

Roles of Social Media in Improving English Language Skills: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The escalating global significance of the English language is becoming increasingly pronounced, propelled notably by the pervasive influence of social media platforms and technological advancements facilitating global interconnectedness. This study presents a systematic review aimed at investigating the efficacy of social media in augmenting English language proficiency. Analyzing a corpus of 43 scholarly articles sourced from diverse academic journals spanning the period from 2014 to 2023 and representing various geographical regions including Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, the research unveiled that 79% of the examined literature asserted the effectiveness of social media in enhancing English language skills encompassing reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and communicative competence. Conversely, 21% of the surveyed articles posited that social media's impact on English language development was negligible. These findings offer pertinent insights for language educators deliberating the integration of social media tools into language pedagogy for the purpose of fostering linguistic proficiency.

Keywords: English, social media, Internet, learning

Introduction

Educators are consistently exploring efficacious strategies for imparting and refining fundamental life competencies. The integration of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has become pervasive within educational frameworks. Concurrently, with the exponential proliferation of ICT, the utilization of social media platforms has experienced a substantial expansion, reaching approximately 93.3% of the global online populace (Moran, 2023, August 8). Aligned with this technological advancement and the ubiquity of social media, language proficiency emerges as a pivotal determinant for effective communication. English, being among the most extensively utilized languages worldwide across domains such as commerce, academia, entertainment, scholarly discourse, travel, and hospitality, assumes a central role. This research endeavors to specifically investigate the efficacy of social media in augmenting English language skills. Employing a systematic review methodology, the study scrutinizes literature concerning the enhancement of English language proficiency through the utilization of social media by its practitioners.

Research objective

1. To investigate if social media helps to improve English language skills.

Literature review

English learning

The imperative of attaining proficiency in the English language has witnessed a consistent escalation. The necessity to acquire English proficiency is propelled by a multitude of factors, notably encompassing Global Communication, Education, Career Opportunities, Travel and Tourism, Access to Information, Cultural Exchange, Science and Technology, Personal Development, Social and Professional Networking, and E-Global Citizenship. English stands as a global lingua franca in the contemporary era, and its mastery confers both pragmatic and personal advantages, spanning heightened career prospects to enriched cultural and intellectual engagements. This proficiency serves as a conduit, facilitating access and generating opportunities across diverse realms. Within this research, the author endeavors to investigate the impact of enhancing English language skills through social networks and internet connections.

Language learning theory

Language acquisition becomes more effective when aligned with the fundamental principles of learning theory. These theories, which elucidate how humans acquire, develop, and employ language, serve as frameworks for researchers, educators, and language learners to comprehend the intricate processes and factors involved in language acquisition. Several prominent language learning theories can be outlined as follows:

Behaviorist Theory: Associated with B.F. Skinner, this theory asserts that language acquisition is a product of conditioning and reinforcement, emphasizing imitation, repetition, and the reinforcement of correct responses (Skinner, 1985).

Cognitive Theory: Developed by theorists like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, cognitive theories underscore the role of cognitive development in language learning, highlighting the importance of processes such as memory, attention, and problem-solving (Johan et al., 2023).

Interactionist Theory: Theories from Jerome Bruner and Michael Halliday propose that language acquisition stems from innate cognitive abilities and interaction with the environment, emphasizing social interaction, communication, and meaningful contexts (Bruner, 1983).

Social Learning Theory: Developed by Albert Bandura, this theory emphasizes observational learning and social modelling in language acquisition, suggesting that individuals learn by observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1971).

Input Hypothesis: Stephen Krashen's theory argues that language learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to input slightly above their current level of competence, underscoring the importance of comprehensible input in language learning (Krashen, 1981).

Connectionist Theory: This theory, also known as the connectionist model, views language learning as a result of neural networks and the strengthening of connections between neurons, focusing on statistical learning and pattern recognition (Siemens, 2005).

Sociocultural Theory: Developed by Lev Vygotsky, this theory highlights the social and cultural context of language learning, emphasizing the role of cultural tools, social interaction, and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1962).

Information Processing Theory: Viewing language learning as a cognitive process involving the encoding, storage, and retrieval of linguistic information, these theories concentrate on memory, attention, and cognitive processes in language acquisition (Nadir et al., August 2019).

Constructionist Theory: Associated with linguists like Ronald Langacker, this theory posits that language is constructed through the interaction of form and meaning, emphasizing the importance of patterns and constructions in language acquisition (Wander et al., 2020).

