpahan, et al., 2022 p. 4). This stage usually begins approximately around the eleventh year of life and continues through the rest of a life span. It explains how teenagers can grasp abstract concepts easier than before, think logically and become more

rational. Even though they themselves act under the influence of emotions, they may judge this behaviour in other people to some extent and want everyone else to act and proceed with logical steps (Čížková, et al., 1999 p. 107). Teenagers often tend to change their ideas and opinions often depending on their surroundings.

Problem-solving is another skill which is getting developed at this age. It is due to the hypothetico-deductive reasoning, which “*refers to the ability to consider different possibilities and hypothetical situations in order to come up with various ways of solving problems.*” (Berk, 2007; as cited in Rowland, 2012 p. 16).

Teenagers partially return back to egocentrism and develop morality on more levels. They are now able to better understand someone’s character, and also the concept of changing the pre-set rules, which can now be changed depending on the situations. When a teenager thinks this way, they achieved autonomous morality (Rowland, 2012 p. 17).

2 Learning

Based on many educational experts’ findings, learning has been over the time roughly organised into three main categories: formal learning, non-formal learning and lastly, informal learning (Ainsworth, et al., 2010 p. 14). The theme of this thesis is relatively based on informal learning, but to understand this concept the best, it is essential to elaborate on each one of them.

2.1 Informal learning

According to Coffield (2000 pp. 18-19), the term informal learning can be used to “*describe any type of learning which does not take place within, or follow from, a formally organised learning programme or event.*”. Therefore, the concept is based differently than in schools and other educational institutions, where the learning is done intentionally, under an approved schedule, and uses specifically made structure and plan.

Like non-formal learning, this type also occurs outside formal setting. However, on the contrary to the previous ones, it is generally agreed to be the most spontaneous type. Informal learning tends to happen when the learner is involved in another activity while unconsciously acquiring new information and skills. It is self-directed by the learner and does not need to have specific goals (Ainsworth, et al., 2010).

Another point worth mentioning, which makes informal learning very important, would be that it helps children develop a variety of skills and competences. Multiple of them would be useful during many future moments in life.

2.2 Formal learning

According to Ainsworth and Eaton, on most occasions it is organised by an institution, in this case by the school. This type of learning is structured and going according to a certain framework, which is in the generic form published by the government and modified by the institutions. In the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport presents a regularly updated framework of education for specific levels. Those levels are given by the age groups. Another main point of formal learning is that people who receive the knowledge, students, need someone else who would present it to them. A qualified teacher or a tutor is therefore present in the class or any other appropriate setting, directs the particular activity and assists whenever the pupils need their help. Formal learning is also dependent on a final assessment of the activity. No matter if it is a small task from a textbook or a final exam, learners are expected to achieve particular outcomes, and it is required that they receive a feedback in the form of a grade or, for example, a credit (Coffield, 2000 p. 18).

2.3 Non-formal learning

Non-formal learning takes place outside of the formal setting, and the process of studying can or does not have to be intentional. Most often it is still organised to a certain degree but lacks any formal assessment after finishing the task. Ainsworth and Eaton (2010 p. 27) claim that this type gives learners a better opportunity to be taught according to their individual needs, since the learning can be adapted without any big effort. A possible illustration of non-formal learning could be for instance tutoring or any training done in order to acquire supplemental skills.

3 Motivation

“The term motivation is derived from the Latin verb movere (to move)” (Pintrich, et al., 1996 p. 4). Although motivation has no generally-agreed, straightforward definition, its literal meaning inherited from the original word is understood as a force, which makes people move towards their goal. Motivation could be also taken as a process. That means it cannot happen rapidly. The view on motivation has changed over the years. Older opinions describe it as a force which is connected to each person’s will and instincts. Pintrich and Schunk (1996 p. 4) also mention that many theories take motivation as a response to some kind of stimuli, in other words, a reward. The current view on motivation shares many similarities with the older opinions, but also highly takes into account the importance of an individual.

Many authors indicate that pupils can be motivated to engage in informal learning by many things. They could be influenced, for instance, by their peers or family members who have relatively a big impact on the teenagers' decision making, by their own want to explore the given topic in depth or to learn more about themselves (Pereira, et al., 2019 p. 1).

4 English language learning

4.1 Language acquisition

Veselka says (Šebesta, et al., 2014 p. 58) that a person usually acquires their first language, mother tongue, as well as their second language. Although there is a notable difference between language acquisition and language learning. On the contrary to language acquisition, the term learning is usually understood as a conscious intake of generally set rules and also with an expected learner's output. That is most of the time practised in classes at schools. However, language acquisition is taken as an unconscious intake of a particular language and it could happen whenever the learner is in contact with the language and focuses on the content, not the form. We distinguish two types of language acquisition which will be mentioned in the following sub-chapters.

4.1.1 First language acquisition

By observing small children, it is possible to tell that they mostly learn the language by associations. They acquire new words in context and uses them in groups with other words based on what they hear – groups of sounds commonly put together, rather than their own (Byrne, 1969 p. 9).

S. Krashen's theory of the natural order of language acquisition (Krashen; as cited in Šebesta, 2014 p. 58) also claims that when children learn their mother tongue, they subconsciously follow a particular pattern in learning grammar and syntax forms. As an example could be mentioned English children who first understand the plural suffix -s or the suffix -ing. Or they know active voice earlier rather than passive voice.

Children's first vocabulary also relies on their environment and the words are accustomed to understand the world around them. A child growing up in a city will have a different vocabulary than another learner of the same age who grows up in the countryside. The process of acquiring the first language is not limited by time either. A child learns anywhere and at any time from any person whom they come into contact with (Byrne, 1969 p. 10).

4.1.2 Second language acquisition

When learners acquire a second language, they do not start from point zero but already are knowledgeable to some extent when it comes to the information from their first language (Šebesta, et al., 2014 p. 58). Compared to first language acquisition - With the second language, there is also an existing pattern of how it follows, but it is not the same as with first language acquisition. It could be because the learners may have different first languages, so everyone focuses firstly on a different topic than anyone else.

4.2 Language learning

Language learning is another possible method, how to achieve new language skills. Although in comparison to language acquisition, where the pupils acquire those skills naturally through conversing and the will to get the right meaning across, language learning focuses on a set number of rules and trying to memorise a variety of concepts. It is widely accepted that when a learner wants to achieve good results and effectively learn the target language, this applies to any language, he or she needs to be consistent, motivated and at best – have a goal (Abercrombie, 1956 pp. 16-26).

Abercrombie states that each learner has a different reason why they start studying a language. It may be e.g. (exempli gratia) for academic purposes, reasons related to travelling, social needs, etc. (et cetera). When a person has any kind of goal like these, it is not difficult to adapt the learning materials accordingly to what they need and would appreciate. On the other hand, the learner may feel lost and confused if they learn without any aim something they are not interested in (Abercrombie, 1956 p. 16). This proves that having a goal and a vision of accomplishment is a significant part of language learning.

5 Online sources for English learning

5.1 Internet

Year 1983 has been taken ever since as the beginning of internet with a purpose to create a connection between the ARPAnet (the U.S. Advanced Research Project Agency Network) and another networks from radios and satellites (Krol, et al., 1993 p. 2). Internet might be classified according to many easier or complex definitions, but Krol and Hoffman generally explain it as “*a global resource connecting millions of users.*” (1993 p. 1).

With the creation and evolution of this network, continuing into the second millennium, the number of children capable of speaking English as their second language started to grow.

One possible explanation for this might be a higher implementation of English in schools and additional classes per week. On the other hand, it is because of the recent media development and increase in the number of their users. After the second World War, the United States of America gained a lot of economic power and the ability to easily influence the rest of the world. One way how to do it has been through media and entertainment (Rudis, et al., 2018 p. 1). The following chapter will discuss digital media in particular and with that connected social media.

5.2 Digital media

By the turn of the 20th century, the digital media went through an enormous rise up. Families started purchasing the first computers and today's teenagers are the first generation, who fully grew up surrounded by modern technologies. Therefore, according to Erstad and Sefton-Green (Pereira, et al., 2019 p. 42), teenage pupils could also be considered as being its main users. Digital media slowly became "*the new support for public knowledge*" (Pereira, et al., 2019 p. 42), switching with classic verbal communications between human beings. The new technologies and quickly rising media offered quick access to any desired information, the usage was easier, and they were accessible almost anywhere and at any time.

Nowadays, schools are not therefore the only source where people can absorb new information and skills. The process of learning, in the case of this thesis – the learning of English as a second language, can occur anywhere. When speaking with family members who orient in the language, speaking and chatting through applications and media with local friends and foreigners, and through activities which the pupil finds enjoyable. As an example could be listed for instance cinematography in the target language or with subtitles, listening to music in the language or reading books and articles.

5.2.1 Apps oriented on language learning

Apart from the apps focusing on social interactions and sharing information about people's daily lives, a big variety of apps have been also developed specifically for learning certain languages. These applications are always relatively easy to obtain and access, and all the learner has to do is download it on the device of their choice. At this time, there is also a particularly high probability that majority of the used languages worldwide would be installed in the app's settings.

Advantage of learning languages via these applications is that most of the times they are really engageable. The developers purposefully create them in a form of a game, so that it easily catches and holds the user's attention.

5.2.1.1 Duolingo

The first language learning application, which should be mentioned, is Duolingo. With its more than 500 million learners (Duolingo, n.d.), it is claimed to be the most downloaded app of this kind in the world. According to the official website (2011), Duolingo currently offers courses in 39 languages for English speakers and one more is being prepared.

