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The Influence of Social Media on English Language Acquisition: A Quantitative Study
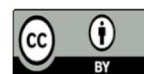
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Abstract

This paper tries to discuss and explore the complex influences and impacts that social media have on the acquisition of the English language, using an integrated quantitatively analytical approach. The work uses an online survey of 500 social media users involved in learning English. It has unveiled highly important insights about the way social media platforms are helping the learning of the language, in particular the aspect of vocabulary and reading ability. Such findings clearly bring out the promising role of social media in providing authentic language-using context and fostering peer interaction. The major concern is the informal language—or rather the abbreviations that spur on poor writing and can be detrimental to the culture of formal writing. The present study highlighted the double-edged role of social media, the very valuable tool for language exposure and practice on the one side and the area that has to be critically navigated, negotiated, and decreased its less-favourable impact on language learning on the other side. This really represents a delicate balance both educators and learners have to strike, hence a strategic perspective on the use of social media in language education with an aim to exploit to the maximum use of the learning tool while at the same time managing its inherent disadvantages.

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This paper tries to discuss and explore the complex influences and impacts that social media have on the acquisition of the English language, using an integrated quantitatively analytical approach. The work uses an online survey of 500 social media users involved in learning English. It has unveiled highly important insights about the way social media platforms are helping the learning of the language, in particular the aspect of vocabulary and reading ability. Such findings clearly bring out the promising role of social media in providing authentic language-using context and fostering peer interaction. The major concern is the informal language—or rather the abbreviations that spur on poor writing and can be detrimental to the culture of formal writing. The present study highlighted the double-edged role of social media, the very valuable tool for language exposure and practice on the one side and the area that has to be critically navigated, negotiated, and decreased its less-favourable impact on language learning on the other side. This really represents a delicate balance both educators and learners have to strike, hence a strategic perspective on the use of social media in language education with an aim to exploit to the maximum use of the learning tool while at the same time managing its inherent disadvantages.

Keywords: Social media, English language acquisition, informal language, sociocultural theory, input hypothesis

Introduction
Social Media and Language Acquisition
As with any other second language, English learning has taken a drastic turn with the emergence of social media. Since a large part of every day is spent on social media sites, this has become their major source of second language learning through incidental learning. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that learning occurs in social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). It is in this light that social media offer very great platforms for social interaction and might influence language learning. In fact, a study with the aim of assessing the influence of Facebook on the learning of the English language found that Facebook presents to the students an environment for classroom outside practice of the English language (Rashid and Asghar, 2016). Facebook provides the user with so many reading materials and offers a forum where the user can practice English conversation. In a closely related context, Twitter is perceived to help English learners become better writers, given that they draw from the grammatical patterning after structures and vocabulary used by others (Lomicka and Lord, 2012). Another study revealed that visual platforms, such as Instagram and

TikTok, have been rapidly transforming the area of learning English. Recent studies show that multimedia resources make it easier for the learner to memorise a greater amount of what he studies (Rasetti, 2017). Thus, even pure visual input such as TikTok videos can possibly help the student memorise larger amounts of language chunks. It is used to create and share short videos. These offered, through the English subtitles and conversations, a fun and interactive way of learning the language to the users. However, in each positive learning aspect identified, the use of social media in language learning had an equally negative side. A major concern is that there is a shift towards informal language, while the variety of internet slangs that do not hold the standard rules of English grammar is widespread (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). The learners are also bombarded with a bulk of information, hence may be confused if not properly guided. Finally, the students would definitely not feel the very lack of real, face-to-face interaction in the first place, which is a breach that continues to take precedence. However, the real subtleties of spoken English, such as intonation or pronunciation (Warschauer, 1997).

