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Exploring the Impact of Social Media on English Language Learning: Opportunities and Challenges

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KEYWORDS

Social media, language learning, digital education, communication skills, educational technology, language acquisition

Abstract

This study seeks to elaborate on the influence that social media presents in the learning of the English language in Pakistan, together with the opportunities and challenges influenced by the phenomenon. The research object was to understand how media in Pakistan influence educational dynamics and language development within everyday life. The growing dominion of the English language as the lingua franca of the world would, therefore, make educators and policymakers understand the role that social media plays as host for language learning. The data collection method for this study was therefore done through a mixed-method approach across Pakistan with 30 participants from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Methods to use social media and keeping users engaged with English content were studied and presented as an effective tool for the most recent method of upgrading language skills. Finding out from our respondents further reiterated this, as a good number of them (97%) found social media helpful in improving their English language through substantial involvement with content in English and gains made in vocabulary and grammar. Quality of language, however, remains a persistent challenge amid informal styles of communication. In other words, the study suggests that while social media is an effective supplementary tool for language learning, yet at the same time, it should be used with a degree of caution within formal educational frameworks to optimise the benefits. It is precisely this research, then, that highlights strategies that could fully exploit such an educational potential while mitigating social media's weaknesses to improve English language education in Pakistan and other similar settings.

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Introduction

Continuously, improved science and technology continue to enrich the lives of human beings, promoting increased prosperity and the potential to gain a higher level of education. Notably, with the current application of modern technology, the standard of teaching second languages has drastically improved (Chau, 2021). In an increasingly digital, progress-driven world, technology has opened the doors to levels of integration into daily living previously unheard of and given

access to large data pools (Francis, 2017). Today's learners are, in a way, natives of the digital landscape. They have grown amidst technologies and their rapid evolutions. Among these technological tools, social media has become part of the technology, being a critical part of every life aspect and, most essentially, in educational contexts where they become very pivotal (Slim & Hafedh, 2019). Other social media which has equally taken communication to other levels include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and WhatsApp, just to mention but a few. This kind of digital interaction does not only make social engagements easy but also educational engagement, wherein language is the primary mode of communication. In this respect, English broadly represents the most spoken language in the world, and therefore, it is in a position not to be overlooked. This is because English is globally used as a language in communication that brings people from diverse backgrounds together in connection and participation in worldwide discourse (Ilyosovna, 2020; Getie, 2020).

The pervasiveness of English in social media platforms underlines its significance in the global discourse. It is not just the most written language but also a significant tool for communication in various fields, hence important in social media interaction (Al-Jarrah et al., 2019). Technological advancement, especially that of social media, has made the world be within reach, providing many opportunities to share knowledge (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). For the youth, social media is not a fashion but a constituent factor in their social and academic life, leading them to language learning and cultural exchange behaviors (Ittefaq et al., 2022).

Social media platforms provide networking for people with similar interests, characteristics, or even real-world affiliations, and such networks are drawn for social and professional purposes. The value of English across the globe is immense, and thus, the development to learn and master it requires much perseverance with consistent hard work. Since social media is part and parcel of a person's life these days, this exposure helps in understanding different cultures and diversified languages, thus enlightening one on language skills and knowledge on cultures.

Besides, social media give enough opportunities for the improvement of language skills, accessing massive information, interaction with native speakers, and using the language in many textual forms of blogs, tweets, and posts. Yet, they also pose challenges on how to keep the language accurate and qualitative when there is much informality in communication styles. (Amin et al., 2020). The impact of social media in learning the English language is significant across the global spectrum, and Pakistan is not any exception. It has become part of the modern-day phenomenon in educational circles and in social interactions in the country.

In Pakistan, specifically, it was observed that, despite the traditional problems associated with language education, social media has become invigorating for removing the barriers and enhancing language proficiency. It will offer realistic settings to EFL students, encourage them to practice English, and enhance their skills in speaking, reading, writing, and listening (Kausar & Awan, 2019; Khan & Maroof, 2021). The trends of communication, particularly the role social media plays in students' lives, has a significant influence on their performance and, therefore, command

of the English language (Khan & Khan, 2016; Khaliq et al., 2022). This paper therefore critically examines the role of social media in English language acquisition, capturing the promise and the mandate to effectively engage its associated challenges.