Duolingo is possibly the most popular language learning app, because of its animated design and the way how learner proceeds through the lessons in a form of completing quests and getting rewards. Therefore, the whole system is motivational on its own and it does not take the learner much effort to stay concentrated.

At the same time, the users get to practice their speaking, reading, listening and writing skills together with extending their vocabulary. Research has proven the effectivity of learning languages through Duolingo. The University of South Carolina and the City University of New York's study has found out that approximately 34 hours of studying via Duolingo are equivalent to one semester of language education in university (2011).

5.2.1.2 Memrise

Together with Duolingo, Memrise also belongs to the category of highly used websites and mobile applications when it comes to language learning. This platform originated in Britain and additionally to Duolingo's features, Memrise also offers audio segments and videos of native speakers of the target language pronouncing the phrases, so this app does not use generated voice to show the correct pronunciation (Memrise, 2010). Generally, the developers of Memrise believe that self-learning a new language should be primarily fun and engaging, and that is what they have kept in mind while designing this application and website. This and Duolingo are both available in an app version or on their official website. There are more than 65 million users of Memrise in approximately 189 countries (2010).

5.2.1.3 HelloTalk

Out of these mentioned platforms, HelloTalk, as a conversation-based app, is the most similar one to a classic social media site (Rivera, 2017). However, it was still created with an intention of letting the users have an opportunity to study a language. The learner can easily find a native speaker, who also possibly wants to learn the other language, and they exchange tips, correct each other and learn from each other. On the contrary to the previously mentioned platforms, hello talk is only available as a mobile application for iOS or Android software

systems. It serves as a great way how to connect the social features of staying in contact with other people and native speakers, and the built-in educational environment. The app supports over 150 languages and have more than 30 million users in the system (HelloTalk, 2012). The aim of HelloTalk is to find and connect people who speak each other's target language. These two then people text, have opportunity to correct the other's messages, send voice audios to hear the right pronunciation, and translate unknown words if needed. Thanks to this, they can have a smooth conversation while still improving their language skills.

The users can take advantage of video calls as well. A feature similar to other social media apps is that users can upload any thoughts or photos in the community forum located in the application and interact with native speakers, who see it.

5.2.2 Social media as a study tool

Social media play an enormous role in today's educational system. The young generation grew up surrounded by still-evolving technology, which also meant millions of mobile applications and online platforms. Since the pandemic, new kinds of modern technology have been more often incorporated into the school lessons and children have no problems adapting to them.

The possible benefits of social media could be that they are fun, enjoyable and offer options for many different study types. All of this can have a positive effect on children's motivation and keep them engaged in the learning process. Collaborative learning is another method which keeps their engagement high and usually it involves working in groups on projects and assignments, discussing different topics or asking questions among the participants. Lester and Perini (2010; as cited in Alsaif, et al., 2019 p. 2) have found that activities in this style are mirrored and can be also achieved in an online setting via social network sites (SNS). The following sub-chapters will mention examples of the most used SNSs in the order of their active user count according to the most recent statistics.

5.2.2.1 Facebook

Facebook is one of the platforms which belong under Meta Platforms Inc. (incorporated), originally named Facebook Inc. (GlobalData, 2023). By the current date, this 19-year-old company also owns other three biggest social media products i.e. (that is) Facebook Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp. All of them were reported to exceed one billion monthly active users (Dixon, 2023).

Facebook could be taken by many as the most known social media site accessible to the general public. The first version of this platform was launched in 2004 by an American developer Mark Zuckerberg (Kilroy, 2017 p. 1), who managed to create the website's design during his second year at Harvard University, when he was nineteen years old (Alef, 2010). Based on a recent research, conducted in January 2023, Facebook till this day still remains as the most used social network platform with 2.958 billion monthly active users (Dixon, 2023).

Facebook offers the users an opportunity to create and manage groups, which do not work only as a chatroom for more than two people, but they allow users of the same interest to easily communicate with each other, share advice, and when applied to languages – study together and help others in a case of need. According to the studies done by Shih and Naghdipour (Barrot, 2018 pp. 5-6), university students in Cyprus, for instance, found the involvement of Facebook in classes making the learnt content more entertaining and the activities were more engaging.

5.2.2.1.1 Facebook Messenger

Facebook Messenger is a sub-category of the Facebook platform and in comparison to the original app, which can be also used for sharing photos, videos and updates about the user's life, Messenger works solely as a source of communication in the form of messaging, calling and video calling. Same as Facebook, the platform is available for both mobile and computer software systems without any charge, and with more than 1.3 billion monthly users, it is the third most-used application worldwide (Hartmans, 2017; as cited in Smutný, et al., 2020 p. 3).

Thanks to the interactivity of SNSs, Facebook Messenger included, it makes it particularly easy for students to connect with their peers and practice together in English-learning-focused groups, find partners for language exchange, or train conversation skills with native speakers and receive immediate feedback from them through video calls (Alsaif, et al., 2019 p. 6)

5.2.2.2 Instagram

Instagram, being a part of the four biggest networks under Meta Platforms Inc., also belongs among the most used social media in the world. On the contrary to Facebook and Facebook Messenger, Instagram is primarily a video or photo-sharing social network service (PSNS) and was not intended to serve for messaging (Digital Libraries: Providing Quality Information, 2015 pp. 132-133). Although nowadays it is a feature of the application as well. This mobile application came on the market in 2010 (Russmann, et al., 2016 p. 1) and since

then has gained huge popularity with 1.35 billion monthly users. The prediction says the number will reach 1.44 billion by the year 2025 (Dixon, 2023).

5.2.2.3 TikTok

By the current year, i.e. 2023, TikTok is the sixth most used mobile application in the world and monthly has 1.051 billion users (Dixon, 2023). Taking aside the quickly rising popularity ever since the release, the app gained a massive number of users during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) pandemic. TikTok was launched in July 2015 and serves as a social network for posting short-form videos from any field, so everyone is potentially able to find a topic close to their interests (TikTok, 2023). The creators can edit and upload their own videos, and by that rapidly influence and inspire the viewers.

Duan says that this format of short videos has many advantages for language learning and for learning overall. The learner can search for personalized content and thanks to the big number of English creators has an enormous variety of options to choose from. Thanks to the average length of one video being only 20 to 30 seconds, and the style of how people edit their work, it is particularly easy for students with a shorter attention span to actually concentrate on the whole video and even remember most of the information (Duan, 2023 pp. 1-3).

5.2.2.4 Twitter

Except for Facebook, Twitter is another social network site, which main purpose is to let its users freely write their thoughts and opinions and interact with people worldwide (User Engagement and the Toxicity of Tweets, 2021 p. 1). In 2022, the number of active monthly users has exceeded 368 million and is expected to decrease by 2024 (Dixon, 2022).

Aloraini and Cardoso have conducted a study which focused on students from Saudi Arabia and their perceptions of learning languages with social media (Aloraini, et al., 2018 p. 15). Based on this research they found out that Twitter was the most used application among the learners. They have regarded the app as the most useful one from their point of view. To be concrete, the main utilisation points of the app for most of them involved reading the news and stating their opinions and thoughts. Therefore, depending on the learner's English level, Twitter could serve as a good source for practising reading comprehension and writing skills together with training the ability to express one's self freely.

5.2.2.5 YouTube

YouTube is an online SNS which allows people worldwide to upload, share and view videos of almost any length. This platform was started in 2005 by three former members of the PayPal company and since then, YouTube manage to gain over 2.5 billion active users and became the second most used application (Burke, et al., 2008 p. 2; Dixon, 2023).

YouTube works as a useful source for acquiring and improving language skills. The users can obviously focus on listening, but it is not a problem to practice speaking, writing or reading skills. Other than for instance music videos, which can also be used as a source of new vocabulary, this platform offers videos specifically focused on informal education. Learners have an easy exposure to a world's English accents as they have a chance to listen to a big number of native English speakers and get in contact with the varieties.

Practical part

This practical part aims to analyse teenage pupils' usage of online social media networks and in particular, their perception of using social media for English language learning. To see whether, and if so, how much, they use them to their advantage to acquire English as their second language or not. The research focused on a variety of SNSs, which ones do teenagers essentially use more than others, their activity online and how they would personally compare the informal method of studying English online through social media platforms with traditional learning at school following set norms.

A questionnaire has been prepared and used to gather the needed data from the students. The questionnaire consisted of twenty questions and involved multiple choice questions, Likert scales and one open-ended question. The survey had been distributed to the lower secondary pupils of a selected primary school in person and each pupil, who was present in class, was given one sheet. In total, 202 students filled in the questionnaire and by that participated in this research.

Research objectives:

1. To explore the benefits and drawbacks of learning English through social media from the learners' point of view
2. To determine whether teenage pupils prefer studying English in their own free time rather than traditionally in school classrooms

3. To analyse the amount of English, with which teenagers are surrounded by online, and if it somehow affects their performance in language classes
4. To analyse how teenage learners perceive social media as an English learning tool

Hypotheses

H1 High majority of teenagers are active users of social media.

H2 Most teenagers do not have their social media accounts set in English, but in Czech.

H3 Teenagers spend over three hours a day on social media.

H4 High number of teenagers feel like they improved their English language skills thanks to staying in contact with English online.