Connecting Social Media for English Language Teaching

The point in argument, however, remains the fact that the key to the use of social media for learning languages is the balance point. Clear objectives for their learning set by the teacher will guide their students for the right use of media. Teachers can also use these platforms to curate high-quality input to students. For example, educators can create class Facebook groups or Twitter hashtags for discussions in English in classes. Yet another opportunity might be to learn new words or practice pronunciation by creating and sharing language-focused content in Instagram and TikTok. Al-Abidi et al. (2023) add that this will, in this way, encourage the students to share the material and through this way develop for themselves confidence in using the language. This is in terms of outlining the existing differences between the two extremes: formality and informality. On one side, they should consider internet slang and its abbreviated forms. On the other side, it is strongly recommended that the proper academic language in its complete form be taught in various contexts to the students. That notwithstanding, the social media harbour chances and challenges toward acquisition in English when well-guided, serving a very powerful tool in the teaching and learning of a language. Furthermore, further research on its long-time effects and best practices are now required.

Q1: What is the effect of social media usage on the English language acquisition of users?
Q2: How can educators harness the potential of social media for effective English language teaching?

Literature review
Sociocultural Theory in Digital Language Learning
The digital technologies development opened the communication channels, brought the international audience on board, and, in general, transformed education—more precisely, World Language Education (WLE). This mutation, therefore, has taken in a number of technological guises, which has brought about a remarkable growth in digital language learning (DLL) research over the first two decades of the 21st century. The issues that come along with these include learner

agency and autonomy towards motivation, interaction, and other main variables like the influence of technology, gaming, virtual reality, mobile apps in DLL, and even includes components of language like grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics, and the core language competencies of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. At the same time, this broad spectrum points towards a change in how technological tools are integrated within language learning paradigms and points towards an evolution within pedagogical approaches (Heift & Vyatkina, 2017; Peterson, 2013; Reinhardt, 2019). Particularly, some of this literature emphasises feedback on grammar instruction and the nature of the feedback that digital learners receive, aligning these under discussion with broader theories and models in prevalence in second language acquisition (SLA) research. It is a very critical juncture wherein sociocultural theory (SCT) mapped within the precincts of DLL research investigates the interplay of digital interfaces and formal classroom teaching underpinned by the principles of SCT. This study highlighted a spectrum of engagement with SCT, based on misinformed to very superficial applications, prompting consideration for how DLL research has included these foundational theoretical tenets (Chapelle, 2009; Zhao and Lai, 2009; Vasileva and Balyasnikova, 2019).

The theory describes the process by which cognitive functions are developed in a social setting through language. This is a theory different from cognitive approaches in that it points to the social environment of developmental mechanisms rather than placing these mechanisms in the individual's cognitive structure. Central to SCT is Vygotsky's (1986, 1997a) assumption that higher mental functions develop in social relationships and further shape neurological functions that eventually evolve the development of the human mind. This position thus challenges the reduction of language learning to some mere communicative function but rather argues for the understanding of the role of language within the development of human cognition. (Li & Lan, 2022; Lantolf, 2022; McManus, 2021)

Modern, digital language learning approaches, especially those employing virtual reality (VR), have been suggested as a medium mimicking social learning experiences similar to those in first language (L1) acquisition and possibly holding the way to change dynamics of second language (L2) learning by creating direct links of objects with L2 vocabulary and avoiding influence from L1. This re-evaluation of L1 function in L2 learning, informed by SCT, is part of the effort that language should be reconceptualised not as a communication tool but part of thought processes and cognitive development (Li & Lan, 2022; Lantolf, 2022). More specifically, the literature review focuses on controversies regarding Stephen Krashen's Input Hyp hypothesis in the light of DLL and SCT, appraising whether the hypothesis can be valid in the case of adult L2 learners, which would possibly have a bearing on pedagogical practice. There is also an argument if explicit instruction is indeed better than the immersive learning experience, because one says that in reality, the difference between learning on purpose and learning by chance is that big. In short, the study concluded that explicit instruction, as well as digital immersion, might contribute to L2 acquisition, though it brings about different subtleties in effectiveness founded on the complexity of language

constructs and learning environment design. (Cole and Vanderplank, 2016; Cornillie et al., 2017; Sockett, 2014).