Literature Review

These theories, including Social-interactionism, Constructivism, Cooperative Learning, Web-based Learning, and Computer-generated Instructions, are the necessary hypotheses driving our research (Xiang, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Evans, 2012). Social media, by definition, is a vast subject, and as such, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' explanation. It is often defined as web-based, consumer-generated exchanges of knowledge. Social media is a collective term that accommodates numerous internet-based applications established to back up the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The term is rooted in the concept of 'sharing' (Bhatti, Saad, & Gbadebo, 2019). Very broadly, and despite the overwhelming majority and complexity of social media tools, such as that attempted by researchers like Bhatti, Saad, & Salimon (2019), and Safko & Brake (2009), the creators have systematically classified the overwhelming majority of social networking sites by their prime usage – in terms of communication, collaboration, education, and entertainment, which in turn encompasses a broad group of platforms from Facebook and Instagram to LinkedIn and YouTube.

According to Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, language acquisition is said to be driven by exposure to comprehensible input, suggesting that Iraqi individuals, through exposure stemming from their wide online presence, tend to communicate through various social media platforms, thereby increasing their proficiency in English (Bhatti, Rehman, Akram, & Shaheen, 2020; Walaski, 2013).

Vygotsky's work in the late 1970s, and more specifically his theory of social constructivism, elaborated the social nature of learning. He regarded language development as a greater intrapersonal than interpersonal learning phenomenon, vastly facilitated through the social communicative potential of media. Vygotsky, 1978, in Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002, p. 68. The Social Interactionist approach also sides with the idea that the process of language acquisition is facilitated through naturally-occurring interactions with more linguistically competent adults, through the integration of the physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions. Rudd & Lambert, 2011; Cooter & Reutzler, 2004. This rich linguistic environment is cultivated by the interactive nature of the internet, where non-native speakers engaging in online communities find themselves engaged in meaningful exchanges with native speakers, fostering significant language socialization (Black, 2005; Duff, 2002). This form of socialization goes far beyond the linguistic exchange involved; rather, it is deeply concerned with other social aspects and helps an individual navigate and internalize the complexities of the use of language in contextually rich settings (Garrett, 2008).

Not surprisingly, online gaming communities reflect this same linguistic impact of social media, with a range of studies, such as those by Pena and Hancock (2006), documenting that the most common form of social interaction among players is, in fact, positive socio-emotional interaction, even when playing a competitive game. This environment then encourages deep engagement with the language and fosters second language acquisition and autonomous learning among novice players (Thorne, 2008; Malerba, 2011). The open architecture of Web 2.0, according to Niellson

(2010 in Malerba, 2011) supports more participatory and interactive digital experiences. For example, social networking sites like Facebook, while bringing people together across the globe, also permit cultural and linguistic exchanges, and hence this demonstrates the centrality of social interaction for the process of language learning as well (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). McConnell (2000) summarizes the appeal of socialized language learning in that it enhances the understanding of ideas, encourages critical reflection, and facilitates communication in a social learning environment.

The growing influence of social media in academic practices, especially in the context of English language pedagogy, has also been evidenced through such empirical studies. A study conducted by Pearson Learning Solutions and Babson Survey Research Group in 2013 reported a significant increase of 21% from the preceding year in the adoption of social media for teaching practices in the United States, while more than three-quarters of the educators opined that their interactions with students had improved with the use of digital platforms. However, the respondents were not only using such platforms for personal reasons (70%) but also for educational purposes (41%), with Wikis and Blogs being the most popular tools for instruction activities, and Facebook for personal interactions.

The educational landscapes of not only the developed world but also the developing world, such as Pakistan, are increasingly reflecting this trend toward digital integration, with the impact of social media on English language learning being highlighted. The usage and presence of English all over social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, indicate its extreme importance in the domains of global communication as well as global education. This is because the very interactive and informal nature of this media supports dynamic exchange among peers and between students and faculty, enhancing language skills and cultural exchanges. These tools not only support the co-writing and learning processes but also serve as robust practice and exposure environments for students' language skills, allowing them to interact with peers and access varied linguistic content (Pearson Learning Solutions & Babson Survey Research Group, 2013).

In the Pakistani context, this helps in strategic application of social media in educational contexts because of traditional problems with language education. Suffice it to say that the affordances of social media are always at arm's reach and offer platforms to rise above these barriers in natural language use and exposure. This is informed by Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which postulates that second language acquisition is improved with exposure to comprehensible input; this means the diverse and wide interactions made possible through social media could make a big difference for students in the proficiency of the English language.

The literature, accordingly, refers to a dual approach in regard to social media use in language education: as an aid to formal teaching strategies and as an outlet for an informal, student-oriented approach to learning. It is, therefore, suggested that social media are not limited to the digital nativity of the modern learners or do they occur as independent elements of the changing educational needs; instead, social media has become an inalienable part of the contemporary educational approaches in Pakistan and the rest of the world. That is, the use of such digital aids is integrated into the language learning processes in such a way that it presents a new educational

model in which digital literacy is no longer second to linguistic literacy, and education becomes more and more technologically mediated as the future unfolds.

