

Social Media as a Tool for Informal English Language Learning: Opportunities and Challenges

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15237325>

Published Date: 17-April-2025

Abstract: Social media has revolutionized informal English learning by providing a flexible and engaging space. Various social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok, contribute to closing the educational gaps with their authenticity and real-life applications. Learners can get access to multimedia resources, collaborate, and interact with native speakers from around the world. Social media integration enhances listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as increasing cultural awareness and motivation.

Social media appeals to different learning styles, making it accessible to all levels of proficiency. Its features, like videos and live streams, allow for real-time practice or self-paced learning, thus supporting independent language acquisition. Moreover, the informal setting reduces the pressure compared to a traditional classroom, which encourages experimentation and participation.

Social media in language learning presents challenges. Distractions, content quality, and safety concerns may slow progress. The lack of structure may lead to inconsistent results. Privacy issues and the digital divide further emphasize its limitations, especially in areas with under-resourced settings.

This paper will explore how social media impacts language acquisition through sociocultural and constructivist theories, noting first the opportunities and then the barriers. It also provides some insights for learners and educators on integrating social media into informal English learning. It finally highlights the need to harness technology while tackling its challenges for an equitable learning experience.

Keywords: Social media, informal English learning, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, writing skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background and Context of Informal English Language Learning

The rapid integration of technology into daily life has dramatically reshaped educational practices, especially language learning. Informal learning of the English language is on the rise due to the fact that through digital means, acquiring a foreign language is more accessible and enjoyable. Unlike formal learning, informal learning is spontaneous, most often incorporated into daily activities, allowing one to acquire knowledge and skills naturally through life experiences and social networks (Greenhow, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2015; Mardis, 2013).

Social media now emerged as a powerful enabler of informal learning; thus, it bridges geographical and cultural divides, empowering learners with diverse linguistic resources. To name but a few, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok provide an immersive environment to deal with authentic language, communicate with native speakers, and practice one's intended skills in real-life situations. The same idea was supported by other authors(Xiuwen & Razali, 2021; Al Fadda, 2020). These platforms allow learners not only to enhance their linguistic skills but also to acquire knowledge of diverse dialects, idiomatic expressions, and social norms.

Overview of the Role of Social Media in Education

The educational potential of social media extends beyond the original purpose of entertainment and communication. Social media has become an important tool in language education, offering diverse resources for learners and fostering collaboration with peers. In contrast to traditional methods, social media provides a personalized and flexible approach that accommodates varied learning styles and paces. For example, WhatsApp and YouTube allow direct interaction between educators and learners, thus creating a participatory environment that boosts motivation and engagement among them (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012; Mittal & Kumar, 2022).

This befits the social nature of such spaces. Social learning theory emphasizes the importance of active community-oriented learning processes. Learners within virtual communities participate in various authentic practice opportunities where they receive prompt feedback with which to enhance their proficiency. For instance, through the facilitation of comments on posts, the opening of discussion threads, and even the sharing of multimedia on social networks, virtual real-life communication opportunities provide learners with hands-on avenues through which to develop their skills (Siemens & Weller, 2011; Kheryadi, 2018).

Social media platforms make several types of user-generated content available to users-instructional videos, tutorials, discussion forums, and collaborative projects can be invaluable in developing dynamic listening and speaking, reading, and writing skills. Examples include TikTok's short-form videos, which easily encourage creative language use, while YouTube allows longer-format content to make in-depth learning of subjects possible (Xiuwen & Razali 2021; Zhai & Razali 2021).

Statement of Research Objectives and Questions

This paper addresses the dual role played by social media: it is both a facilitator and a challenge in informal English language learning. This paper critically assesses the effect of social networks upon learners regarding the ability to acquire linguistic competencies and points to some possible hindrances that retard progress. It is, therefore, expected to provide insight on:

1. What are the most salient benefits of using social media for informal English language learning?
2. How do learners make use of certain features of social media to improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills?
3. What challenges do learners face in using social media, and how might such challenges be mitigated to optimize learning outcomes?

This will aid in addressing the following questions that have been identified for the study, namely: to explore how digital platforms have come to be perceived as an evolving part of the educational experience, and to determine those means through which the advantages of social media are maximized while drawbacks are minimized.