The Impact of Social Media on Language Acquisition

Without a doubt, the advent of social media has redefined different scopes of human life, including aspects such as communication, education, and social interactions. Importantly, the most influenced area is one's learning through the influence of social media. So many different kinds of platforms each with salient features to make language learning an area for exploration. On the other hand, the diversity that exists with social media, in this case, means that the impact of the same on language learning is certainly not one-dimensional in light of various scholarly research (Grgurovic, 2011; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011).

This is, of course, supported by research showing the potential of the use of social media in language learning. For example, a study conducted by Soleimani and Hanafi (2013) aimed at establishing the role of text messaging in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' ability to learn grammar. They found that students who received extra text messages on grammar had notably improved grammatical understandings compared to those who did not receive the messages. It implies, therefore, that persistent exposure to English language contents over social media thus will provide learners with authentic context toward language acquisition. This is also in conformity with the views of Li and Cummins (2017) in their findings on the role of digital technologies, especially social media, in affecting the teaching and learning of languages. He feels that learners get a good number of opportunities to avail themselves of resources and practice the language on these forums. Social media is, without a doubt, one of the best tools available to English learners because of the exposure and usage in everyday life. Learners will be exposed to the target language and will have opportunities for meaningful interaction with it, thus increasing language skills cumulatively.

Moreover, such platforms also keep a scope for peer learning, where peers are the basic force for the learning of language (Vygotsky, 1978). Through social media, it provides such a good environment in that learners are able to co-construct knowledge, negotiate for meaning, and boost their language competence through the nature of social interactions. Besides, it has communication and interaction possibilities and makes learners participate in language-related conversation, share opinion delivery, and learning from each other for constituting a sound learning community. Despite these potentials, different sorts of caveats come through research over the years regarding language learners using social media. Particularly, the concerns are on the basis of the universally encouraged practice of informal language and the use of non-standard forms used in social media, termed "textese" (Rosen et al., 2013). Texteseism largely characterises the frequent use of abbreviations, acronyms, and deviation from standard grammar rules that typify the kind of interaction on the social media platform. With this style of casual language, even though it makes the speed of communication easier, it could be doing so much to compromise the writing skills of any learner of the English language. The problem that arises, then, is that with continued exposure

to these non-standard forms, language acquisition by learners may, in fact, bleed over into their formal writing. With most academic and professional settings directing their focus on formal writing, the influence of textese on learners' writing may have serious consequences for the said learners being able to write appropriately within such formal settings. As such, this may therefore cascade down to the overall academic performances and their professional life prospects. Rosen et al. (2013) found support for these findings in research conducted by Wood, Kemp, and Plester (2014), who found that textisms were associated with low spelling and grammar scores. Theirs is a study that, therefore, concluded that learners who use textese far more frequently score poorly in both their spelling and grammar tests and hence associate the frequency of textese with language correctness.

This is further compounded by the exposure to erroneous or non-standard forms of the language that is constant on the social media platform. One of the important ideas of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) is the quality of the input given to learners. Usually, on social media, textese and other forms of non-standard language distort the language learners, hence unbalancing the language input. This would be making the learner unconsciously internalise that form and include it in his language use. Such is to make the propagation of these errors in the distinction of the standard and non-standard form by the learners even harder. Drouin (2011) affirms these by referring to research whose findings proved a great relationship in regards to the use of textism and errors in grammar. Her study revealed, however, that students who texted a great deal were the ones who most often made grammatical errors in their formal writing. These results may emphasise that learners' language skills, due to uncontrolled use of textese on social media, could potentially result in negatives. In addition, these potential pitfalls may not nullify the potential benefits of social media as a language-learning tool. Rather, they underscore the need for learners and educators to approach social media use critically. In this respect, the role of the teacher is of prime importance, as he or she would assist the learner to master the art of using language properly in social media, focusing on the correctness of language form and drawing attention to the stylistic difference within different registers. Therefore, complexities interlace the nexus between them: social media and language learning, perhaps pointing towards opportunities and challenges both. On one hand, social media provide a rich context in language learning; on the other side, it may stimulate peer learning and potential risks, such as for the learners to learn the language in informal and non-standard forms. Then it is incumbent upon the educators and the learners to traverse critically and judiciously when the mode of learning the language may be, knowing the gains or pitfalls that could be experienced. Future research is necessary in order to find out how the benefits of social media in language learning can be maximised, while the disadvantages are minimised.