It's crucial to note that these theories are not mutually exclusive, and researchers often draw from multiple theories to gain a comprehensive understanding of language acquisition. Additionally, the attitude of learners, reflecting emotions, feelings, the learning environment, and materials, among other factors, plays a pivotal role and is categorized as an affective factor (Dornyei, 1994).

Social media users inherently experience various elements of language learning principles, such as language imitation (Behaviorist Theory, Social Learning Theory), social interaction (Cognitive Theory, Interactionist Theory, Sociocultural Theory, Constructionist Theory), exposure to new language inputs from different sources (Input Hypothesis), and connection with others (Connectionist Theory). This study delves into the effectiveness of social media in improving English language skills, recognizing the alignment with these foundational language learning principles.

Social media

Among the earliest social media platforms were Bolt (1997), Friendster (2002), MySpace (2003), LinkedIn (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), and Twitter (2006). The proliferation of social media usage gained momentum with the advent of smartphones. The IBM Simon Personal Communicator, introduced in 1994 for email and fax communication, marked an early step. However, Apple's launch of the iPhone in 2007 for mainstream users, featuring touchscreen interaction, led to a surge in smartphone usage, subsequently popularizing social media. This convergence of social media and interpersonal connections emerged as an effective means of exchanging information and learning tools, coinciding with the emergence of the learning theory of Connectivism around the same time (Siemens, 2005).

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, social media emerged as a pivotal learning platform. This study aimed to scrutinize research documents and studies conducted by scholars in the realm of English language learning during this period.

Material

The research comprised a total of 43 scholarly articles spanning the period from 2014 to 2023, all centered around the theme of English language acquisition. Secondary data were obtained through various sources including Google, Google Scholar, and SpiSpace websites. The predominant trend in the research findings indicated that social media serves as a valuable instrument, contributing significantly to the enhancement of users' English language proficiency. Out of the 43 review papers, 34 explicitly underscored the positive impact on English language development. This translates to 79% of the review papers affirming the

benefits and advancements in English proficiency facilitated by the utilization of social media. Conversely, the remaining nine articles posited that social media's contribution to English language skill improvement was insubstantial, accounting for 21%. It is noteworthy that primary studies were conducted across diverse regions including Asia, Africa, and Europe, showcasing the widespread adoption of social media as a platform for global interaction.

Social media encompasses online platforms and websites that empower individuals, groups, and organizations to generate, share, and exchange information, ideas, and multimedia content with a broad, often global audience. These platforms facilitate interaction and engagement among users through diverse communication tools and features. Modern communication heavily relies on social media, playing a crucial role in connecting people, disseminating news and information, and fostering online communities. Noteworthy social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Reddit, Pinterest, Telegram, Discord, WhatsApp, and WeChat.

The utilization of social media can significantly enhance English language skills, offering valuable opportunities for practice and access to diverse features and content that create a more effective and relaxed learning environment. Research by Alghamdi & Sabir (2019) indicates that English learners hold positive perceptions regarding the utilization of social media platforms to enhance language proficiency. Mittal (2016) observes the positive influence of social media on recreational reading (Fadda, 2020), further emphasizing its impact on everyday English usage. Several studies reinforce the notion that social media substantially contributes to the enhancement of English language skills. Gideon & Akpomuje (2020) affirm its beneficial role, spanning reading, writing, speaking, and listening, corroborated by research from Erzad & Suciati (2018) and Iswahyuni (2021). Additionally, social media aids in vocabulary improvement (Pitaloka et al., 2020), grammar, and communicative language proficiency, fostering improved fluency and proficiency through English communication practice.

Social media platforms foster authentic language usage, supporting students in enhancing grammar knowledge and writing abilities. Beyond these aspects, social media contributes to the development of reading, writing, vocabulary, listening, speaking, and grammar skills, as evidenced by research from Iswahyuni (2021) and Ahmed (2020). Moreover, it enables teachers to stay connected with peers, staying abreast of developments in their fields and facilitating the adoption of innovative teaching practices.

Furthermore, social media serves as a creative tool for language learning and critical thinking, potentially enhancing writing skills, as demonstrated by studies from Desta et al. (2021) and Ariantini et al. (2021). Suswati et al. (2019) emphasize that social media assists in improving creative writing.

