

ONLINE PLATFORMS, OFFLINE PROFICIENCY: NAVIGATING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LANGUAGE SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the multifaceted influence of social media on the process of English language learning, examining the ways in which digital platforms shape language acquisition, linguistic competence, and socio-cultural interactions. With the pervasive integration of social media in contemporary society, English language learners are increasingly exposed to diverse linguistic inputs and interactive environments. This study investigates the positive and negative effects of social media on language learning outcomes, considering factors such as vocabulary acquisition, language proficiency, and cultural competence. In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms have revolutionized various aspects of human life, reshaping communication, information dissemination, knowledge exchange, commerce, and education. Davies aptly notes, "texts of the new technologies have mutated into complex hybrid systems that have made new demands on reading and writing, viewing, social exchange, and communication" (Roelofse, 2013). This paper seeks to delve into the nuanced impact of social networks on English language proficiency, aiming to unravel whether these influences sway language knowledge and usage towards positivity or negativity. Recent research underscores the potential of various social media platforms—YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter—as effective teaching tools. Contrary to concerns about negative impacts, these platforms have demonstrated the ability to enhance students' motivation, proficiency, and interest in learning English. Through a fusion of multimedia, interactive features, and real-time communication, social media engages learners in ways that traditional methods may not. The findings underscore that platforms like YouTube contribute to listening skills, providing authentic content that exposes learners to diverse accents and expressions. Similarly, WhatsApp and Facebook foster language exchange and written communication, positively influencing writing skills. Instagram and Twitter, with their succinct format, encourage concise expression, impacting both vocabulary and writing proficiency. This research endeavors to offer a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics between social media and English language learning. By recognizing the positive contributions of these platforms alongside potential challenges, educators can harness their potential to cultivate a more immersive and effective language learning experience in today's interconnected digital landscape.

Keywords: Digital Age, English, Language Learning, Social Media Platforms.

Introduction

In the ever-evolving digital age, the influence of online platforms on various aspects of our lives is undeniable. One notable arena undergoing significant transformation is language learning, where the integration of social media has become a prevalent force. As individuals increasingly navigate the realms of online communication, this study delves into the intersection of virtual spaces and language proficiency. Social media has changed how we communicate and share information. This study explores how it impacts language learning, specifically for English learners. We'll look at both the good and bad effects on things like vocabulary, language skills, and cultural understanding. The goal is to understand how social media can be a useful tool for learning. Educators are encouraged to integrate social media into language learning curricula judiciously. Incorporating authentic social media content, guiding learners in selecting appropriate language exchange platforms, and fostering digital literacy skills can enhance the

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positive impact of social media on language learning. 'Educators can integrate social media tools into their existing pedagogy. Online environments used by education professionals include Course management systems, wikis, blogs, virtual worlds and more' (Thomas et al., 2013, 39-54).

'Social media is constantly changing the way people live in different aspects. Nowadays, various social media platforms are affecting communication, information delivery, knowledge exchange, commerce, education and all different aspects of life' (Reiger & Christoph, 2018, 87- 118). Social media plays a crucial role in contemporary society by facilitating the instantaneous sharing of everyday experiences through videos, pictures, or text across various platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube. Utilizing diverse technologies, it presents numerous opportunities for written communication. While some perceive technical inaccuracies and spelling errors in instant messaging as detrimental, others argue that these deviations may represent the emergence of a distinct yet complementary online media language. Social networking sites, accessed by millions globally, generate a significant volume of multimedia text, contributing to the evolution of a novel language on screens, tablets, and smartphones. This transformation stems from our interaction with these technologies, enabling informal and personal communication on a mass scale, ultimately influencing the choice of words in our daily communication.

Social media has revolutionized global communication, increasing the speed and efficiency of interactions. Platforms like Twitter, with its character limit have led to shorter and more concise sentences, reshaping the way we express ourselves. The impact extends to language alterations, as words like 'FaceTime' transition from nouns to verbs, and universal replacements like 'Google it' become commonplace. The continuous evolution of the English language is evident in the incorporation of neologisms, such as 'emojis', recognized by the Oxford English Dictionary.