Significance of the Study

The wide usage of social media in daily life points out the importance of social media as a learning tool; it is necessary for modern pedagogical practice to connect formal and informal education. This study fits within the present globalized world where English has become the lingua franca of communication, trade, and cultural interaction. Using social media will provide the learner with linguistic and cultural opportunities to improve his or her proficiency and intercultural competence (Nanda & Kumar, 2022; Engeström, 2001).

In light of this, the present research highlights the need for alignment of technological development with educational goals. Social media sites can provide learners with more autonomy by offering the possibility of self-directed study and discovery. They offer unparalleled opportunities for collaborative learning, where students engage with their peers, educators, and native speakers in real-time. Of course, this potential does not come without its challenges. Issues of distractions, privacy concerns, and inequitable access to technology have to be addressed if equitable and effective learning experiences are to be assured (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006; Kheryadi, 2018).

This paper will balance both opportunities and challenges experienced by English learners during the use of social media, placing them at the center of the fraternity. A researcher in this field will equip the learners with measures that might help them navigate better through digital platforms and keep pace in a world that is increasingly interconnected. On the other hand, it shall enlighten educators and education policy fraternities on best practices regarding how to embed social media into learning frameworks for better learning outcomes and lifelong learning according to relevant studies (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012; Mittal & Kumar, 2022).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The integration of social media in informal English language learning is based on some well-established learning theories, especially sociocultural and constructivist frameworks. The common denominator of these theories is the interaction between learners and their environment, where social media acts as a tool for mediation in creating enhanced learning experiences.

Sociocultural Theory and Mediation

Sociocultural theory, as proposed by Vygotsky, emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development. Social media platforms function as mediating artifacts that facilitate collaborative activities, provide access to diverse linguistic inputs, and support interactive learning environments, thus supporting the sociocultural theory. The learners can hold conversations, get feedback, and interact in real-time in language-rich environments with the aid of WhatsApp and Facebook, among other tools, to develop their cognitive and linguistic abilities (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This is in agreement with the principle of mediation, which positions learners as agents who actively use the tools in their sociocultural contexts.

Leontiev's activity theory elaborates this framework by investigating the motives, goals, and conditions behind learners' activities. Leontiev showed that in social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube, numerous goals—for example, improving one's speaking or writing—are achieved by satisfying learners' inner motivation. These platforms not only provide linguistic resources that are easily accessed but also allow interactions that enhance learners' reinforcement of engagement and confidence (Leontiev, 1978).

It is Engeström's (1987) extended activity theory that brings in the dimension of community and participation in communities as a necessary condition for learning. It is afforded naturally through comment functions, discussion threads, and group projects on social media sites, thus creating such a collective learning and feedback system. Features outlined above, such as those, indicate how learners can achieve their language aims through negotiating mediated activity systems of interaction and collaboration.

Constructivism in Language Learning

Constructivist theory explains learning as being an active process and contextualized in nature, whereby knowledge is constructed via experience and interaction. Social media underpins this paradigm with its potential to provide interactive and learner-centered contexts. Learners are proactive while interacting with multimedia content, engaging in discussions, and preparing their materials—all of which propels knowledge construction. For example, the possibility that Instagram provides learners to create and share posts, and to get involved in language-rich dialogues with peers (Piaget 1957; Dewey 1938).

The constructivist approach is manifest, for instance, in the participatory nature of social media, whereby learners cooperate with each other to overcome a problem at hand, refine their skills, and explore different standpoints. This approach is in concurrence with Dewey's assertion that communication and interaction lie at the core of the learning process. Media tools such as YouTube and Twitter permit learners to find authentic purposes for language and bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical use.

Connectivism and Social Learning

The connectivist model, being an extension of social learning theories and relatively recent, finds special relevance in the age of digitization. Connectivism flags how learning is networked and ways of knowing are distributed within a network of nodes with active construction by learners. Social media does this for the model through active engagement of learners with experts, peers, and other communities. This supports Siemens' notion of creating connections in order to improve learning, especially in areas such as communication skills and cultural awareness, among others (Siemens & Weller, 2011).

Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes observation, imitation, and modeling as the most important facets of learning. For instance, on platforms like TikTok, learners can easily imitate the pronunciation and expressions of native speakers by viewing different short videos which improves their oral communication. On the same note, through the use of Facebook groups and discussion forums, learners can share experiences, seek advice, and improve their language abilities.