Consistent findings across various studies (Khan et al., 2019; Alghamdi & Sabir, 2019; Noor et al., 2021) highlight the role of social media in enhancing English proficiency. Malik et al. (2022) discovered that social media plays a crucial role in the development of English writing skills among EFL university students in Indonesia. Similar findings were reported in Tunisia's EFL university student population by Lakhali (2022), while Al-Jarrah et al.'s (2019) study in Malaysia emphasized the significant role of social media in improving English language writing performance at the school level.

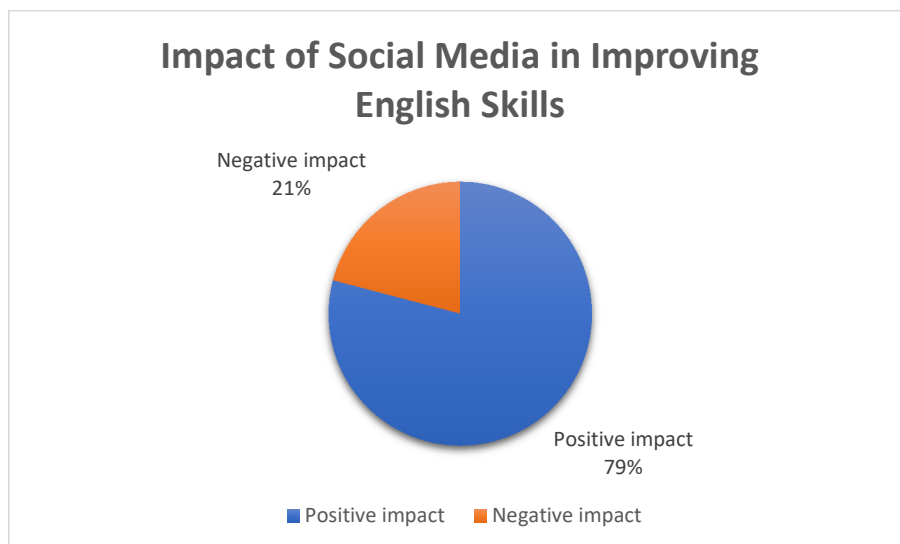
Sukri et al.'s (2018) study in Malaysia indicates that social media sources, such as Facebook and blogs, are valuable for improving English language skills, particularly in reading, writing, and vocabulary development. Iswahyuni's (2021) research in Morocco highlights substantial improvement in various EFL learners' English language skills, covering reading, writing, vocabulary, listening, speaking, and grammar. Samuel & Pulizala (2020) found that social media aids in improving reading, writing, vocabulary acquisition, and motivation for language learners in India. Faizi et al. (2014) noted an improvement in listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in foreign languages through the use of social media, though Oos et al. (2020) reported mixed findings, indicating positive perceptions of reading and writing skills but lower perceptions of listening and speaking skills among students.

A study by Mohammad et al. (2023) in Saudi Arabia recommends integrating social media for teaching writing skills. A systematic review with meta-analysis conducted by John & Yunus (2021), involving 36 peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2021, concluded that the integration of social media improves speaking skills and reduces speaking-related anxiety. This finding aligns with Poramathikul et al.'s (2020) research. Arif's (2019) study in Sri Lanka found that students hold positive attitudes towards using social media for English language learning. Research by Mahroof (2019) in Indonesia, Dirjal & Ghabanchi (2020) in Iraq, and Suprato (2020) in Indonesia consistently demonstrates the benefits of using social media for enhancing speaking and listening skills.

Using Facebook positively impacts the development of writing skills in English as a foreign language, improving vocabulary and reducing students' shyness, as noted by Klimova & Pikhart (2019). Abdul & Rafeena (2020) found that Facebook and YouTube help learners enhance their English language skills, including grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Social media also serves as a motivational tool for students to enhance their English language skills through networks, as highlighted by Bano & Zaman (2020). Another advantage is the opportunity to learn new vocabulary and exchange ideas, as indicated by Daud et al. (2021).

Frequent social media usage by EFL students and teachers significantly impacts the improvement of speaking skills in English, as revealed by Namaziandost & Nasri (2019). Additionally, the findings of Alghamdi & Sabir (2019) underscore the improvement of speaking and writing skills through the use of social networks for message exchanges on platforms like Facebook, email, and computer media, highlighting their effectiveness. Ahmed's (2020) study with Yemeni EFL learners demonstrated that social media contributes to improving English proficiency, particularly in writing and reading skills, vocabulary expansion, and communication with English speakers. Namaziandost & Nasri (2019) reiterated the positive impact of frequent social media usage on speaking skills in English. The positive impact of social media in improving English skills can be seen in the pie chart in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Impact of Social Media on English Skill Improvement



Source: Data of 43 reviewed articles, 34 mentioned positive impact, and nine documents mentioned negative impact on English skills improvement.