Social media's influence also extends to the reappropriation of words; for instance, 'tweet' now signifies posting a brief message on Twitter. Acronyms, abbreviations, and hashtags have become natural substitutes in real-time conversations, aiding in faster communication. Internet slang, often vowel-excluded, further enhances efficiency and readability. Hashtags, unbroken phrases identified by a hash mark, contribute to the formation of virtual communities around specific topics, fostering real-time discussions globally. Social media introduces a new writing style, impacting purposes ranging from casual conversations to formal discourse, with linguistic changes requiring adaptation.

Youtube is another social network that is commonly used by language educators and learners. There are many popular language education channels on YouTube that have a large number of followers that use the video-based platform to learn and interact with other users. The landscape of language learning has undergone a remarkable transformation with the pervasive integration of various social media platforms. From the dynamic visual content of Instagram and YouTube, offering immersive language exposure through videos and images, to the real-time interactive discussions on Twitter and Facebook fostering communicative skills, learners now have an array of tools at their disposal. Platforms like Duolingo and Babbel gamify language acquisition, making the learning process engaging and interactive. The versatility of social media, spanning platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, and WhatsApp, enables users to explore language nuances, expressions, and colloquialisms in real-world contexts. As we navigate the digital realm, the educational potential of these platforms becomes increasingly evident, offering learners a rich tapestry of linguistic resources to enhance their proficiency.

The evolution of communication, particularly through technologically mediated platforms, has given rise to a diverse lexicon comprised of acronyms, abbreviations, and neologisms. Originating from online forums and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) preceding text messaging, these linguistic shortcuts serve to expedite real-time typed conversations or minimize the challenges of typing on mobile phones. Emoticons like 😊 and acronyms such as LOL, celebrating its 25th birthday, contribute elements of non-verbal expression, though their overuse can be divisive. Twitter syntax, enriched by hashtags that categorize tweets, has not only permeated other social media platforms but has also infiltrated everyday speech. While some caution against excessive use, hashtags have permeated popular culture, appearing on greetings cards, t-shirts, and even in sitcom dialogues. Beyond syntax, social media has subtly transformed communication styles, fostering more informal and open exchanges, with individuals sharing personal information with larger audiences. This shift towards brevity, succinctness, and creative constraints, such as Twitter's 140-character limit, has become a hallmark of modern communication styles, influencing broader aspects of life and culture.

"Language learning is interwoven with cultural interaction and is mediated by linguistic and other symbolic activity"(Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Social media provides an environment that allows users to

weave their goal of language acquisition with culturally relevant interactions through a wide array of available platforms that are often categorized as formal for classroom use and informal for personal use.

'Common social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and are used by language learners to communicate with other learners and native speakers of the target language' (Alm, n.d.).

Facebook has redefined common words like friend, like, status, wall, page, and profile, reflecting the platform's influence on language. Social media has introduced darker meanings, turning troll into an online provocateur, sock puppet into a deceptive online persona, and astroturfing into a fake grassroots movement. The evolution of language is no longer confined to traditional publishing, as social media allows anyone to contribute to word trends. Oxford Dictionaries' 2013 Word of the Year, 'selfie', originated on an Australian internet forum, showcasing the impact of online forums, Twitter, and Facebook in quickly popularizing new terms. The ease of instant interaction with wide audiences makes it simpler than ever to help a word gain traction from the comfort of one's armchair.

Facebook can serve as a valuable tool for English language learning by offering a diverse platform for global communication in English. Users can immerse themselves in a rich linguistic environment, exposing them to various writing styles, vocabulary, and grammar structures through posts, articles, and comments. Actively engaging in discussions and commenting on content enhances written communication skills. Moreover, the platform hosts numerous educational pages and groups dedicated to English language learning, providing valuable resources, tips, and language exercises. Additionally, the support for video content on Facebook allows learners to access instructional videos and subtitled materials, facilitating improvement in listening and comprehension skills. However, it's crucial for learners to use Facebook mindfully and complement their usage with other language learning methods for a comprehensive educational experience.

Similarly, YouTube presents a valuable platform for English language learners, offering a diverse array of dedicated channels. These channels provide a wealth of resources, including lessons, tutorials, and interactive videos aimed at enhancing listening and speaking skills, expanding grammar knowledge, and refining pronunciation. Learners can leverage this vast repository of content to tailor their language learning experience, gaining exposure to various accents, expressions, and real-life communication scenarios. The interactive nature of many YouTube language learning channels also facilitates active engagement and practical application of newly acquired skills, contributing to a well-rounded language education. Combining YouTube resources with other learning methods can further optimize the effectiveness of the language learning journey.