Relevance to Informal English Language Learning

These theories projected onto social media presuppose that social media could be transformational for informal English language learning. On the contrary, compared to the fixed classroom setting, social media offers flexibility, accessibility, and personalization in creating flexible learning opportunities. Accordingly, learners can practice language skills at their desired speed, access authentic linguistic content, and engage with different cultural expressions. Video tutorials on YouTube and interactive posts on Instagram, for instance, have several multimodal resources to match different learning styles.

Social media also facilitate the development of intercultural competence by improving the exposure of learners to different dialects, accents, and cultural norms. In this respect, using social media for language learning is within the framework of a constructivist approach, for students get a chance to build knowledge in real-life interaction. Also, game-like functions in TikTok boost motivation and engagement, ensuring the fun and interactive processes of language learning.

Opportunities in Social Media for Informal English Learning

Access to Authentic Language Materials and Real-World Interactions

Social media sites have become avenues through which English is portrayed, and authentic contexts are readily available to learners. For instance, YouTube houses a vast library of content from native speakers on various topics, including daily life, business presentations, and cultural characteristics. Materials presented in this manner offer the learner opportunities to come into contact with the language in its natural use, including idiomatic expressions and conversational nuances, and can promote both linguistic and cultural fluency (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021). Unlike static classroom content, these dynamic media formats simulate immersive environments where learners engage with spoken English in its raw unfiltered form.

Even TikTok-like platforms democratize language learning with videos, which are short by nature. For example, many content creators incorporate vocabulary lessons or pronunciation guides into their uploads so that learners can practice in small bites. Using such opportunities for micro-learning, the modern-day learner would prefer options that are more mobile-friendly, and convenient for him to practice English anytime and anywhere.

Interactive features make the platforms more effective. For example, comments and live streams create an avenue for real-time interaction between users and content creators. Both WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger host informal yet substantial conversations with native speakers or other learners. In effect, this builds fluency wherein learners adjust to diverse accents, expressions, and cultural contexts during these online interactions. Social media crosses the bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical use by creating real-life simulations critical in language acquisition (Al Fadda, 2020).

Instagram and Pinterest introduce the visual learner to another type of authentic materials. The infographics, photo captions, and user-generated educational content expose the learner to everyday language in vivid formats. This kind of exposure makes the learning of vocabulary almost unconscious and promotes retention through recurring visual association.

User-Generated Content and Peer Collaboration

It is one of the defining features of social media to be user-generated-what translates into an unprecedented facilitation of collaborative learning. Facebook groups of English learners share their personal experiences, ask and clarify doubts, and share tips. Such peer interaction inculcates in them a non-hierarchical environment wherein learners learn from the structured posts themselves but also from the insights and corrections offered by others (Faizi et al., 2013).

For example, Instagram allows users to do some creative writing, such as creating photo or video captions. In themselves, such activities allow learners to reflect critically on word choice, tone, and grammar expressions of the personality of the learner. The creation of content itself helps solidify grammatical structures and vocabulary in a more interactive and relevant way for the learner.

The real educational potential of these platforms increases with collaborative projects: in WhatsApp, for example, learners often create study groups where they practice essay writing and review one another for feedback. YouTube allows the creation of collaborative playlists or channels on any given topic on which learners can then share relevant educational videos, and comments, and build up collective knowledge. Thus, these will be particularly important to socio-affective learning outcomes since they foster team collaboration, empathy, and mutual support.

Peer feedback on platforms like TikTok has other added advantages. For instance, learners posting video pronunciations or short speeches may get error corrections and words of encouragement from the audience. This represents an interactive circle in which creation and response, in turn, hone one's skills, but most importantly, normalize error-making as part of a journey of learning-almost making it encouraging to fail (Al-Tamimi et al., 2018). In such social types of interactions, there is creation of community and shared enterprise that actually encourages persistence through difficulty.

Diverse Multimedia Formats and Learning Styles

Social media is very good at providing learning styles through its myriad of multimedia options. In particular, auditory learners benefit by using sites like Spotify and YouTube for podcasts, interviews, and songs created for teaching English. These resources help improve the learner's listening and pronunciation as they attempt to imitate the native speakers.