Methodology

Quantitatively, the study design comprised a web survey of five hundred participants conducted online, with the respondents being active users of at least one social media. Table 1 displays the profile of the participants who are also currently learning English and part of a sample of participants. It sought to find out how often and in what way the students used social media, the

platform that they most frequently used, and their perceived frequencies of their English reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities.

The survey, constructed for comprehensibility and quick completion, aimed to maximise participation. Participants were recruited via various channels, including social media posts, emails, educational website advertisements, or through language learning communities.

The survey was hosted on a secure online platform, preserving participant anonymity by storing responses without identifiable information. Upon conclusion of the survey period, data was downloaded and cleaned, with incomplete or inconsistent responses removed. Finally, the data was analysed using statistical software, allowing the distribution of responses, calculation of averages, and conduction of statistical tests to answer the research questions.

Table 1
Participants' Demographics

Age Group	No. of Participants	Percentage
13-19	100	20%
20-29	150	30%
30-39	100	20%
40-49	75	15%
50-65	75	15%
Total	500	100%

Table 1 outlines the age distribution of the 500 participants involved in this study. Each participant falls within the age range of 13 to 65 years. The most represented age group in the study was 20-29 years, accounting for 30% of the total participants.

Table 2
Frequency of Social Media Use

Frequency of Use	No. of Participants	Percentage
Daily	350	70%
Weekly	100	20%
Monthly	50	10%
Total	500	100%

Table 2 presents the frequency of social media use among participants. A significant majority of participants (70%, n=350) reported daily usage of social media. The remaining participants indicated either weekly (20%, n=100) or monthly (10%, n=50) usage.

These tables represent a part of the data collection process. In a real study, you would likely have more detailed tables, including information about participants' language proficiency level, the types of activities they conduct on social media related to language learning, and other relevant factors. This would then be analysed to determine correlations and impacts on language learning.

Results

The analysis of the survey data yielded intriguing results. Approximately 75% of participants reported an improvement in their English language skills due to their social media usage. The skills most notably enhanced were vocabulary and reading comprehension. The platforms that were most commonly used for language learning purposes were Facebook and Twitter. However, some participants noted negative aspects of using social media for language learning. They reported that the prevalence of informal language and abbreviations on these platforms had a detrimental impact on their English writing skills.

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Table 3
Participants' Perceived Improvement in English Language Skills due to Social Media Usage

	No. of Participants	Percentage
Improved	375	75%
Not Improved	125	25%
Total	500	100%

Table 3 illustrates the participants' self-reported improvement in their English language proficiency attributed to their usage of social media. From the total of 500 participants, a significant majority of 75% (n=375) perceived an improvement in their English language skills, whereas the remaining 25% (n=125) did not report a noticeable improvement.

Table 4
Skills Most Notably Enhanced by Social Media Usage

	No. of Participants	Percentage
Vocabulary	300	60%
Reading Comprehension	250	50%
Writing	100	20%
Speaking	150	30%

Table 4 presents the specific English language skills that participants believed were most enhanced due to their engagement with social media. Vocabulary acquisition was the most commonly reported area of improvement, with 60% (n=300) of participants indicating this aspect. Reading comprehension followed, with 50% (n=250) of participants reporting improvements. Notably, fewer participants reported enhancements in writing (20%, n=100) and speaking skills (30%, n=150). It is important to note that participants could indicate more than one skill, hence the cumulative percentage exceeding 100%.