Respondents

In order to proceed with this research, Czech teenagers were asked to participate in it. To be specific, pupils of lower secondary education. The study was conducted at a primary school ZŠ Svatoplukova in Šternberk. Learners from 6th to 9th grade, therefore aged from 11 to 16 years old, were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding their perception and relationship with the English language and their experiences with acquiring it in their own free time. 202 pupils in total took part in the research, out of that, thirty respondents attended sixth grade, fifty-five seventh grade, fifty-six eighth grade and the biggest number of participants were nine-graders, sixty-one in total.

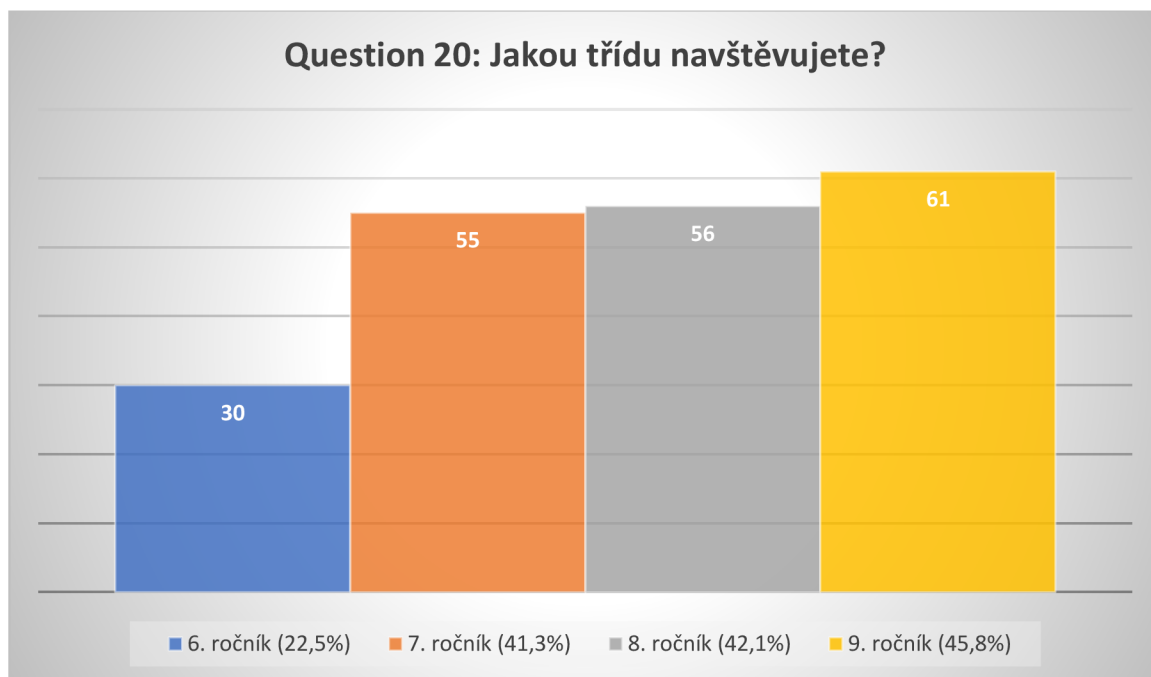


Figure 1: Grades the respondents attend

The age of the respondents was influenced by the number of classes and their corresponding grades. In each grade except sixth, i.e. seventh, eighth and ninth, the children were divided into three classes due to the exceeding number of students. That means eleven classes participated, however, not all pupils arrived at school on the day the research took place and were not able to fill in the survey.

In the end, only four pupils were 11 years old (2%), eight pupils were 16 years old (4%), thirty-two were 12 years old (16%), and the most common ages were 13 (53, 26%), 14 (50, 25%), and 15 (55, 27%) years old, where these three in total took a little bit over three-quarters of the overall number. Out of all respondents, 88 were girls (44%) while the majority of 56% was formed by boys (114).

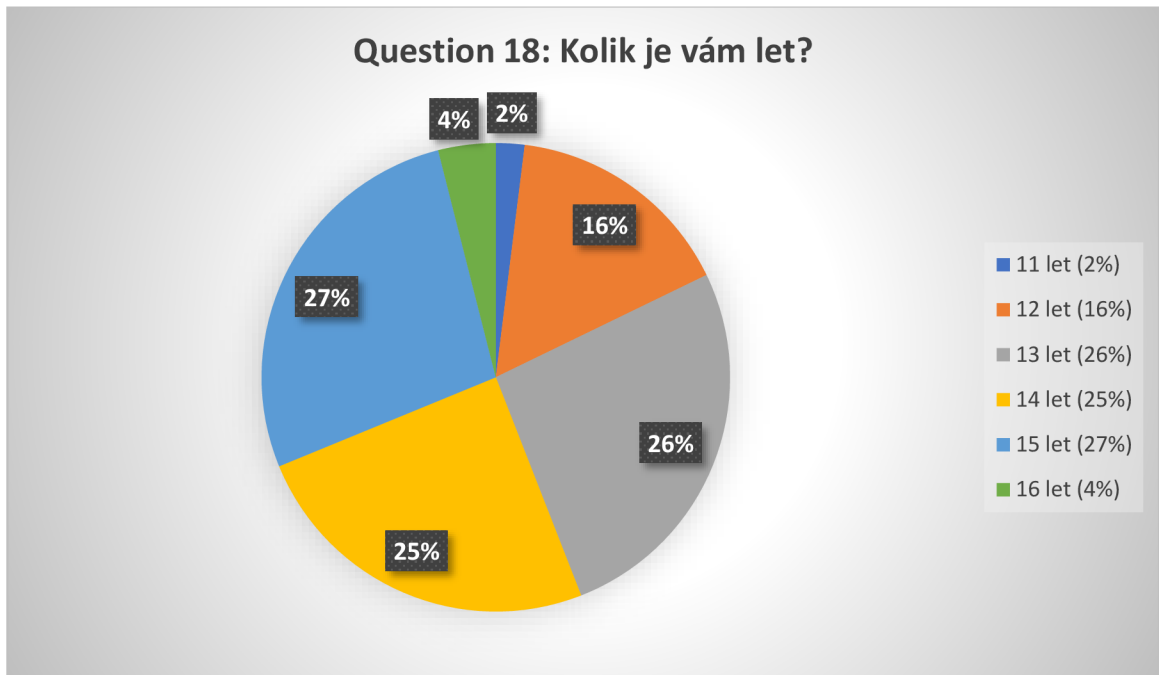


Figure 2: Age of the respondents

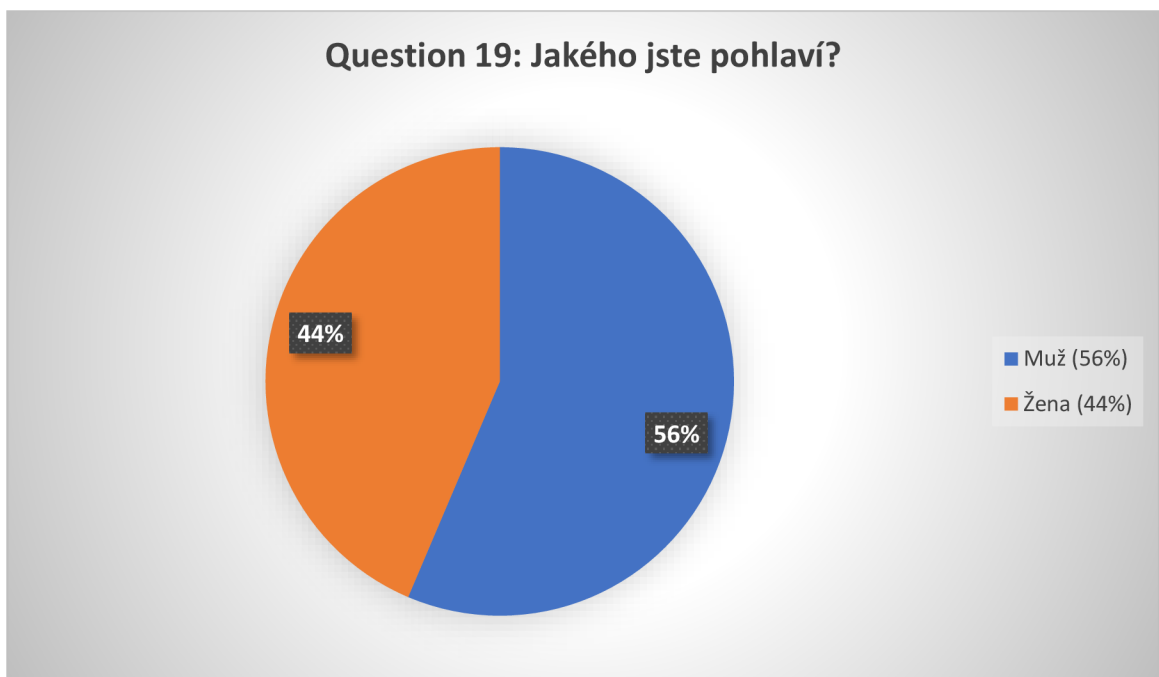


Figure 3: Gender of the respondents

Questionnaire results analysis

The first question respondents were asked to answer concerned whether they are active or casual users of social media. The results have shown the expected outcome and proved correct H1, saying that 95% of all respondents, which came up to be 193 people, indeed actively use social media in their free time. Only 9 learners (5%) clarified they do not consider themselves as active users, however even if their first answer was no, they still filled out the rest of the questionnaire and tried to give their honest opinions on the questions.