Medium like Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok work quite efficiently for visual learners. These websites incorporate the audio-visual aspect by embedding clips, images, and infographics into learning. For instance, grammar tips, vocabulary lists, and cultural notes can be visually embedded into a number of pins on Pinterest. In such a way, social media will be able to meet the different levels of sensory modality, and learners can use the format that best suits their likings and capabilities.

This makes social media suitable for learning environments because it can embrace a variety of modes: text, audio, and visuals. Videos-even on YouTube include spoken words on-screen text or animations, further reinforcing comprehension via multiple modes. Equally, Instagram's captioning features will support learners in connecting the written and spoken forms of language. These multimodal approaches support both comprehension and retention better by engaging multiple cognitive processes at once (Hamad et al., 2019).

With its interactive nature, social media serves as a provocative avenue for kinesthetic learners to practice their English. For instance, most of the challenges on TikTok challenge one to act out a situation, practice dialogues, or respond creatively to some sort of prompt. These activities make passivity in learners active as they get to participate in the language.

Role of Gamification and Engagement Features in Learning

Other strong points are gamification, and the introduction of game-like elements into non-game contexts. This has been promoted through applications such as Duolingo, with its badges, streaks, and point-based challenges, all to encourage learners to practice regularly. However, while Duolingo is a dedicated language-learning platform, there is an increasing amount of similar gamified elements embedded within more generic social media platforms.

Gamification in content creation makes content more interactive-for example, challenges for TikTok users to create for specific content, such as describing daily routines in English or using new vocabulary creatively. Such actions would inspire learners because clear objectives and attainment when the task is well performed would be present. Likes and shares are immediate rewards, setting up a self-reinforcing feedback loop.

Interactivity further enhances the educational potential of social media. Instagram and YouTube offer live quizzes in which learners can instantly check their knowledge while competing with their peers and make educational entertainments. Such features allow active participation and make learning very enjoyable and memorable.

Gamification also stresses repetition, which is a very important aspect of language acquisition. Using platforms such as WhatsApp, one can take part in a daily language challenge or discussions in groups, hence ensuring constant exposure to English. Moreover, the competitive aspect of gamification ignites a sense of urgency and dedication to improving one's skills, given that the learners try to keep up with their peers (Siemens & Weller, 2011).

Other than the individual's benefits, gamification allows collaboration. With features like leaderboards and group challenges, Facebook-like platforms allow collaboration wherein learners come together to meet mutual objectives. Camaraderie becomes created, and the comradeship fosters different approaches which enrich the experience of learning.

Challenges in Using Social Media for English Language Learning

Issues with Reliability and Quality of Content

Social media democratized the production and sharing of information and it enabled all manner of practitioners to create and share content. While on one hand, openness encourages creativity and innovation, it turns into a nightmare for the poor

learner who would like to use the resource to learn English. Unlike traditional learning materials, the content on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram is seldom filtered for quality through some quality assurance or peer review process. This results in a mix of the highest quality educational content with misleading or false information that mostly confuses the learners and slows them down (Faizi et al., 2013).

For example, YouTube tutorials on grammar in the English language are sometimes uneven and depthless; some creators simplify the rules to the extent of being misleading. Second, TikTok is a site that relies on likes and sharing rather than the truth about the content. This, therefore, may end up taking learners into spending time on entertaining yet linguistically wrong videos that lack the depth required for inclusive language learning, as postulated by Zhai & Razali (2021).

Furthermore, the informal tone and slang utilized in social media content give the non-native speaker a false impression of standard usage in formal situations. Memes or other viral videos tend to take phrases out of standard use, which may lead the learner to implement expressions inappropriate in an academic or professional setting (Hassan et al., 2021). It puts educators into a twofold task: to encourage students toward credible sources and guide them regarding standard and colloquial language.

What complicates the issue even further is that the curation of content relies on algorithms. These algorithms, designed to maximize user engagement rather than educational value, often promote sensational topics or trends over substantive learning materials. Therefore, learners who use social media for self-directed learning do not find it easy to identify resources relating to their goals in education (Muneera, 2022). Addressing these challenges calls for the incorporation of digital literacy training into the curricula of language learning to equip students with skills critical to the evaluation of online content.