Methodology

Data collection procedure

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We purposefully selected 30 subjects from various parts of the country to be able to appreciate what kind of impact social media poses on English language learning within the context of Pakistan. This sampling has been designed to ensure that it incorporates people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds for the provision of a broad perspective of the role that social media plays in language acquisition within the Pakistani context. Our research was based on the information collected from the questionnaire, which is in appendix 1 in its summarized form. The whole purpose was to evaluate how often individuals use social media to learn English and to assess different platforms on the effectiveness of enhancing vocabulary, grammar, and language skills. Additionally, it was also an evaluation on how the users engage with the content produced in the English language on these social media platforms and how it influences them to become proficient in their language skills. To ensure that the various responses to this research question could be fully explored in all their dimensions, each response was accorded equal weight, as this could help to ensure an in-depth analysis of the various ways people in Pakistan use English through social media. This study tries to find out the facilitations and problems related to the use of social media for learning English in the Pakistani context. It is through analyzing varying perspectives that meaningful deductions are hoped to be made that could well benefit educators, learners, and policymakers seeking to optimize social media for English education in Pakistan. The study will finally be of great help for other researchers and policymakers regarding the effectiveness of social media tools in this particular setting, i.e., education in Pakistan, and may serve to support upcoming strategies or policies to further improve the learning of English through digital means.

Data Analysis

The analytical phases of the survey were based on a detailed study of responses gathered by participants in an attempt to pinpoint underlying constructs related to the impact of social media marketing on improving the English language proficiency of users and their writing style. Core objective—concretely measure and evaluate phenomena evidenced from responses. The initial process of data collection was subsequently followed by an organization and cleaning process through which data was sorted to make sure it was genuine, precise, and consistent. This process included several steps of verification of completeness of data, correcting wrong responses, and standardizing data where responses were different due to different demographics of respondents. After the preparation of data, the next step involved the application of descriptive statistics for making brief summaries of the results. This was mainly done through the calculation of percentages for measuring the extent of the participants who chose particular responses over several queries. It is in this way that responses were categorized to allow analysis in terms of different categories. The study could have possibly involved hypothesis testing as a way of reinforcing the relations between the identified variables. For example, two-way tables could be used to determine whether there were differences in the distribution of responses for changes in

variables such as age, educational level, or frequency of using social media. This way, one managed to investigate the factors underlying the perceptions and behaviors of the participants regarding the role of social media in the acquisition of languages. The use of inferential statistical models was instrumental in gauging the statistical significance of the observed patterns of data. Chi-square and t-test analysis was very important to establish whether the observed differences in responses by groups were random or whether there existed some undercurrent relationships. Finally, in the process of making meaning of this data, inferences were drawn about the research questions, where the overall impact of social media on language, particularly in writing and speaking skills, was established to be strong, considering this is what the participants were claiming.

Results

The results of our study clearly define the correlation between the use of social media and the learning process of the English language by participants. From the very first survey question, a colossal 97% of the responses recognized social media as a helpful force in their efforts at language learning. On the contrary, a very insignificant percentage of 3% recognized no important effect of social media on their English learning processes. This is reiterated further in Table 1, which outlines participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of social media in language learning.

Another investigation points out the various ways in which the participants interact with English language content. Specifically, 40% of the participants interact with English content on a very regular basis, while only 13% follow English content very rarely. The remaining 47% interact with it irregularly; they follow English infrequently, coupled with other languages, the most commonly followed second language being that of Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. This distinction is noted in Table 2, which makes up the difference in nature of language content the respondents interact with on their social media. The survey also attempted to establish the nature of certain linguistic skills that had been affected by their social media use; through the survey, it was revealed that 83% had seen an improvement in their English vocabulary and their writing skills because of their use of social media. Improvements had also been noted with regard to their use of punctuation, in which 60% had noticed changes in their use of punctuation, lending to the notion that social media transforms and influences the use of language.

Regarding linguistic preferences on social media, 77% of the participants predominantly use Urdu, while 73% use English, and a smaller fraction (7%) communicates in other languages. This highlights the multilingual nature of social media usage among the study's Pakistani cohort. The survey also assessed the prevalence of internet slang and abbreviations. Surprisingly, 53% of the respondents indicated that they rarely use slang or abbreviations, 10% reported never using them, and 40% frequently employ common internet expressions like "LOL" (laugh out loud), "GG" (good game), and "TYT" (take your time). This variety reflects the participants' differing approaches to the informal language often utilised in social media communications.

