

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON EFL LEARNING AND STUDENT MOTIVATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

This paper is intended to synthesize some of the literature on the effects of social media on EFL learners' acquisition of language and its main goal is to find out how social media motivates students and affects their ability to acquire English language skills. Social media platforms contribute to language development, and it is necessary to determine the extent to which they influence learners' vocabulary acquisition, grammar, comprehension, and overall language proficiency. Through this paper, we hope to gain a better understanding of the potential benefits and the drawbacks of incorporating social media platforms into language learning environments, as well as provide educators with recommendations on how to develop effective teaching strategies and improve English language instruction for EFL learners.

KEYWORDS:

Digital literacy, EFL learning, language skills, English language learners, social media

1. Introduction

Social media encompasses websites and online platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact in online communities. Social media plays a crucial role in contemporary communication by allowing people to stay connected, share information, voice their thoughts, and participate in online communities.

People can find new and exciting ways to communicate online through social networking sites because they make it simple for users to create their own profile while at the same time building an online digital community whose members are frequently referred to as 'friends'. Users can interact with people both inside and outside their online network of contacts, either through private messages or public

comments which are posted for everyone to see. During the past years a significant increase in social networking could be observed. It can be argued that this is symptomatic of its diffusion into popular culture and widespread integration into our everyday lives. As a result, there has been a lot of attention to the expansion of social networking and the possible advantages and drawbacks referring to how certain users are interacting with it. Researchers (Motlagh et al., 2020) contend that social media may have an impact on students' language development based on these characteristics.

Social media has become essential for studying English as a foreign language (EFL) because it offers ELLs (English language learners) opportunities to improve

their core skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) as well as expand their vocabulary. This paper looks at pertinent research in this area to demonstrate how social media affects English language acquisition.

Recent advancements in technology have made possible the expansion of language acquisition in a more methodical way. Students' motivation is impacted by the fact that they now get the chance to experiment with new technologies. Therefore, it is crucial that educators stay up to date on technological advancements and understand how they might be used to better engage students and help them with their English language proficiency at all levels. As a result, social media apps have become important teaching and learning tools, with a wide-reaching impact on the way students and teachers communicate not only during English lessons but also outside the classroom environment, thus helping teachers to extend both the physical and temporal limits of their classes.

Numerous researchers have examined how social media affects English language learning, especially how social media affects vocabulary acquisition. It could be argued that vocabulary becomes more important than structure when it comes to achieving the fundamental language skills, since it is vocabulary that determines language understanding. The importance of vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language is indisputable; while poor grammar limits one's ability to express oneself correctly in a foreign language, inadequate and insufficient vocabulary makes it impossible for someone to speak the respective language. That is, communication can become obstructed if a speaker has poor vocabulary or if it is not accurately used. Social media apps can be considered to be useful tools in this regard but, at the same time, it can be debatable which apps should be utilized in the development of language learning and to what extent they can become successful

while supporting learner autonomy. Previous studies by Dizon (2016), Çetinkaya & Sütçü (2018), Nickerson (2018), Santoveña-Casal & Bernal-Bravo (2019), Roohani & Vinchek (2021) have examined the effects of social media apps (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram) on the acquisition of English vocabulary and have pointed out the pedagogical benefits of social media for raising both student motivation and achievement.

Language is not fixed; it has always evolved and adjusted according to the historical and cultural context specific to a certain time. Contemporary culture is characterized by the emergence of new technologies and social media networking sites, which have become a fertile playground for linguistic experimentation. Therefore, a noteworthy impact of social media is that it has given new lexicon to communication in English. Before social media, words like *selfie* (self-portrait photograph), *hashtag* (a metadata tag that is preceded by the symbol #), *blog* (a truncation of *weblog*), *buzzword* (word/phrase fashionable at a certain time) did not exist.

Another phenomenon that we have witnessed in recent years is the reappropriation of existing words. As a result, words such as *friend* and *unfriend* have started to be used with a new meaning, i.e. the one related to their social media connotation, meaning the process of adding or removing someone from an online circle of friends, on platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. Other popular examples of reappropriation include the words *like* (referring to a type of social media engagement through which a person shows that they literally like the online content by clicking a button), *wall* (the homepage of someone's social media profile), and *viral* (a social media post that reaches a large audience and receives an unusually high number of shares and exposure).