Distractions and Lack of Focus

By their very design, social media platforms foster user engagement at the cost of longer attention spans. In this sense, infinite scrolling, video autoplay, and notification alerts are designed to increase users' time on a platform, rendering it a highly distractive setting for learners (Anwas et al., 2020). While these features make social media an entertaining experience, the exact same features may weaken concentration, which is necessary for language learning.

For instance, a student who logs in to Instagram to watch an educational video about a certain topic may easily get distracted by irrelevant posts appearing in their feed. This constant bombardment of stimuli fragments attention spans, making it difficult to keep complex linguistic information, such as idiomatic expressions or subtle grammar rules, in one's mind (Zhai & Razali, 2021). Moreover, the brevity of most of the content on social media—designed to arrest attention within a few seconds—runs contrary to the sustained engagement required for language mastery.

Research has shown that students who are interrupted more while studying retain less well and have less adequate overall understanding of the learning material (Faizi et al., 2013). For instance, learners in a TikTok language challenge may ultimately spend more time editing their video responses than considering the linguistic features they are practicing; in this example, preoccupation with form at the expense of content drains the learning potential of the activity.

The problem of distractions does not only pertain to individual learners but also extends to collaborative activities. Virtual study groups on WhatsApp or Facebook are equally seen to divert from their predetermined purpose, with members changing to sharing memes or other conversations unrelated to their studies. This cuts down the effectiveness of collaborative learning and reduces the time available for the core interaction of the students (Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021).

It is here that educators and learners have to establish boundaries around the use of social media during the study session. Examples are: switching off notifications, using separate education accounts, and setting other concrete session goals. On the other hand, this encourages the platforms to develop features related to educational content: customizable feeds or distraction-free modes for students.

Privacy Concerns and Cyberbullying

Social media, being public and linked, poses profound perils regarding the users' privacy and security. It is easy for language learners, especially young or inexperienced users, to give out sensitive information while they take part in activities online. For example, a student who engages in conversational English may leak private information while on Facebook and thereby make themselves a target of possible exploitation or harassment (Muneera, 2022).

Another concern is related to privacy: the data collection practice of social media platforms escalates this concern. In addition, algorithms analyzing user behavior for personalization raise questions about ethical data usage. Therefore, a learner while using a language learning app or group on social media may agree to the use of their information for advertising or any other purpose, thus compromising their digital security (Hassan et al., 2021).

Another common problem is cyberbullying of a learner on social media. Collaborative platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram, while promoting interaction, may also be places where negative behaviors are encouraged—for example, mocking accents or grammatical errors. Such experiences can reduce learners' self-confidence and motivation, ultimately discouraging them from participating in future activities (Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021). For example, a learner who suffers from derogatory remarks on their pronunciation in a TikTok video may develop apprehension about speaking in English publicly; it puts a hindrance in progress.

Each of these challenges requires educators and developers of the platforms to give great prominence to creating secure and non-exclusive virtual environments. Safety in social media learning communities can be developed using moderated discussion groups, clear guidelines related to respect in communication, and the possibility of reporting cases of abusive behavior. Other ways to make such platforms even more safe include training in digital privacy and cybersecurity.

Limited Access to Technology for Some Learners

While the ubiquity of social media has been increasing, the disparities in access to technology remain one of the biggest impediments to its effective use for language learning. Poor students from low-income families or from rural areas may not have access to a smartphone, high-speed internet, or even electricity. The digital divide excludes them from online learning and further widens the already existing educational gaps. (Hassan et al., 2021)

For instance, a student in a far-flung area may not be able to view a live-streamed English lesson on YouTube on account of bandwidth constraints or frequent power failures. Access notwithstanding, data plans or modern devices that allow students to continuously create and view content across different social media platforms can simply be unaffordable for certain students. Particularly in most developing countries, technology remains too expensive, as noted by Muneera (2022).

This digital divide further degrades the quality of learning experiences for these understaffed. Those learners who cannot stream high-definition videos or engage in real-time interaction are deprived of major elements of language acquisition, including observation of gestures or even conversational practice. Furthermore, not having access to many resources decreases a learner's exposure to varied uses of authentic language, which is necessary for proficiency development (Faizi et al., 2013).