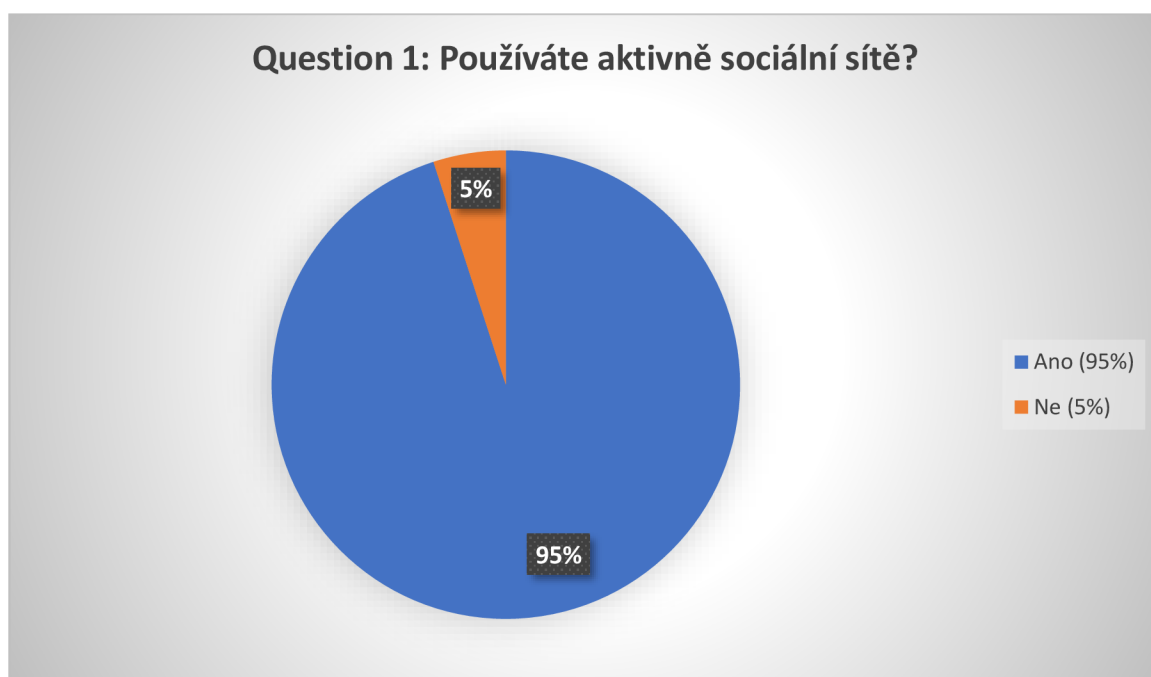


Figure 4: Do you actively use social media?

When asked which SNS(s) are the most used ones, and which one(s) they use the most often, the results were quite clear. Participants could have chosen more options instead of only one, depending on which sites and applications they personally use. Instagram and YouTube both received the same number of votes (165) and therefore could be classified as the most frequently used social media networks among teenage students. 25 votes less got messaging application WhatsApp (140) and a similar amount received TikTok with 136 votes. Snapchat is the last app, which gained more recognition in the research.

On the other hand, social media sites like e.g. Facebook, Facebook Messenger and Twitter seem to be the least usual choice for teenage pupils.

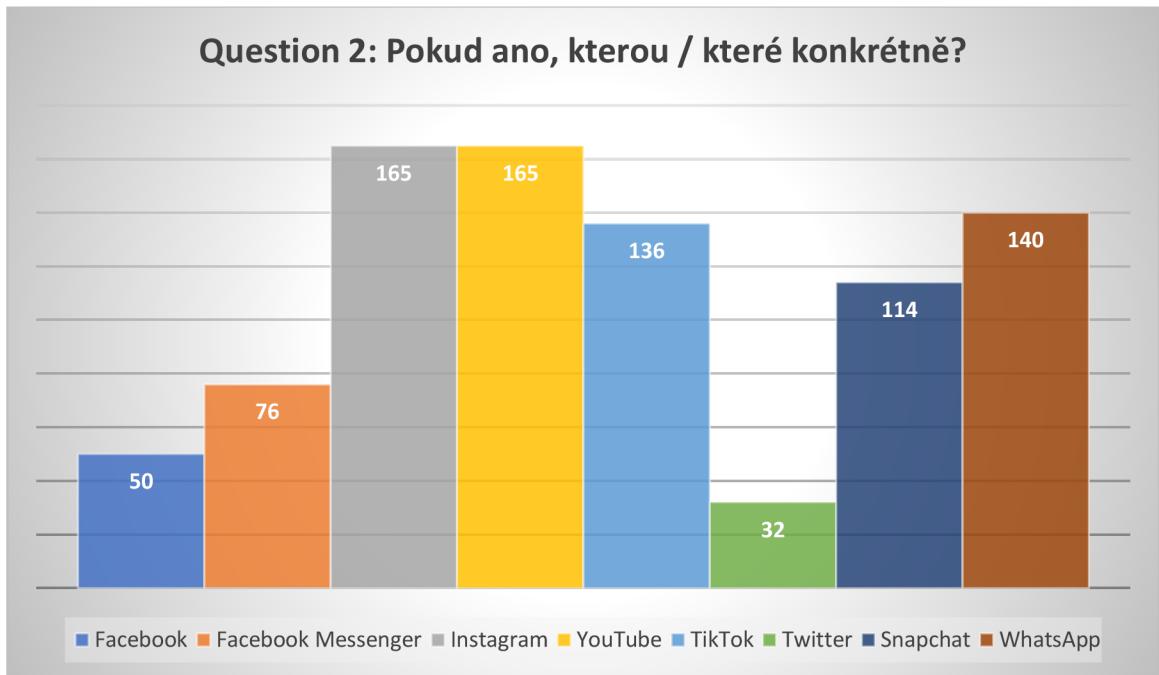


Figure 5: The most used social media among the respondents

Figure 6 shows the number of respondents who have set up a personal account on at least one of the social media networks. After the results have been analysed, the difference rate came up bigger than in the first question, saying that 196 respondents (97%) own an account on minimally one SNS or mobile application. Only 6 teenagers claimed they have never actually started their own account.



Figure 6: The number of respondents with an account on at least one social media

Time spent on social media

The goal of questions 4 and 5 was to examine the amount of time teenagers actually spend on online social media sites. The contrast in this question was really quite visible and wide majority of participants, 173 (85,8%) to be particular, marked the option “every day” as their choice. 24 students (12%) said they use social media only a few times per week and are definitely not active every day. 2 (0,7%) mentioned they are only online throughout the weekends, when they do not have many other responsibilities and can relax with a leisure activity. And lastly, 3 teenagers (1,5%) said they only open social media few times a month.



Figure 7: Visualization of the time spent on social media

The fifth question to some extent proved the third hypothesis correct by confirming that more than half of the asked teenagers spend over three hours a day on social media. 67 students (33,1%) admitted they are usually active for 3-4 hours per day, while still a considerably big group of the pupils (41 people, 20,4%) are active for an even longer time, 5-6 hours a day in total. 20 students, which equals to 9,7% of all the participants, mentioned they spend more than 7 hours daily online. Shorter periods of time were marked by a minority of students. 48 teenagers (24,1%) are most often active only for 1 or 2 hours a day, and 26 questioned students (12,7%) even less than one hour.



Figure 8: Visualization of how many hours per day do the respondents spend on social media

The view on using English on social media

The second hypothesis talks about the majority of teenagers having their social media set in Czech, and not in English language. This has been also proven correct, but the difference in the numbers of students has been almost minimal. 99 students (48,9%) admitted to having their SNSs set in the Czech language. When they have been asked later on this subject, they explained it is more comfortable and practical. Although only 13 people less (86 respondents, 42,9%) said they use English as a pre-set language of choice. 17 respondents (8,2%) use both languages depending on the application. However, this question shows that both English and Czech are used by teenagers on similar scales when it comes to their social media settings.

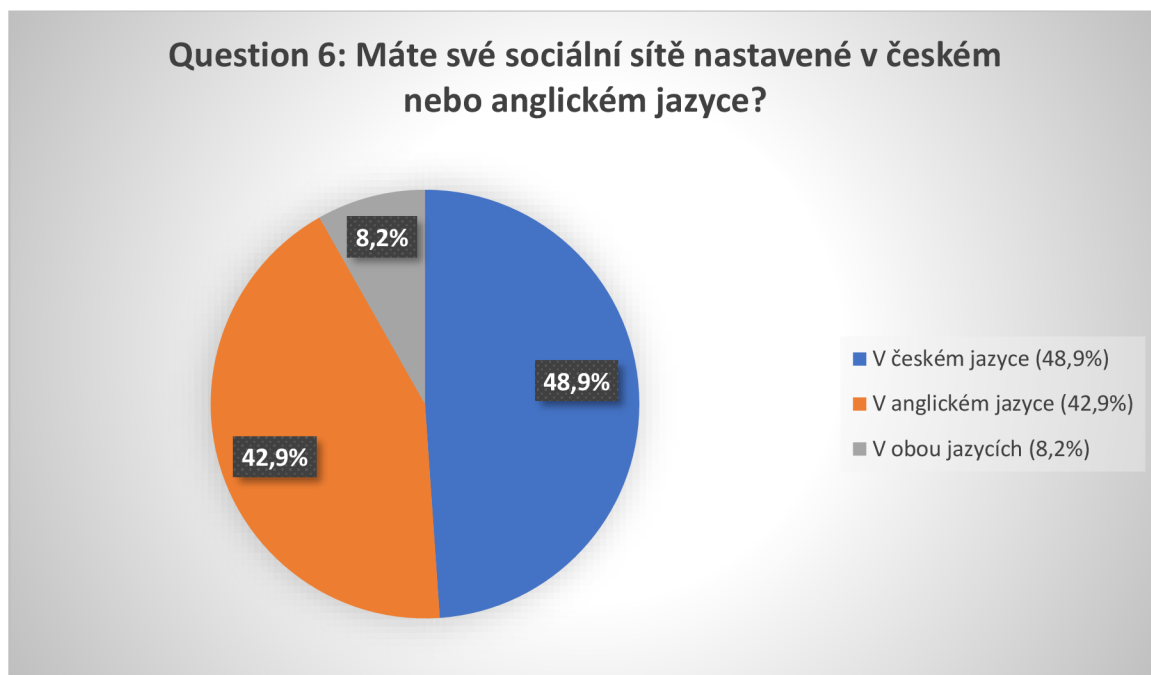


Figure 9: Do you have your social media set in Czech or English?