Genericization (also called trademark erosion; a process that occurs when a trademark becomes so widely spread that it is used as a common name) has also become common due to internet development and the emergence of social media apps and websites. Words such as *to google* (Google is the world's leading search engine) or *to photoshop* (Photoshop is a very popular photo editing software developed by Adobe) have become so powerful that they have basically replaced the common speech phrases 'to search for something', respectively 'to retouch'.

Most public content on social media is unfiltered and unedited, therefore trends are certain to emerge when it comes to the use of English language. One can easily affirm that using social networks generally deteriorates grammar. But what about language acquisition and student motivation? The following sections of this paper will try to highlight both the advantages and the drawbacks of using social media in the EFL classroom.

2. Literature overview

Nowadays, technology permeates every part of people's lives and education makes no exception. As a result, there is already a substantial amount of research on the social and pedagogical advantages of utilizing these technologies for teaching-learning purposes. Since most people have access to the internet, teachers have the chance to draw on the benefits of incorporating technology – particularly social networking tools – into the classroom as these can make language instruction more engaging and motivating for language learners. Over the past decade, a significant amount of study has been conducted on the integration of technology in English language instruction, and many experts view it as a useful substitute approach to teaching and learning the language.

Using social media in the classroom can foster feelings of belonging and community among students which

improves content learning. Students can use social media as tools to extend their learning environment, investigate new resources, while engaging in cooperation and dialogue.

According to recent research, social media use in EFL teaching and learning may contribute to language acquisition (Reinhardt & Zander, 2011) and to increasing student motivation through self-expression exercises (Boonmoh, 2010). For example, integrating *WebQuests* into ESL (English as a second language) reading lessons can help foster a more critical mindset. Similarly, Bakar, Latif, & Ya'cob (2010) conducted research on the integration of *blogs* as teaching tools in EFL classrooms. According to these findings, students display a positive attitude towards the applicability of blogs in second language acquisition. They considered that using a blog improved their writing and reading skills, built their confidence, decreased their anxiety, and improved their overall communication skills (Bakar et al., 2010).

In a study conducted by Sakkir (2018), it was concluded that using social media sites such as *Facebook* increased students' enthusiasm in participating in writing lessons. Furthermore, Al-Mubarak (2016) has pointed out the benefits of using web-based media to teach and learn English. His study, based on English major students in Saudi Arabia, concluded that social media is useful in EFL learning. Similarly, Al-Tamimi et al. (2018) have demonstrated through their research that using Facebook to improve vocabulary and writing skills can prove helpful; according to the results of this study, pupils who were instructed to write using Facebook produced higher test results than those who followed the conventional approach.

According to Chartrand's (2012) investigation, students with limited time for authentic English interaction or conversation might enhance their communicative skills by utilizing the Web. He points out that social media can assist students while learning a language through

the use of *videos* and *podcasts*, enabling teachers to better handle individual differences among students.

There is no doubt that social media help people share information and connect, both in their personal and professional lives and language learners can draw on opportunities for instant linguistic and cultural exchange. Integrating social media into classroom practice involves a certain reconfiguration of the teacher's role; now teachers do not act as mere sources of information and knowledge but as facilitators, thus helping students to design their learning in such ways that allows them to interact with English-language content by reading and writing in both formal and informal contexts. This approach can bridge communication inside and outside of the classroom.

Nowadays, individual learning is no longer attained through teacher-centered lectures since it is based on "principles of collective exploration, play and innovation" (Selwyn 2012, p. 3). Learning is not seen as the students' ability to accumulate as much knowledge as possible anymore, but as their ability to find the right databases from which they can retrieve the information they need. Consequently, language instructors should use social media as a means of offering learners the opportunity to evolve into more knowledgeable individuals.

2.1. Advantages of using social media in EFL lessons

Social media represent authentic language sources that can be successfully employed in the EFL classroom to motivate student learning and create interesting and attractive activities that students can have fun engaging with. Social media can be regarded as a valuable tool for EFL learning because they provide a more realistic and dynamic context for language learning through exposing students to authentic language use, including colloquial expressions, slang, and current trends.

Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook encourage creativity in language use because students can create multimedia content or infographics. By using social media, students also develop digital literacy skills, including the ability to evaluate online information, understand digital etiquette, and navigate various platforms effectively. Moreover, social media allow for multimodal learning experiences, incorporating visuals, audio, and text which caters to different learning styles and enhances overall comprehension.