Such gaps can only be addressed through systemic and grassroots efforts, where investment by governments and other NGOs in infrastructure development, a subsidy of access, and distribution of cheap devices are done in the concerned disadvantaged communities. Community centers and libraries so equipped with digital resources are, more locally, other opportunities for learners to reach these learning tools on social media.

Case Studies and Real-Life Applications

Social media sites are some of the most transformative tools of informal English language learning, offering unique environments where learners can both practice the target language and make cross-cultural contact with native and non-native peers. This part will present real-life examples of successful implementation, including YouTube, TikTok, and language exchange groups, and analyze the effects on outcomes for learners.

YouTube: Enhancing Listening and Pronunciation Skills

YouTube has become one of the most visited websites by language learners, as it houses various videos to meet some different learning needs. It is often used by learners to enhance their listening and pronunciation skills through a series of tutorials, interviews, and storytelling. The interactivity of YouTube enables learners to replay complex segments through its interactive video features, playback options, and playlists—which help in understanding and retaining information (Islam et al., 2020). Additionally, recorded lectures and language tutorials offered by instructors provide learners with structured and self-paced material relevant to their learning goals (Hamad et al., 2019).

For example, language learners across the world repeat on YouTube to imitate the accents and intonations of native speakers. In turn, many said that through this repetition, much like the engagingness of oneself, the proper pronunciation and natural

expressions have become less painful to acquire. Comments also allow many discussion forums where learners share their insights about what they have learned, clarify some doubts, and even ask for materials from other people, hence community-supported language learning happens online too (Lange, 2019).

TikTok: Fostering Speaking Skills through Creativity

Short-form video-based TikTok has emerged as a creative language learning space. Users would challenge, perform role plays, or tell stories that help them improve not only their vocabulary but also their oral fluency. A case study on the influence of TikTok on EFL learners showed that it proved effective in raising confidence and alleviating speaking anxiety (Zhai & Razali, 2021). Such short videos train users to pay attention to the main and sufficient information to get their point across a skill very important for a language learner.

Furthermore, with the idea of TikTok algorithms-as-curators selecting content for users, learners are allowed into totally natural environments where English is spoken. It could be enabled by following several different producers of content concerning languages; that is, different accents, dialects, and cultural traits. As such, this bridged the gap between formal learning and the real world with users encouraged to repeat phrases, take part in interactive language trends, and finally collaborate with native speakers on the platform.

Language Exchange Groups: Cultivating Cultural and Conversational Fluency

Facebook and WhatsApp groups just make an easy way to get in contact with a mother-tongue speaker. Normally, virtual groups combine learners and native speakers who practice languages through text chats, voice notes, and even video calls. The exchange itself brings learners real-life opportunities for speaking English and fluency.

For example, one such research aiming to investigate Facebook groups designed specifically for EFL learners reported that the improvement of group discussants was significant in terms of grammar accuracy as well as sentence building. Interaction here develops not only the linguistic features but also the cultural contexts and the idiomatic sayings that have to be used appropriately. Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006 add that such outcomes are enhanced through an emergent sense of shared purpose with other collaborative activities such as story writing or discussing some cultural events.

Instagram: Engaging Learners with Visual and Written Content

Although Instagram is usually mentioned within the context of visual content sharing, it's also proving useful as an informal language learning tool. Learners use Instagram to follow accounts that teach English by publishing lists of vocabulary, grammar tips, and interactive quizzes as stories or posts. Hashtags like #LearnEnglish and #EnglishTips also allow learners to access and connect with educators and other learners worldwide, so they can create a community of support.

A practical use of Instagram for language learning includes caption-writing activities that encourage learners to describe the picture or video using their freshly learned vocabularies. The activity fosters not only their writing but also their creative and cultural awareness. (Çakmak, 2020). Furthermore, Instagram live streams open up new avenues for learners to be able to practice speaking with native speakers and receive instant, personalized feedback.

Collaborative Learning on WhatsApp

Another website supporting informal learning via group chats and discussions is WhatsApp. Learners create a group where they share resources, discuss questions, and practice the skills of writing and speaking with their peers. This platform is effective for pronunciation practices, as learners can send voice notes and get responses from native or advanced learners. Research proved that a collaborative learning environment enhances engagement and motivation for its participants owing to support from a network of people of the same mind (Anwas et al., 2020).