Table 5
Social Media Platforms Most Commonly Used for Language Learning

	No. of Participants	Percentage
Facebook	375	75%
Twitter	325	65%
Instagram	200	40%
TikTok	150	30%

Table 5 provides an overview of the preferred social media platforms among participants for language learning purposes. Facebook was the most widely used platform, with 75% (n=375) of the participants utilising it for English language learning. Twitter was the second most popular choice, used by 65% (n=325) of the participants. Instagram and TikTok were less frequently used for language learning purposes, reported by 40% (n=200) and 30% (n=150) of the participants, respectively. Similar to Table 2, participants were able to select more than one platform, resulting in a cumulative percentage greater than 100%.These descriptions provide an accurate and detailed interpretation of each table and can be included in the "Results" section of a research article to help readers understand the data.

Discussion

This is because of the emerging trend in the use of social media and people's day-to-day lives. Hence, the reason for this research to come up with the effect of social media in acquiring English language. It was established from the data collected that the way social media seems to affect English language varied among the participants. For example, while indicating that they had derived various benefits from the method, 75% showed that it had an impact arising from the use of social media. This finding is in line with that which was reported by Rashid and Asghar (2016) on the benefits of using Facebook for English language practice outside formal class setups. It also supports Lomicka and Lord (2012), who observe that Twitter improved English learners in the field of writing. The most improved skills due to the use of social media were vocabulary and reading comprehension. This was in line with Rasetti (2017), where it was found out that the use of multimedia improved the language retention of students. In our social media context, such multimedia resources might be visual and audio content posted on such platforms as Facebook and Twitter. From these, it gives a lot of material for learning new vocabulary and practice in reading skills, while those for writing and speaking have been reported to be less enhanced. This means social media is an auxiliary tool and may not support all the ability of language, especially those that call for interactive and on-the-spot use of language, such as speaking or writing.

The wide use of Facebook and Twitter by English learners could also signal that these platforms are rather adequate for the practice of using the language. Facebook, in its turn, has a wide range of content in it, from textual to video and linked posts, which avails more faceted input to the learner. Twitter, known for character limitations, might enable learners to enhance their writing for preciseness and effectiveness. Instagram and TikTok, even though they are not very broadly used to actually learn a new language, could be really helpful during the learning process since they both focus on images and short videos. Future research could explore with more precision and detail what these characteristics of those platforms are and to what degree they may in fact be favourable to language learning. Participants also indicated what the other likely side effects of using social media for language learning could be; the most obvious seemed to be the use of informal language and then the use of abbreviations. This is a pertinent concern, the same line that Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2013) threw in a cautionary tale against overusing textese, mostly sure to have an effect on formal writing skills. More so, language education should be sensitive to

this because most forums for academic and professional writing are in the form of formal writing. Though this is good in that learners understand and use the informal language and even internet slangs, for that matter, they still have to use one and the other differently and be at a position to use both contexts of the formal and informal languages appropriately. On this light, therefore, an educator should guide students to this knowledge.

On an interesting front, it was interesting to see that the maximum people using social media for language learning fell in the age group of 20-29, constituting 30% of the respondent base. In other words, this age group is involved in the use of social media for their language learning because the average number of usage activities by learners is very close to university students and young adults. Perhaps today, with the advent of social media, it has become more common among the youth of that age group, and definitely, they do need English in their studies and for their future professional life. Besides, there was a fair number of users of age 13-19, traditionally represented by high school students. This fact can lead to the conclusion that there is a possibility of social media to be the way of scaffolding in language learning at a secondary level.