Negative impact of social media on English skill improvement

Studies have also suggested that social media may not significantly benefit the improvement of English skills; rather, it may have a potentially adverse effect. The utilization of social media has been linked to a detrimental impact on students' writing abilities, notably impeding their proficiency in composing descriptive texts, as outlined by Salikin and Tahir in 2017. Although no substantial discrepancy in achievement was observed between the two groups, Slim and Hafedh reported a slight enhancement in students' proficiency subsequent to their participation in a course in 2019. Concerning the augmentation of English language skills, social media has been shown to be ineffective, as indicated by Mittal in 2016 and Mahroof in 2019.

Furthermore, certain studies suggest that the predominant influence of social media on English language skills tends to be adverse. This negativity arises from the prevalence of informal and colloquial writing styles, along with non-standard language usage, as noted by Natsir et al. in 2023 and Sha & Pathan in 2018. Additionally, the frequent use of abbreviated and incorrect terms has been observed, leading to detrimental effects on grammar and spelling. Moreover, the impact of social media appears to diminish enthusiasm for English learning, as proposed by Fadda in 2020.

In the specific context of Kurdish EFL learners, social media was found to negatively affect spelling and academic writing skills, as identified by Nuri et al. in 2021. Additionally, the utilization of English on social media platforms often deviates from accepted standards, particularly regarding grammar and spelling, as emphasized by Ojetunde in 2019. The overall negative influence, in contrast to positive effects, of social media on the enhancement of English skills, is depicted in Figure 1 above.

Social Media Apps

Numerous social media applications are currently accessible, including email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Reddit, Pinterest, Telegram, Discord, WhatsApp, and WeChat. Individuals utilize these applications to engage

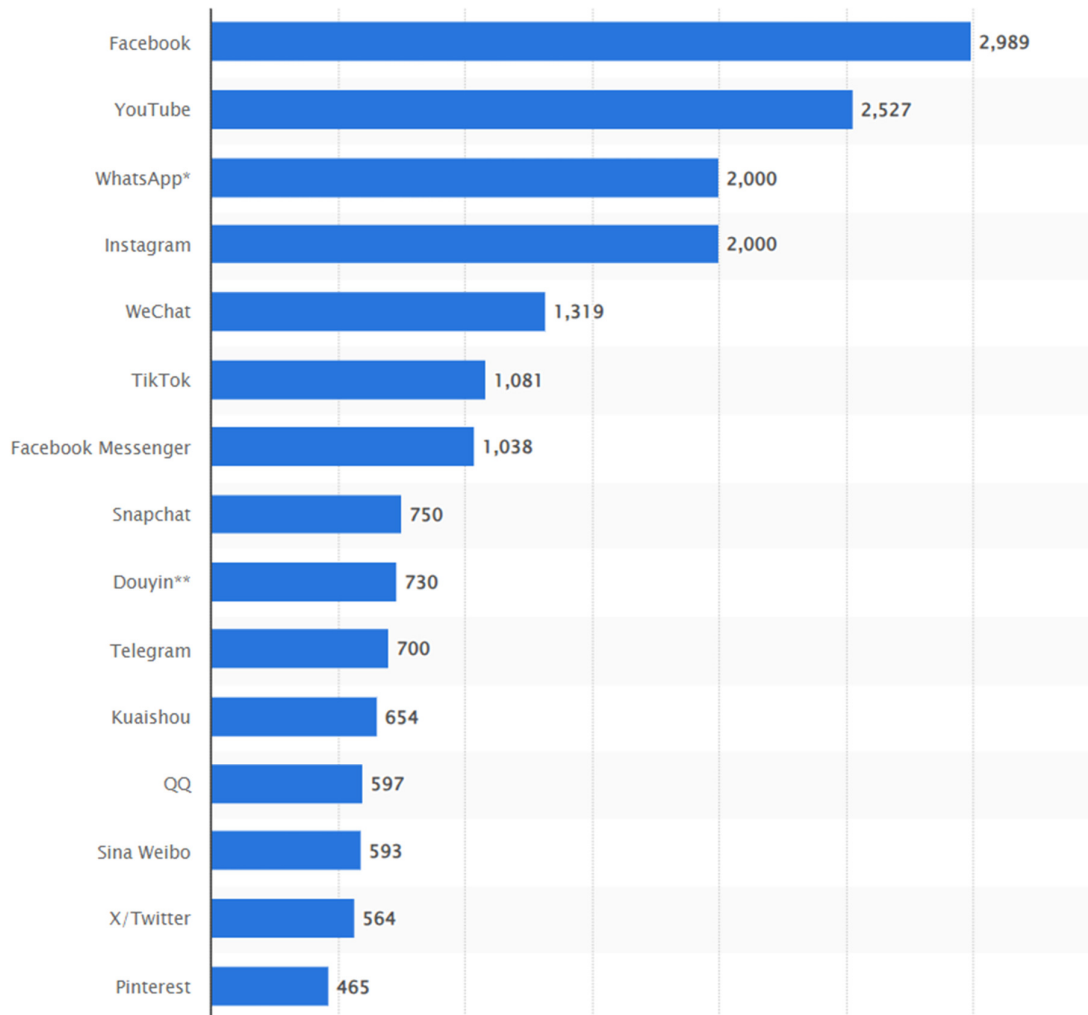
with friends and family, connect with businesses, and interact with colleagues in professional settings. Upon reviewing documents related to social media usage, researchers consistently highlighted the following apps as the most frequently mentioned:

Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, email, WhatsApp, and Twitter

The following Figure 2, highlights the social media and number of users of the platform.

Most popular social networks worldwide as of July 2023, ranked by number of monthly active users (in millions)

Figure 2. Social Media and Number of Users in July 2023 (in Million)



Source: Statista. Retrieved on 23 October, 2023. Website:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

As per information from the Colorlib website, 4.9 billion individuals, constituting 62.5% of the world's population, are Internet users. Within this group, 4.62 billion people engage with social media, accounting for 58.4% of the global social media user population. Social media is widely

utilized by internet users, with 93.3% of the worldwide online population actively using social media platforms. Among the adult population globally (aged 18 and above), 74.8% are reported to be social media users, as of August 8, 2023, according to Moran.

Findings

The research encompassed an examination of 43 primary studies conducted between 2014 and 2023. Over the ten-year span, findings from these documents revealed that 34 studies emphasized the enhancement of English skills. This signifies that 79% of the investigation supports the efficacy of social media in improving English language proficiency. On the contrary, nine research papers indicated a lack of effectiveness in utilizing social media for English skill improvement, constituting 21% of the primary studies.

In summary, despite a limited number of studies pointing to a negative impact on language improvement, the overarching consensus from the primary studies suggests that the use of social media has a positive influence on English language learning. This indicates that social media can be effectively integrated into classroom teaching with advantages for English language instruction (Agustrianita, 2017).

Discussion

Social media platforms align with various principles from language learning theories, encompassing Behaviorist Theory, Cognitive Theory, Interactionist Theory, Social Learning Theory, Input Hypothesis, Connectionist Theory, Sociocultural Theory, Information Processing Theory, and Constructionist Theory. Concurrently, the widespread usage of social media is evident, with 93.3% of the global online population and 74.8% of the global adult population over 18 engaging in social media (Moran, 2023, August 8). This widespread adoption makes communication more accessible among people worldwide. Among the 43 documents scrutinized, 79% indicated that social media effectively contributes to language improvement. It facilitates advancements in reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Erzad & Suciati, 2018; Iswahyuni, 2021), vocabulary enhancement (Pitaloka et al., 2020), as well as grammar and communicative language proficiency. Only 21% of the reviewed documents expressed reservations about the use of social media in language skills, citing concerns such as informal writing styles and non-standard language usage, as noted by Natsir et al. in 2023 and Sha & Pathan in 2018. However, the prevailing trend highlights the predominant positive impact of social media on improving English skills. Despite ethical restrictions in some schools prohibiting mobile phones and social media in classrooms in Delhi (TimesofIndia, 2023), and UNESCO advocating for a global ban on mobile phones in schools (Butler & Farah, 2023), empirical studies consistently affirm the efficacy of social media, particularly on mobile phones, in facilitating language improvement.

Conclusion

Social media is useful in shaping language improvement in reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary development. The study concluded that 79% of the document supports the benefit of social media in English language improvement.

Implication

1. Social media could be used effectively in English language improvement.
2. With the sheer size of the user, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram could be more suitable as the majority of users use these platforms.

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