It is generally known an enormous amount of content online comes from the United States of America or possibly from other English-speaking countries. The seventh question aimed to show, how much English are teenagers actually exposed to in online spaces and how much attention they pay to it. The results say 96 students (47,3%) regularly come into contact with English online. 53 students (26,3%) mention they are not as certain as the first group but still encounter English very often. Quite a similar number of students (20,3%) marked the middle option, saying they sometimes see English content while they are online, but it is not as prominent on their social media as for the first two groups. A surprisingly small amount of students said they rarely notice English online (4,5%) or that they do not come across it at all (1,5%).

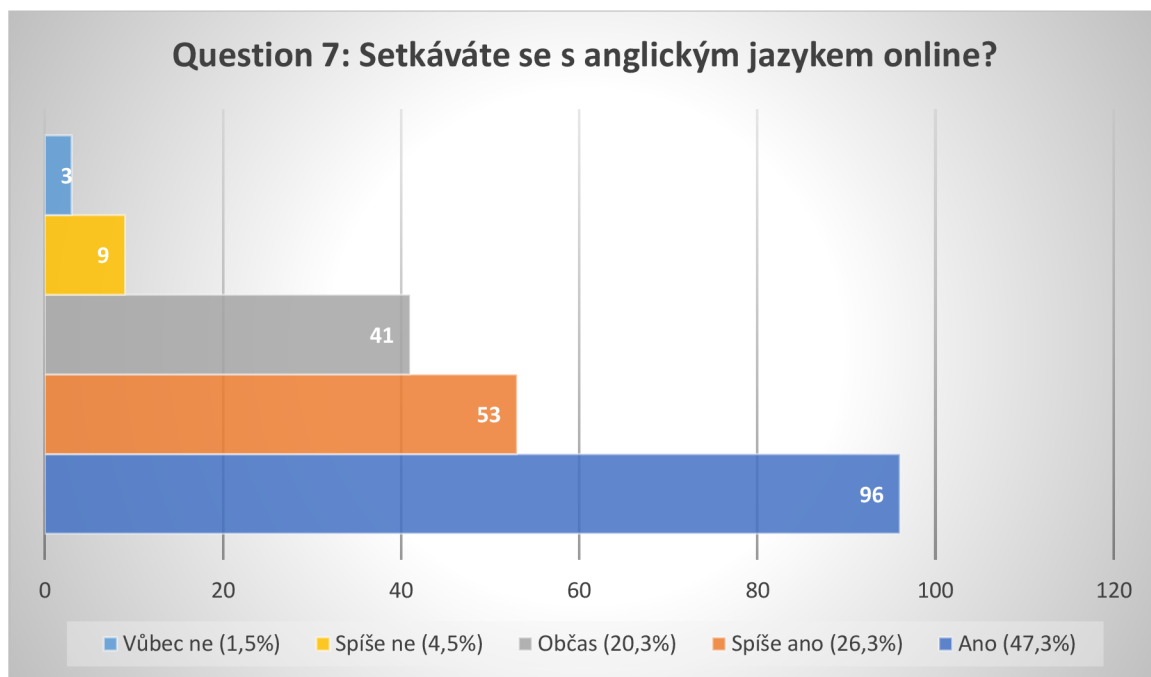


Figure 10: Coming across English in the online spaces

The eighth question was supposed to examine in which cases do teenage students encounter the English language the most often. The participants could have chosen more than one option. The highest numbers of respondents were divided under three instances. Firstly, the biggest number of respondents opted for listening to music in English. 167 people chose this option as their preferred way of coming into contact with the language. 141 people voted for watching videos and other content on the YouTube platform. 135 respondents often use social media to read posts from other users or news. Votes were then quite similarly distributed among the other options, however in smaller amounts than the first three mentioned ones. Together with reading the posts online, 74 students also mentioned writing their own posts in English in order to reach a wider audience. 84 people said they also sometimes use English when they call or text with their family relatives or Czech and international friends, while texting is the preferred option out of the two. 54 students had other experiences with encountering English on social media, those being e.g. playing games, watching TikTok videos, searching for information or reading longer texts, for instance, online books.

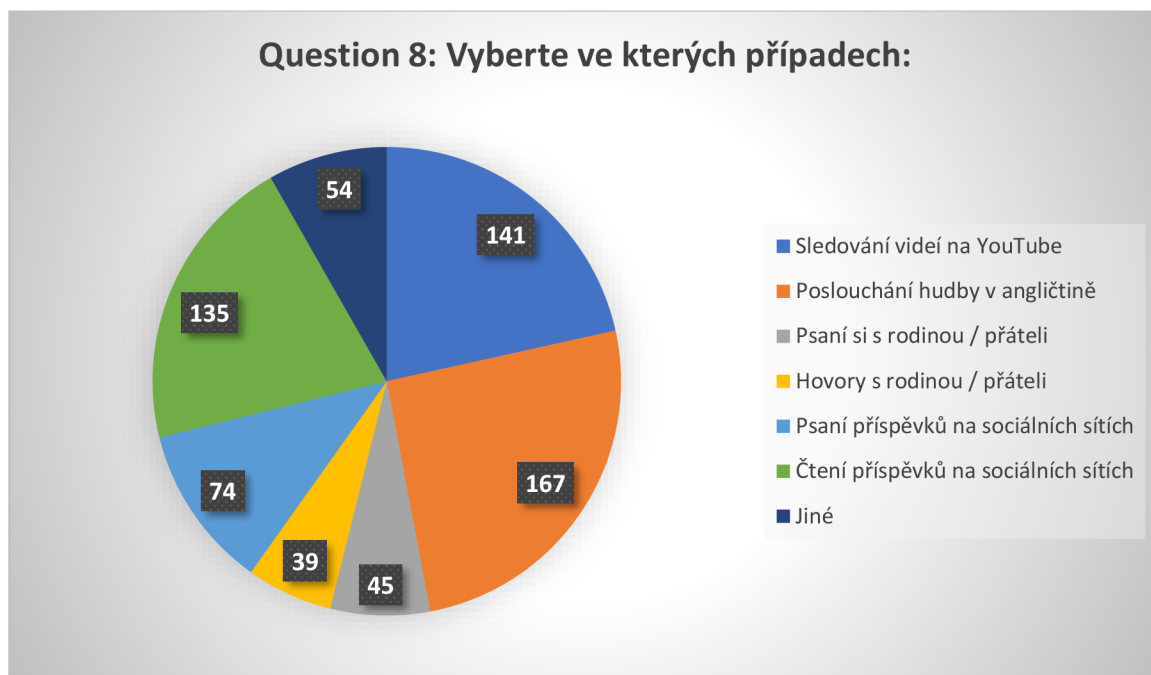
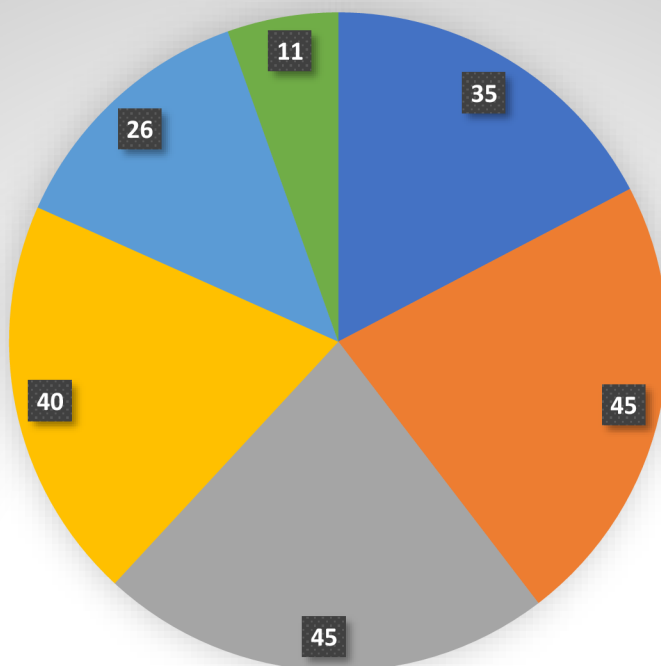


Figure 11: Instances when the respondents use English online

Figure 12 visualises the results of the ninth question which aimed to analyse the learners' level of English proficiency from their perspective. As the respondents attend grades from 6th to 9th, the level of their proficiency should be primarily determined by that and by their age, but even then, the results varied quite a lot. 35 students (17,2%) were not that confident in their language skills. A big majority of pupils chose one of the middle options, 26 respondents (12,7%) opted for a more advanced level of their English and 11 students (5,2%) were confident about their skills and the ability of being able to communicate without any trouble. Even though each participant has answered this question, it was evident from the questionnaires this was a particularly harder question to answer as the respondents' choices have been changed a lot before submitting the survey sheet.