In a similar vein, Instagram serves as another valuable platform for language learners. By following Instagram accounts dedicated to English language learning, users can access a curated stream of content that includes vocabulary exercises, grammar tips, idioms, and other language-related materials. This curated content not only assists learners in enhancing their reading and writing skills but also provides a visually engaging and bite-sized approach to language learning. The platform's visual nature allows for a dynamic learning experience, combining educational content with the appeal of multimedia. Integrating Instagram into language learning efforts, alongside other methods, can offer a well-rounded and interactive approach to skill development.

'Through pedagogical use of social media, educators and learners are given the opportunity to engage with Indigenous communities around the world, access a myriad of resources not previously available, and engage in their education in a new medium' (Kitchenham, 2013, 351- 364).

Social media platforms, through features like reels, shorts, and videos, wield both positive and negative influences on language learning. On the positive side, these bite-sized visual snippets offer a glimpse into real-life language usage, incorporating colloquial expressions and cultural subtleties that textbooks may overlook. The amalgamation of auditory and visual elements in short videos enhances listening skills and comprehension, catering to various accents and speech patterns. The inherently engaging nature of social media content fosters a positive attitude towards language learning, transforming it into an enjoyable and consistent practice. Moreover, the cultural richness embedded in videos enhances cultural awareness, providing learners with valuable insights into the lifestyles and traditions of native speakers. However, to reap these benefits, learners must approach social media mindfully, striking a balance with structured language learning methods and ensuring exposure to diverse language registers for a comprehensive language education.

Consistent posting and updates on social media wield dual influences on language learning, contingent upon individuals' approach to their online activities. On a positive note, regular social media engagement can serve as a constructive avenue for language development. The act of posting

necessitates users to articulate thoughts in writing, fostering improved grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing proficiency through continuous practice. The immediacy of feedback on social platforms, where friends or language exchange partners may offer corrections or suggestions, enriches the learning experience. Additionally, active participation in online communities exposes learners to diverse language styles, vocabulary, and cultural nuances, enhancing their linguistic repertoire. The informal language prevalent in social media posts further provides exposure to colloquial expressions and slang, complementing more formal educational settings. Furthermore, the sense of accountability generated by sharing one's language learning journey motivates learners to maintain consistency and progress.

Baldwin suggests that social media can be both a friend and a foe for natural language processing. While he considers social media a cause for "spelling inconsistencies, the free-form adoption of new terms, and regular violations of English grammar norms," he refers to the advantage of "lexical normalization" in the same linguistic setting (Baldwin, n.d., 58-59).

Social media, while offering a plethora of advantages, poses several challenges to language learning. One notable drawback is the prevalence of informal language, characterized by abbreviations, emojis, and slang, which can hinder learners in developing a nuanced understanding of proper grammar and vocabulary usage. Additionally, the text-based nature of social media communication limits interaction, depriving learners of the essential nuances present in spoken language, such as tone and pronunciation. The platforms are rife with inaccurate information and linguistic errors, potentially confusing language learners. Furthermore, the addictive nature of social media and the associated time consumption can divert learners from structured language study, impacting their focus and concentration. Moreover, the limited exposure to cultural diversity on these platforms may result in a narrow understanding of language and hinder the ability to engage with various accents, dialects, and cultural contexts. In navigating these challenges, learners must exercise discernment, supplementing their social media exposure with more comprehensive and structured language learning resources.

In conclusion, this research offers a nuanced understanding of the evolving relationship between social media and English language learning. By recognizing both the positive contributions and potential challenges, educators can harness the potential of these platforms to cultivate a more immersive and effective language learning experience in today's interconnected digital landscape. The study underscores the importance of adapting language education strategies to leverage the benefits of social media while mitigating potential drawbacks. Ultimately, a well-informed integration of social media in language learning can lead to enhanced proficiency, cultural competence, and a more engaging educational experience. While social media offers unprecedented opportunities for language exposure and interaction, careful consideration must be given to mitigate potential distractions and language quality concerns. Critics may find grammatical errors and misspelled words challenging, for the younger generation growing up in the era of pervasive social media, this evolving dialect represents the language of the times and is likely to endure.

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