Quantitative setting of the complex role of social media in promoting English Language Learning among diversified groups within Pakistan is provided below in summary in Tables 1 and 2. The results here indicate not only the broad use of social media as a means of education but also trends of engagement with language content and the adoption of informal language forms. These detailed analyses of results will therefore touch on strategic applications that social media has in language education. The data and graphical interpretations of the data are also available in the accompanying Figures below.

Table 1
Perceived Effectiveness of Social Media in Language Learning

Response	Percentage
Beneficial	97%
No Significant Impact	3%

Table 2
Types of Language Content Engagement on Social Media

Content Type	Percentage
Primarily English	40%
Mixed Content	47%
Non-English	13%

These tables elucidate the major trends from the survey, enhancing the understanding of how participants interact with and benefit from language learning via social media in Pakistan.

Discussion

Our survey has been able to identify several aspects of how social media can influence English language learning, which finds a major role in language learning. The findings clearly indicate that the vast majority of the participants see social media as an advantage to their language learning; therefore, other advantages can also be drawn from educational and personal enjoyment. This double advantage presents a very useful opportunity for teachers and instructors of English to use such platforms innovatively and effectively for the dissemination of educational content. In addition, the learners are motivated to use such content for the development of their language skills as a supplement to textbooks and formal courses.

The findings showed that students are very interested in the use of English content on social media, as well as that in other regional languages that mirror the linguistic landscape of the setting under study. They indicated that learning vocabulary from social media has added a lot to their English vocabularies, which is evidenced by watching videos, reading comments, and contributing in discussions with English speakers. Such engagements broadened not only their vocabularies but

also positively influenced their practices of punctuation, a very central aspect in academic writing and professional life.

A key point of discussion in our survey was the prevalent use of abbreviations and slang commonly encountered in social media interactions, such as "BRB" (be right back), "TYT" (take your time), and "TTYL" (talk to you later). While these abbreviations enhance communication efficiency, it is recommended that their use be limited to informal contexts and not adopted in professional settings, where they are inconsistent with formal English standards. Moreover, the accessibility of native speakers through social media has simplified the process for English learners to enhance their language proficiency. However, in multicultural environments, switching between languages might be viewed as disrespectful, posing a challenge. Educating individuals about the rationale behind language choices may enhance acceptance and encourage engagement in language practice.

some extent informal and would not suit most, if not all, of the situations—more so if it involves formal or professional cases. It has been observed that this new way of communicating in a casual style sometimes has an influence in which wrong or nonexistent words are picked up, which could damage the language capability of new users of the English language.

While social media may prove to be a valuable tool for learning and practicing informal language, by no means should it be considered a substitute for language education. Rather, ideally, it should be considered as a supplement to language education using formal approaches. A sound policy in the use of social media for English learning might be to strike a balance between informal exposure and formal education. Great opportunities for language learning are provided by social media, but it also uncovers some pitfalls that one should tread very cautiously with. More research could clarify the balance struck between informal learning through social media and formal language education, which in turn could guide the development of integrative educational strategies.

Recommendations for Future Research

We recommend that an experimental study be carried out, comparing a sample of the population using social media in learning English and another using traditional educational processes. Such an investigation would give extensive insights into whether or not the effectiveness of social media in learning a language is successful. Moreover, recording the language development over time, for instance, through recordings or written work, gives concrete evidence of improvement in the discussion of which methodologies to use in language learning.

Conclusion

Our research provides convincing evidence of the effect that the boom in social media has brought to bear on the learning of the English language. It has shown how Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, among other platforms, are not only tools for casual interaction but also major tools in the education system, especially in aspects like the language. A majority of the respondents viewed social media positively with respect to enhancing skills in the English language, hence showing its potential as a powerful educational resource.