Question 9: Jaká si myslíte, že je vaše úroveň anglického jazyka?



- Rozumím základním frázím a osobním otázkám a zvládnu je také používat. Dokážu vést jednoduchou konverzaci, pokud na mě ostatní mluví srozumitelně a pomalu. Umím se představit a krátce hovořit o osobách a předmětech kolem mě. (17,2%)
- Rozumím slovní zásobě, která se mě týká (např. rodina, moje město, domov, záliby, nakupování, a podobně). Dokážu se orientovat v kratších textech a popsat své okolí. (22,5%)
- Rozumím textům a konverzacím o aktuálních událostech, a snadno se do těchto konverzací i zapojím. Poměrně jednoduše se dorozumím v běžných situacích. Umím napsat jednoduchý text na téma, které dobře znám. Také umím popsat své zážitky, sny a plány. (22,5%)
- Nemám velké problémy se čtením delších textů (knihy). Dokážu se dorozumět s rodilými mluvčími a poměrně snadno jim rozumím. Rozumím většině seriálů a filmů. Zvládnu napsat podrobnější text na známé téma, a obhájit své názory. (19,5%)
- Rozumím delším konverzacím, rádiu, filmům a seriálům, i když se moc nevyznám v daném téma. Dokážu číst a rozumět různým žánrům knih a delších textů. Zvládnu jasně popsat složitější témata. Nemám problém vyjádřit své myšlenky. (12,7%)
- Bez obtíží rozumím rodilým mluvčím nehledě na téma konverzace. Rozumím složitějším textům a když nevím, jak něco říct, zvládnu to popsat jinak. Spontánně dokážu mluvit o čemkoliv a zapojit se do diskusí. Umím napsat text na jakékoliv téma. (5,2%)

Figure 12: Respondents' opinions on the level of their English proficiency

According to the results from question 10, shown in the figure 13, most of the respondents do not use social media specifically to study the English language or to improve their skills. Only 13 people (6,7%) which is the lowest number of responses, confirmed they indeed use social media networks to study the language and 32 respondents (15,7%) clarified they sometimes do. Nevertheless, the options with the highest number of votes stated the participants only sometimes use social media in that way (34,5%) or they seldom do (28,5%). 29 respondents (14,2%) mentioned they never use these sites and applications for English language learning.

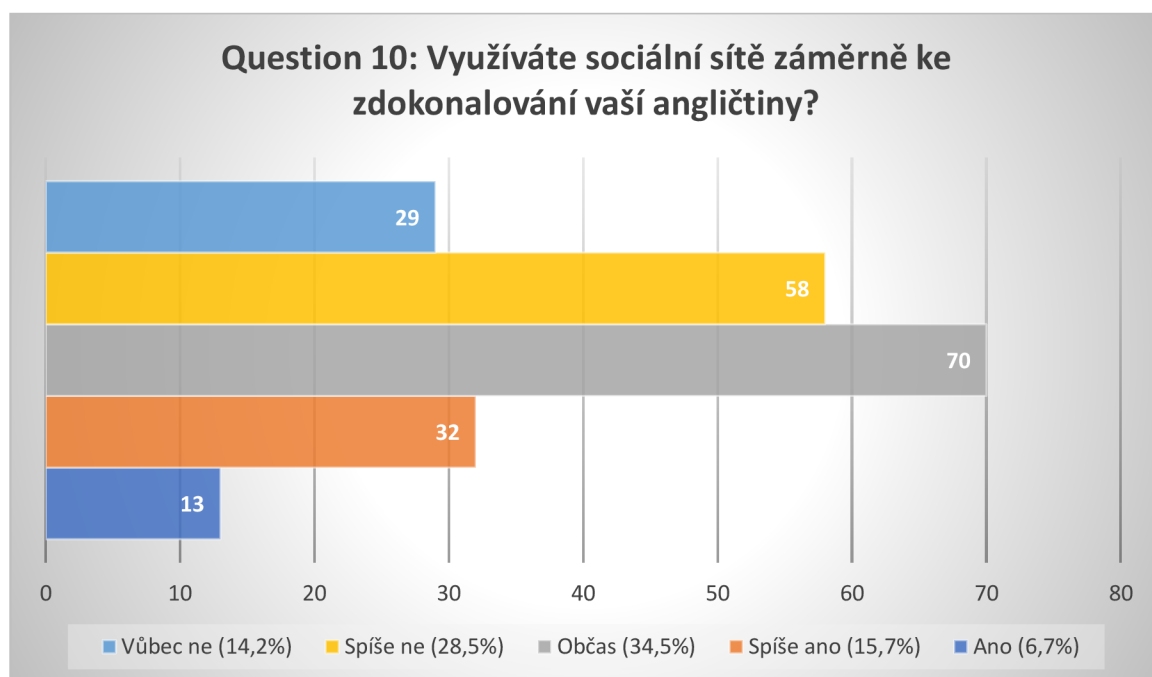


Figure 13: Do you purposefully use social media in order to improve you English skills?

However, if the respondents do use their accounts on online platforms with an intention to study, the most second common way how to do so was through watching educative videos on YouTube or other media, which deal with the desired theme or problematic topic the learner wants to understand more. 67 students chose this option in the questionnaire. Even more students (83) marked listening to podcasts as a way how to study and the mentioned sites were Spotify or YouTube as well. 51 students also like to practice their pronunciation via YouTube or e.g. the language learning app Duolingo. Some students wrote down other popular options including watching television series and films, texting with their peers or listening to music and analysing the lyrics.

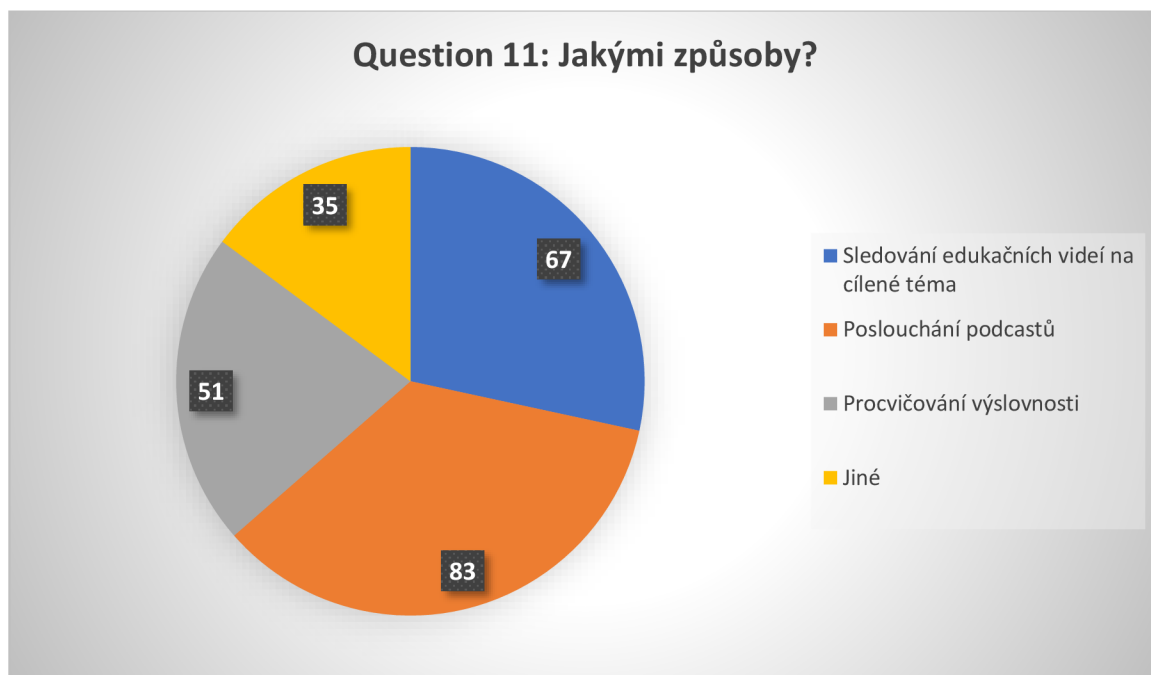


Figure 14: Methods used by the respondents to improve their English skills

When the teenagers were asked about what are in their opinions the factors which make studying English language through online social media networks more pleasant and enjoyable or what motivates them about it compared to learning the language in a school setting, the answers repeated quite a lot.

The biggest benefit of social media from their perspective was the ability to use them anytime and no matter the place if the internet is available (86 respondents). Next advantage with a similar number of marked answers (82) was that the students do not feel pressured by this method. They do not feel stressed as much as they normally might and that helps them to keep the motivation higher. The third important feature of social media, which plays an enormous role in their popularity is the interactivity and their style. Social media are designed to be entertaining and the teenagers participating in this research feel it as well. 71 people said they find this method to be engaging and enjoyable. Other reasons why studying through social media is motivating is that in most cases it is for free and the pupils do not need to pay for any resources (48 respondents), it is easy, or that it is intertwined with their favourite topic, activity or sport.