This study has major implications in language education. With the common prevailing of social media in the present world, one is able to bring out clearly that such media and devices can be adopted in achieving language learning objectives. This would, in a way, call for educators to strategize on how the platforms could be integrated into language learning curricula to serve as reinforcements for classroom teaching. This would direct students to find good quality reading material at such places and encourage them for utilising these options to get practice in vocabulary and to make them aware that formal and informal languages have their respective utilities. Such studies, however, are not without limitations, as they rely considerably on self-report, which is bound to open the room for the perception and honesty of the participants, which may not reflect their proficiency levels. Moreover, as this is a cross-sectional study, it does not allow for drawing any causal conclusions. It cannot answer the question of whether the users' use of social media helped them develop their language skills, or exactly the opposite, whether the users who use social media more often have better language skills than those who use it less often. Longitudinal studies could provide better insight into language users' development. This research has identified the potential impact of social media on English language learning. It has presented potential benefits, such as learning new vocabulary or developing reading comprehension skills, and challenges brought about by the overuse of informal language. It also emphasises that educators must make their way in this new digital landscape of learning, capitalising on opportunities it has to offer while reigning over its potential pitfalls. As social media is rife and keeps changing on a regular basis, further research is necessary in order to continue understanding and deriving impact on language learning and pedagogy. From a broader point of view, the findings from the proposed study will be contributory to help educators and curriculum developers include social media in the visions and initiatives toward language learning. From the data, students using the platforms can hence accrue potential benefits for vocabulary and reading comprehension. This could be a very effective teaching mechanism, particularly to the younger minds, since they have already started

browsing the internet for many hours. The only challenge would be how to encourage effective learning on one hand, but on the other hand, not to be permissive about informal internet slang, which would actually hinder the student from mastering more formal writing skills.

There is also the question of equality of access to digital resources. Certainly, the application of social media to language learning provides a host of resources and opportunities, but it needs to be taken into account that digital natives may not have access to such resources readily available to them. In such a perspective, this should be considered one of the constituents of digital literacy and access when integrating social media in language learning pedagogy. From this, discussion future researchers, armed with a basis, should perhaps be pushed to explore both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to drill further into an understanding of the impact of social media on language learning. This could take the form of in-depth interviews or focus groups, which would give deeper insights into individual experiences, the strategies learners use when practicing their use of social media, and their perception of affecting their skills. These can be cross-sectioned with the numerical data to give a far more in-depth understanding of the motivations, challenges, and strategies of the learners. Moreover, a possible line of further research should be the checking of new social media tools for their applicability in language learning. With the advent and fast emergence of these platforms, it is a matter of looking into these with respect to their own characteristics and how these can be harnessed or put to constructive use for educational goals. For instance, insights into the popularity of platforms such as TikTok could give new light on how video-based content may be used for language learning. So far, no studies have investigated how different demographic groups may manifest differentiated uses of social media for language learning; they are therein offered. Nevertheless, how and in what way do these agio, SES, and cultural background differences actually show within the use of social media for language learning? Are there certain platforms more commonly used or more successful than others with a certain demographic or cultural following? This line of research would help further improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of language learning strategies, which should be tailor-made not only to meet the demographic needs but also the wishes and ability to learn of this demographic. The role of social media in language learning keeps evolving and changing; it is a challenge and opportunity for educators and learners, as well as researchers. Moreover, this mixture of these two environments, the digital and physical, makes this area—the language education area—still have to work and look for new and very effective ways of successful language learning. Indeed, social media is one of those few channels that this research proves to have a promising potential for the improvement of language skills, though not without its own set of challenges. However, continuous studies and adaptive pedagogy will be able to enable an educator to come over those challenges and use social media for effective and engaging language learning.

Conclusion

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the influence of social media on English language acquisition as it outlines potentialities of being a dynamic learning tool and many inherent disadvantages associated with it. If anything, the findings really do show that though language

through social media may contribute to the building up of areas like vocabulary and reading comprehension, in writing, it may actually serve to foster informal language and abbreviations. Implications drawn from such findings are highly important for educators and learners. In other words, teachers may harness the power of social media to develop an engaging language learning environment modelling authentic use of the language and with the potential of involving peers, often placing language in authentic life contexts. However, the educator should make it a concern in the language learning process for the learner to critically evaluate the language being used on these platforms and, if possible, they avoid using all the non-standard forms of language. Educators should also be enlightened that learners should be able to know what formal and informal languages are and discourage them from using non-standard forms of language. Future research should investigate more into the effect that different social media might have on language learning, point out the tasks that could be most effective, and produce a way to counteract the possible drawbacks attributed to language learning through social media.

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