Many educators consider that social media use in EFL lessons brings benefits for students' linguistic development in a foreign language. For example, social media use in English language classrooms has been shown to improve students' understanding and fluency while also facilitating information access, encouraging self-learning and autonomy, and motivating students (Yunus et al., 2012; Kessler, 2013).

2.2. Challenges of using social media in EFL lessons

While there are numerous advantages, it is essential to consider potential challenges and ensure that the use of social media aligns with educational goals and safety guidelines.

Despite the afore mentioned benefits, there are linguists who consider that Standard English will be significantly impacted by the English language used online. Thus, according to Winarto (2019), slang words used on social media lack appropriate grammatical structures. Similarly, learning English has been negatively impacted by electronic communication, leading to significant grammar and spelling mistakes and the use of colloquial language in students' academic assignments. McBride (2009) considers that social media platforms are not always suitable for EFL teaching due to their lack of intended purpose, meaning that they have not been especially designed for teaching a foreign language and, therefore, they are ineffective.

When using social media, the greatest challenge that many English teachers are facing refers to finding the ones that are the most applicable to their particular teaching circumstances. Language instructors may run into a number of problems when searching for appropriate materials, such as finding practical ways to integrate social media sites so that they do not become time wasters or correctly correlating the level of their students with the learning tools that they want to employ (Yunus et al., 2012).

A 2008 study by Erben et al. found out that students' social skills are likely to be weakened by too much use of social media tools in the EFL classroom because encouraging interaction through social media impairs students' abilities when it comes to face-to-face interaction. Social media platforms are designed to be engaging, which can lead to distractions. Students may be tempted to browse unrelated content during class time, affecting their focus on language learning tasks. Additionally, EFL learners may not be able to develop their academic skills since social media hinders face-to-face communication. To put it in other words, social media technology and the resources available on these sites, do not offer EFL students the pedagogical construction required for the development of their language proficiency. Likewise, Yunus et al. (2012) argue that even in today's technologically advanced society, ELLs must learn how to communicate with others in face-to-face interactions.

Furthermore, the same research study conducted by Erben pointed out that the absence of pedagogical intentions is one of the most evident drawbacks of social media use in EFL classes. In other words, even if ELLs are exposed to authentic language through social media platforms, a lot of information that comes from these sites is not meant to be used for learning since many materials that can be found on social media platforms are badly written, difficult to understand, contain errors, and do not

follow Standard English conventions. As a result, ELLs might not really develop their language skills by engaging with this type of content.

3. Conclusion

People around the world have changed their strategies when it comes to learning a foreign language, especially young people whose lives have been greatly impacted by the emergence of the Internet and new social media platforms. As a result, language instructors had to switch their teaching approach and methodology as to include the employment of learning technologies through which they help learners to keep in touch with a global community in order to stay relevant and effective beyond the classroom.

Because technology is evolving at an unprecedented rate, it is important for language instructors to adapt their teaching strategies to include social media and various apps. The ever-changing digital ecosystem binds teachers to promote a healthy attitude towards the use of information by the students. This means that the academic use of English language should not be affected by the newly established language trends determined by the emergence of social media. By eliminating bad practices, such as the usage of abbreviations or instant thesaurus, we can still improve students' EFL vocabulary and grammatical structures.

To sum up, this literature analysis revealed that EFL learners use a variety of social media platforms to acquire new language. The majority of the research points out that EFL learners benefit from social media applications; however, there are also a few studies that underline the negative effects of social media on ELLs' acquisition of the language.

One of the main perks of using social media by English language learners is that it allows them to participate in real-time online conversations which involve real-life situations during which they practice the

target language. The drawback is that this practice takes place in an environment that is not pedagogically controlled by a teacher; this means that the learners are subject to making mistakes or picking up language and vocabulary that is erroneous without having an experienced language instructor to correct them.

The majority of the research in this field suggests that social media is a significant component of the EFL teaching-learning process. By investigating the features, functions, content, and mechanisms of these social networking sites, researchers may be able to assist teachers and students in participating in a highly qualitative educational process.

The research cited in this paper indicates that social media use in EFL classrooms has several advantages for students' skill development and academic advancement because social networks are viewed as useful resources for teaching and learning English by both teachers and students.

Furthermore, according to this narrative review of the literature, more research on the drawbacks of using social media applications in EFL teaching and learning should be done. It is also advised that future researchers close the methodology gap by using a mixed method research design to examine how social media affects English language learning for EFL learners worldwide.

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