Figure 15: Enjoyable / Motivating factors of studying English through social media

The thirteenth question deals with the major language skills and whether or not do the participants think it is possible to improve in them with the help of social media. As the figure 16 shows, answers for all the language skills were positive. For listening skills, almost 73% of respondents think it is definitely possible to improve, while 8,2% does not think so and 18,7% is not sure about the answer. All the five categories follow the same scheme. The most hopeful outcome came from acquiring new vocabulary, but on the other hand, the respondents were the most hesitant about improving their pronunciation.



Figure 16: Possible language skills to get improved in

Jestliže používáte anglický jazyk online:

The three following questions deal with respondents' perception of the English language skills gained through social media and whether this knowledge affects, to a certain extent, their performance in class and their general relationship with the language.

The majority of the teenagers responded positively to the 14th question, asking if they now have a better orientation in the language thanks to their usage of social media. 85 students (42,1%) responded that they feel some kind of an improvement in their language proficiency, while 45 students (22,5%) think their confidence in speaking the foreign language definitely improved. 49 respondents are not sure (24%), and 23 students have more negative perception of this question.

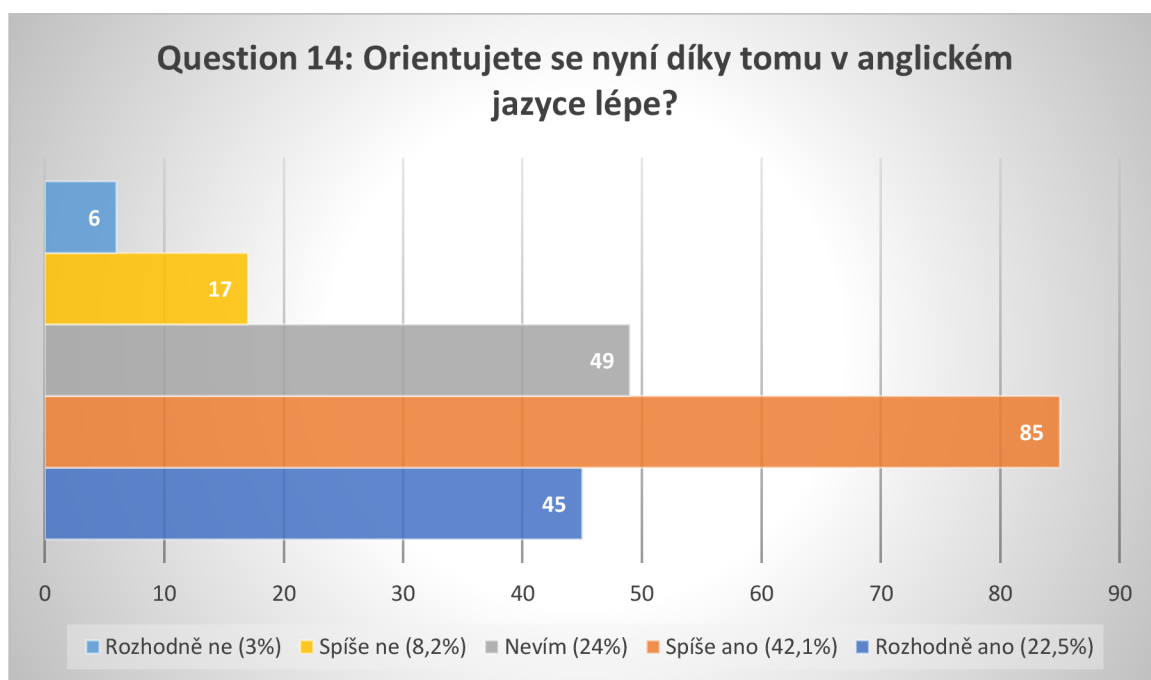


Figure 17: Do you have better orientation in the English language thanks to social media?

When they were asked about their confidence and performance in the lessons, the answers were not so different from the previous question. The biggest number of students also think they mostly more confident now after being surrounded by English online and that it has a positive impact on their ability to use English comfortably. The biggest contrast compared to the question 14 is that there are more students mostly not seeing any difference rather than those who feel fully sure they managed to improve.

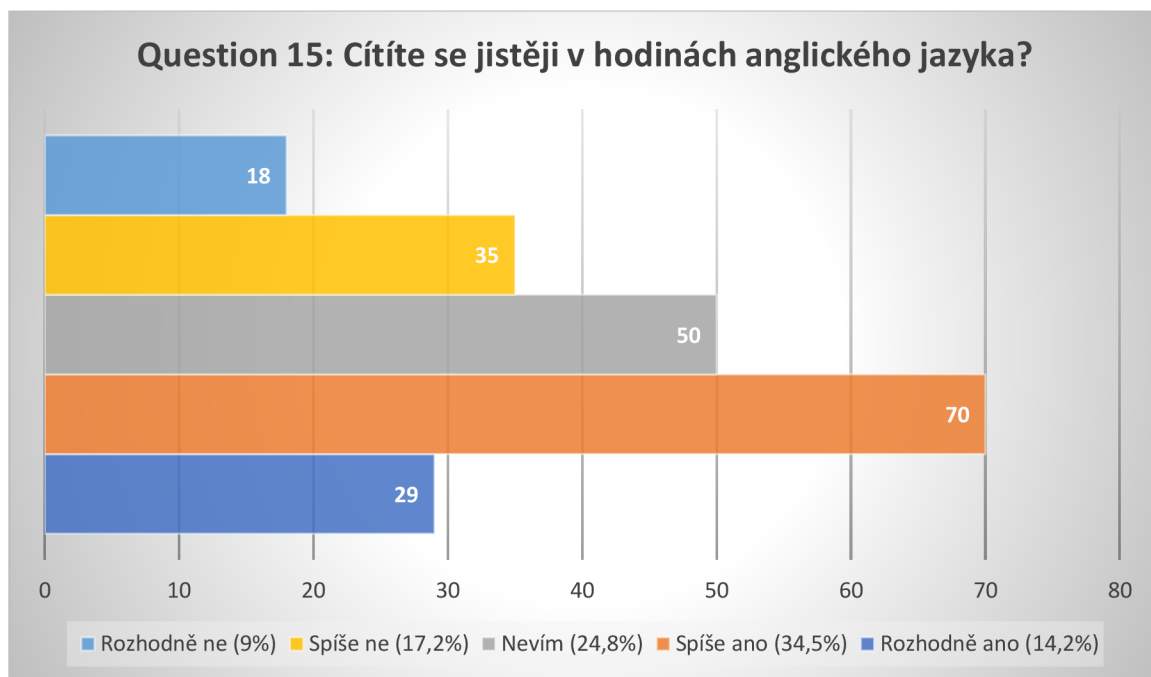


Figure 18: Are you more confident in the English lessons?

Question 16 seemed as one of the hardest to answer for the respondents. 80 students mentioned they do not know if they prefer this informal method over the traditional formal one. The most common reason for this thinking was that studying through social media might be more enjoyable, but the certified language teacher is capable to explain problematic topics in depth and in a way the pupils would understand. But others had a different opinion and 47% in total said they do prefer social media over the lessons in school. 4 pupils prefer classes focused on specifically learning the language and 20 pupils are more inclined to it as well.

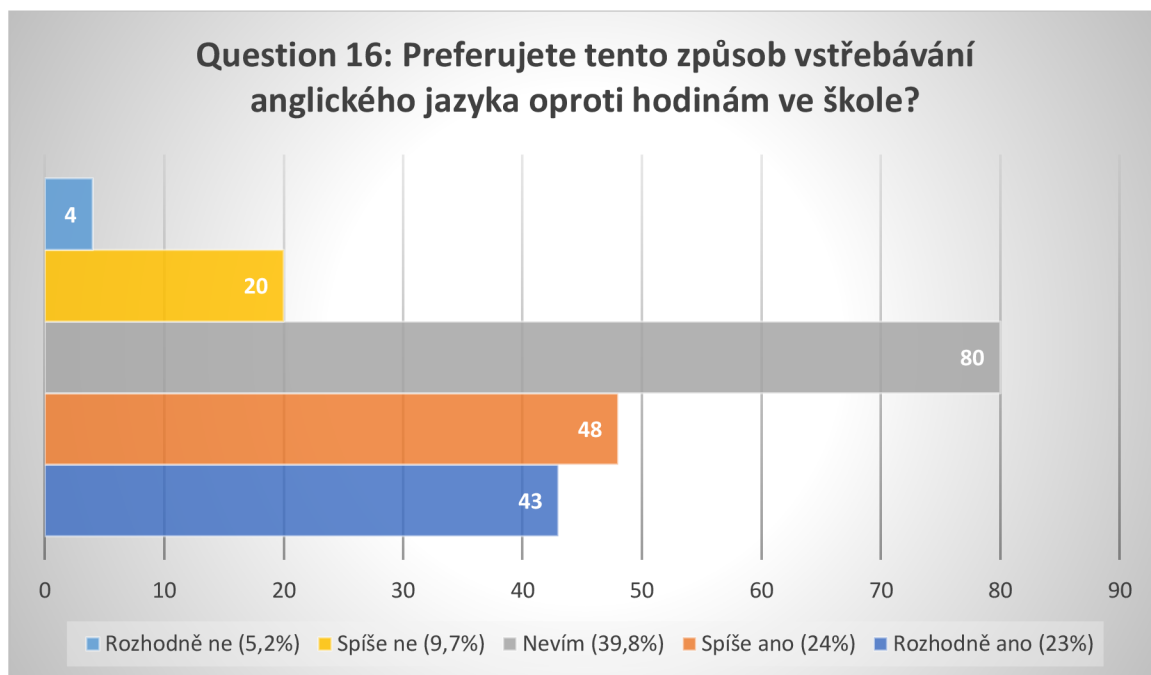


Figure 19: Preference of social media English over classroom English

Question 17: Jaký je váš osobní názor na učení anglického jazyka skrze sociální sítě? Má tento způsob nějaké výhody / nevýhody?