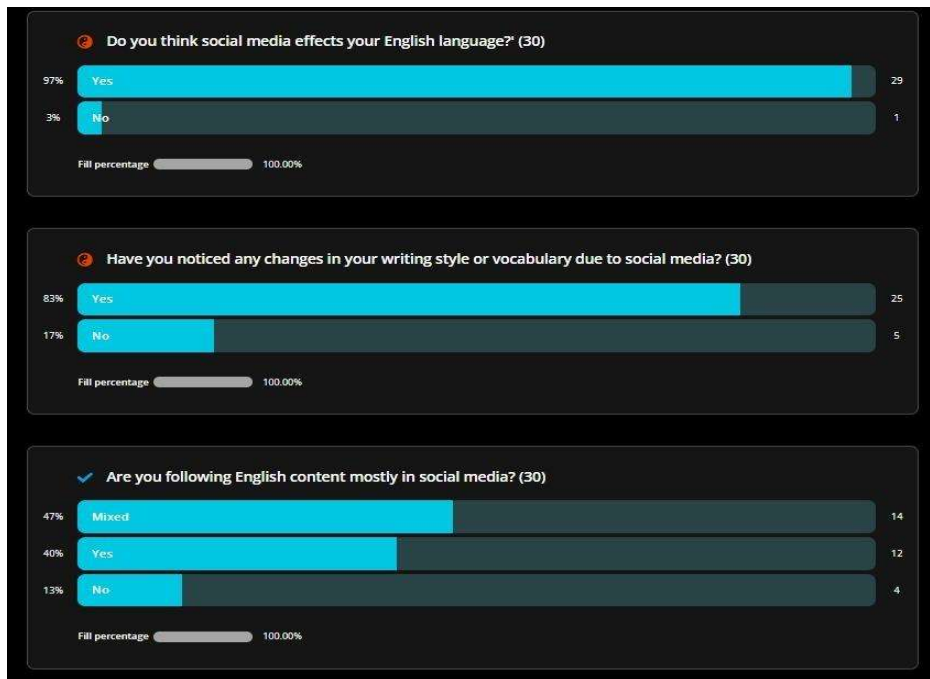
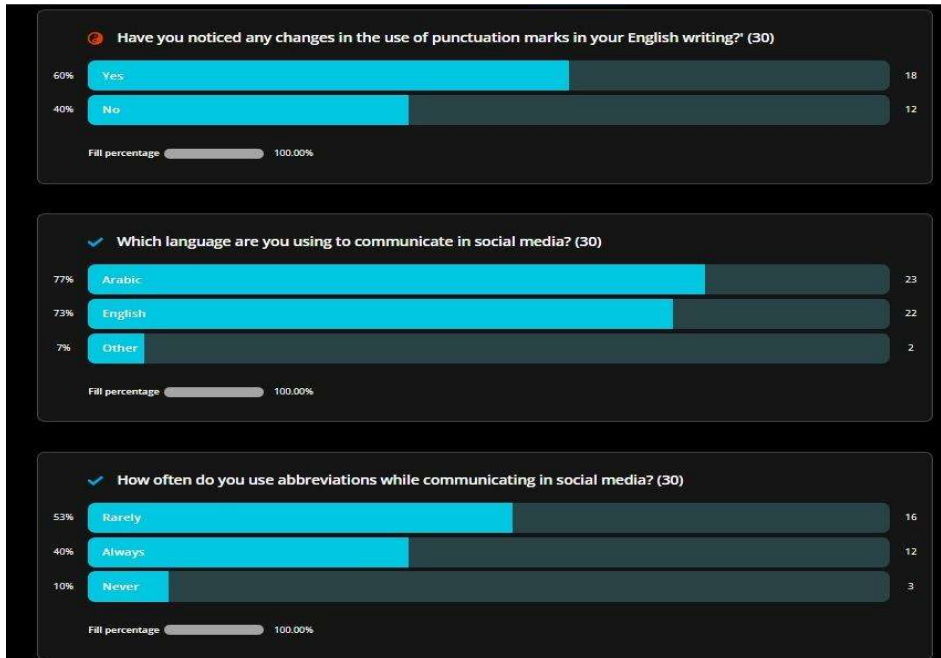
The findings also point to a need for teachers to strategically embed social media in language learning curricula for maximum benefit. In so doing, teachers can bridge the gap that exists between these digital interactions and eventual educational outcomes. The study also points out the difficulties caused by the level of informality of communication in social media, whereby a lot of slang and informal expressions are used that might not be very good to expose users to in the professional or formal academic settings. This paper would also suggest that, according to research, even though the strength of the supportive role for social media in language learning tools is heavy, yet, it should never be taken as a substitute. The ideal way would be to utilize the benefits of both conventional and digital methodologies to create an integrated learning that not only facilitates linguistic skills but also cultural awareness and global interconnectivity. It is, therefore, imperative that henceforth, such research findings should be taken into account by educational policy-makers, educators, and curriculum designers alike and be incorporated accordingly in language education so that learners do not only learn the language but also prepare themselves for the challenges thrown at them in the global forum, where digital literacy is equally important as linguistic skills. Research should further examine this dynamic field with longitudinal studies to understand changes over time and experiments to understand the effective influence of specific educational interventions.

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Appendix 1



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