For example, research among students in Malaysian universities proved that through WhatsApp groups, learners can improve substantially in constructing grammatical sentences and expressing themselves in English. According to the participants, the daily conversation and joint activities lead them to enhance their language skills while understanding the cultural contexts more profoundly.

Outcomes of Informal Social Media Learning

Outcomes from using social media platforms for informal learning of English have been overwhelmingly positive. For example, 81.92% of the respondents in one study attributed their ability to improve communicative competence to the

collaborative nature of social media (Muftah, 2022). Though Instagram and Facebook fared better in promoting written communication and enriching vocabulary, the ability of social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok was rated higher regarding improvement in listening and speaking skills, respectively (Al-Tamimi et al., 2018).

Another important advantage of social media is its capability to provide learners with authentic exposure to language. In contrast to other classroom environments, social media provides the opportunity to be plunged into real-life language use, enabling learners to grasp idiomatic expressions, cultural allusions, and conversational nuances. This not only accelerates the language acquisition process but also better equips learners for practical communication in different contexts.

However, the challenges associated with informal learning on social media for instance, distraction, reliability of the content, and the lack of structured guidance on how to filter quality content to stay focused during learning activities are to be addressed. Of course, such benefits can only be maximized when both educators and learners consider strategies that will enable them to make great strides in their language journey through strong platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and language exchange groups.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study illustrate the dual nature of social media as a useful affordance and a possible challenge in informal English language learning. Specifically, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have revolutionized how learners engage with language content by affording learners multiple opportunities to practice their skills in real-life settings. Learners benefit from authentic interactions, multimedia content, and collaborative spaces that allow for engagement, which contributes to improved linguistic competence (Hamad et al., 2019). These platforms allow learning outside the conventional boundaries of a classroom, therefore making language acquisition more accessible and flexible.

All these advantages notwithstanding, effective learning might be interfered with by issues such as distractions, privacy concerns, and unreliable content. Generally, students are attracted to other non-learning information that compromises their attention and productivity. More importantly, data security, cyberbullying, and exposure to banned materials have been identified as major threats in the use of social media for education purposes (Al-Tamimi et al. 2018) support the abovementioned drawbacks of implementation in an informal learning environment and argue for a more cautious approach regarding the integration of social media.

Implications for Stakeholders

Educators themselves thus play an important role in how social media are used for language learning. On the other hand, by organizing valid and quality resources, the teacher can support students' active engagement with at least a reduced level of distraction. For instance, YouTube video integrations or Facebook group usage for collaboration purposes enable learners to use their language skills for more realistic purposes (Islam et al., 2020). Also for example, through moderated platforms, learners can share ideas and get feedback without the threat of online harassment (Kheryadi, 2018).

Learners need to develop digital literacy skills to navigate social media effectively. This includes the evaluation of the credibility of resources and prioritizing educational goals over leisure activities. There is also a role for policymakers in ensuring that access to digital tools is equitable. Affordable internet access and provision of devices will go a long way in bridging the digital divide and making social media-based learning inclusive.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. **Structured Learning Activities:** Educators should also design structured tasks that utilize social media for focused purposes, such as analyzing educational videos or engaging in guided discussions through Facebook or WhatsApp.
2. **Enhancing Digital Literacy:** Training for teachers and students will help them reap the potential of social media and avoid some pitfalls that might be associated with misinformation and overuse.
3. **Promoting Gamification:** Gamification could also be introduced using quizzes or challenges through Instagram or WhatsApp in order to maintain learners' motivations and engagement (Kheryadi, 2018).
4. **Ensuring Privacy and Moderation:** Policymakers and educators have to collaborate in the creation of moderated environments, keeping in mind the issues of safety, and focusing on learners.
5. **Equitable Access:** Evidence-based, targeted policy-regularizing subsidized devices or free Internet access would be necessary to increase participation in online language learning initiatives.

The possibility of social media for informal English language learning is immense. It offers a suite of tools that can make this process engaging, accessible, and effective; however, the challenges it presents require structured strategies and collaborative efforts by educators, learners, and policymakers. Aligning technological advancement to pedagogical goals, social media could prove to be a game-changer in language education.

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