The seventeenth question was an open-ended question and not answered by all respondents. It concerned the learners' own preferences and ideas of possible benefits and disadvantages of learning English with the help of social media. The majority of the students marked advantages as the more prominent features of SNSs. Examples of the benefits mentioned in the questionnaire are written in the following points:

- Social media offer a calm environment and the learners do not feel pressured.
- It is fun and enjoyable because the experience is similar to playing a game.
- Social media could be used anytime and no matter the place if the user is nearby a good internet connection.
- Learners can set time intervals according to their own preferences and study for how long they want.
- Most of the time the content is slow-paced and easy to comprehend.
- Students can learn different vocabulary than those from their textbooks and see the words they are already familiar with in a different context.
- An enormous part of the content comes from English-speaking countries, which allows the learners to listen to native speakers and practice the correct pronunciation, as well as see which phrases are commonly used in daily life.

- Learners have an opportunity to search for any desired or problematic topic they need. They can focus on the ones they are not so familiar with and which they do not understand well.

However, together with benefits, the respondents were also able to see a few drawbacks about this method. An example could be that teachers in school can sometimes explain the context better, in more depth and faster than if the pupils were about to learn it on their own. Another answer written down in the survey concerned the content online. It does not have to be appropriate for the children's age and they have no control over what the different sites will show. Last example of a disadvantage is the lack of feedback. On the contrary to the classroom with teacher and their peers, in many cases there is no person online who would check their possible mistakes and corrected them with given explanation. One male respondent wrote "*Who wants to learn, manages it. Who is not interested in it and does not work on the improvements, gets no results.*" This altogether summarises how learning generally functions and language learning fits with this as well.

Conclusion

This bachelor thesis intended to describe different ways and methods how teenage students can study English as a second language. The major topic of this work is an informal learning of English through online social media sites and mobile applications and the students' perception of this learning style.

The practical part consisted of quantitative research which was conducted at a chosen primary school and with the help of students of the lower secondary education. The needed data have been collected through a printed questionnaire, filled by each pupil, and later counted and analysed accordingly to the methodology.

All four originally placed hypotheses have been proven correct by this research. The acquired results indicated that almost every teenage student is an active user of at least one social media platform and 78% of teenagers in total spend minimally one to six hours online every day. Although the majority of students keep their social media settings in the Czech language, the ratio came to be 42,9% and 49,9%, which means that English is nonetheless preferred by a high number of participants.

From the submitted responses it could be concluded that most of the respondents do not intentionally use social media apps and online social network sites for English language learning, but if they ever encounter an English content, they are not opposed to it and try to pay attention to what is being written or said. On the other hand, those who actively study English online have found several benefits of this method. Examples worth mentioning include interactivity, which makes the learners engaged and motivated for a longer time, the possibility to learn anywhere at any time under the condition of having a stable internet connection, obtaining higher confidence in using the language, and all language skills can easily get improved either depending on which platform is used.

However, drawbacks should always be considered as well and despite all the mentioned advantages in this thesis, many teenage students were perplexed about this study method and them, together with many others, might still feel the preference of formal techniques they are familiar with from educational institutions.

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List of abbreviations

ARPAnet	the U.S. Advanced Research Project Agency Network
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
e.g.	exempli gratia
ESL	English as a second language
etc.	et cetera
i.e.	that is
Inc.	Incorporated
PSND	Photo-sharing social network service
SNS	Social network sites

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Appendix – Questionnaire

1. **Používáte aktivně sociální sítě?**
 - a. Ano
 - b. Ne
2. **Pokud ano, kterou / které konkrétně?**
 - a. Facebook
 - b. Facebook Messenger
 - c. Instagram
 - d. YouTube
 - e. TikTok
 - f. Twitter
 - g. Snapchat
 - h. WhatsApp
 - i. Jiné: _____
3. **Máte vytvořený účet na minimálně jedné z nich?**
 - a. Ano
 - b. Ne
4. **Kolik času na sociálních sítích trávíte?**
 - a. Každý den
 - b. Párkrát do týdne
 - c. Pouze o víkendu
 - d. Párkrát do měsíce
5. **Kolik přibližně hodin na nich strávíte v průběhu dne?**
 - a. Méně než 1 hodinu
 - b. 1-2 hodiny
 - c. 3-4 hodiny
 - d. 5-6 hodin
 - e. 7 a více hodin
6. **Máte své sociální sítě nastavené v českém nebo anglickém jazyce?**
 - a. V českém jazyce
 - b. V anglickém jazyce
 - c. V obou jazycích
7. **Setkáváte se s angličtinou online?**

Vůbec ne – Spíše ne – Občas – Spíše ano – Ano
8. **Vyberte, ve kterých případech: (NEvyplňujte, pokud jste v předešlé otázce označili vůbec ne)**
 - a. Sledování YouTube videí
 - b. Poslouchání hudby v angličtině
 - c. Psaní si s rodinou / přáteli (českými / zahraničními)
 - d. Hovory a videohovory s rodinou / přáteli (českými / zahraničními)
 - e. Psaní příspěvků na sociálních sítích
 - f. Čtení příspěvků a textů na sociálních sítích
 - g. Jiné: _____
9. **Jaká si myslíte, že je vaše úroveň angličtiny?**
 - a. Rozumím základním frázím a osobním otázkám a zvládnou je také používat. Dokážu vést jednoduchou konverzaci, pokud na mě ostatní mluví srozumitelně a pomalu. Umím se představit a krátce hovořit o osobách a předmětech kolem mě.
 - b. Rozumím slovní zásobě, která se mě týká (např. rodina, moje město, domov, záliby, nakupování, a podobně). Dokážu se orientovat v kratších textech a popsat své okolí.
 - c. Rozumím textům a konverzacím o aktuálních událostech, a snadno se do těchto konverzací zapojím. Poměrně jednoduše se dorozumím v běžných situacích nebo při cestování. Umím napsat jednoduchý text na téma, které dobře znám. Také umím popsat své zážitky, sny a plány.

- d. Nemám velké problémy se čtením delších textů (knihy). Dokážu se porozumět s rodilými mluvčími a poměrně snadno jim rozumím. Rozumím většině seriálů a filmů, pokud se zajímám o daný žánr. Zvládnou napsat podrobnější text na známé téma, a obhájit své názory.
- e. Rozumím delším konverzacím, rádiu, filmům a seriálům, i když se moc nevyznám v daném téma. Dokážu číst a rozumět různým žánrům knih a delších textů. Zvládnou jasně popsat složitější témata. Nemám problém vyjádřit své myšlenky.
- f. Bez obtíží rozumím rodilým mluvčím nehledě na téma konverzace. Rozumím složitějším textům a když nevím, jak něco říct, zvládnou to popsat jinak. Spontánně dokážu mluvit o čemkoliv a zapojit se do různých diskusí. Umím napsat delší text na jakékoliv téma.

(Převzato ze Společného evropského referenčního rámce pro jazyky SERR)

10. Využíváte sociální sítě záměrně ke zdokonalování vaší angličtiny?

Vůbec ne – Spíše ne – Občas – Spíše ano – Ano

11. Jakými způsoby? (uvedte prosím také, kterou soc. síť k tomu používáte)

- a. Sledování edukačních videí na cílené téma
- b. Poslouchání podcastů
- c. Procvičování výslovnosti
- d. Jiné:

12. Co vás na učení angličtiny skrze sociální sítě baví / motivuje? (můžete označit jednu i více možností)

- a. Je to zábavné a interaktivní.
- b. Necítím se pod tlakem a stresem.
- c. Mohu je využívat kdykoli.
- d. Sociální sítě jsou většinou zdarma.
- e. Jiné důvody:

13. Dle vašeho názoru, můžete se díky sociálním sítím zlepšit v:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| a. Poslechových dovednostech | ano – ne – nevím |
| b. Komunikačních dovednostech | ano – ne – nevím |
| c. Čtení a porozumění textu | ano – ne – nevím |
| d. Slovní zásobě | ano – ne – nevím |
| e. Výslovnosti | ano – ne – nevím |

Jestliže používáte anglický jazyk online:

14. Orientujete se nyní díky tomu v AJ lépe?

Rozhodně ne – Spíše ne – Nevím – Spíše ano – Rozhodně ano

15. Cítíte se jistěji v hodinách anglického jazyka?

Rozhodně ne – Spíše ne – Nevím – Spíše ano – Rozhodně ano

16. Preferujete tento způsob vstřebávání anglického jazyka oproti hodinám ve škole?

Rozhodně ne – Spíše ne – Nevím – Spíše ano – Rozhodně ano

17. Jaký je váš osobní názor na učení anglického jazyka skrze sociální sítě? Má tento způsob nějaké výhody / nevýhody?

18. Kolik je vám let?

- 11 - 12 - 13 - 14 - 15 - 16

19. Jakého jste pohlaví?

- a. Muž
- b. Žena

20. Jakou třídu navštěvujete?

- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.