

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A LEARNING PLATFORM: STRENGTHENING MEDIA COMPETENCY IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

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Abstract. In the digital age, social media has evolved from a recreational platform to an influential tool in education, particularly in enhancing media competency among English language learners. This study explores the integration of social media in English education, with a specific focus on how platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok can contribute to the development of learners media literacy, critical thinking, and communicative competence.

Keywords: Education, media competency, social media platforms, digital literacy, 21st-century skills.

In recent years, the integration of digital tools in education has reshaped the way knowledge is delivered and acquired. Among these tools, social media has emerged as a dynamic learning platform, particularly in the field of English language education. With billions of users globally, platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook offer authentic, engaging, and accessible content that caters to various learning styles. As learners increasingly interact with such platforms outside the classroom, educators are beginning to recognize their potential to enhance language acquisition, boost learner motivation, and foster media competency—a key 21st-century skill.

Traditional classroom instruction often falls short in providing real-world exposure to language use and media navigation. In contrast, social media provides constant access to informal language learning opportunities, such as watching videos, reading captions, joining discussions, and even creating content. This shift calls for a re-evaluation of English language education, not only to improve linguistic skills but also to prepare students to think critically and responsibly in digital environments.

Despite its benefits, the use of social media in education raises several concerns. Questions arise regarding content credibility, learner distraction, digital equity, and privacy issues. Thus, it is essential to explore how social media can be effectively and responsibly incorporated into English language instruction to support both language proficiency and media literacy.

The present study aims to examine the role of social media as a learning platform in developing media competency among English learners. Specifically, it investigates learners' engagement with English-language content on social media, the perceived impact on their language skills and media awareness, and the challenges faced in this informal learning environment. By addressing these aspects, the research contributes to a growing body of knowledge on digital pedagogy and provides practical recommendations for integrating social media into language teaching and curriculum design.

In the 21st century, education has increasingly embraced digital technologies to enhance learning outcomes, particularly in the field of language education. Social media platforms have gained attention as powerful tools for informal learning due to their ability to support collaborative engagement, content sharing, and authentic communication. [1] English language learners (ELLs) are now regularly engaging with platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook not only for entertainment but also as supplemental sources for language exposure and practice. [2] Several studies have demonstrated that social media fosters an immersive environment for language learning. For instance, Wang and Vasquez found that learners benefit from real-time interaction with native speakers and exposure to contemporary vocabulary and idioms in context. [3] Additionally, the multimodal nature of platforms—combining video, audio, and text—caters to different learning styles and enhances comprehension and retention.

In parallel, the integration of social media in education demands a rethinking of digital and media literacy as part of the language learning curriculum. Media competency involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and create messages in various media formats. According to the European Commission, media literacy is a crucial component of digital competence and should be embedded in educational policy to prepare students for active participation in digital society. [4] Buckingham argues that students must not only consume media but also critically engage with it to understand underlying ideologies, cultural values, and power dynamics. [5]

However, despite the clear advantages, there are also notable concerns. Learners may face challenges such as information overload, distraction, unequal access to digital tools, and exposure to misinformation. Studies by Greenhow and Lewin highlight that the informal nature of social media can lead to unfocused learning if not properly guided by educators. [6] Furthermore, ethical issues such as privacy and online safety must be addressed, especially when integrating social media into formal education contexts.

Based on the foregoing, this study employs a mixed approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate how social networks can be effectively utilized as a learning platform for enhancing media literacy among English language learners (ELL).

The research was conducted among 120 university students majoring in English education at three different institutions in Uzbekistan. The participants were aged between 18 and 24 and had intermediate to advanced levels of English proficiency (CEFR B1–C1). A total of 12 English language instructors also participated in semi-structured interviews to provide professional insights into media use in their classrooms.

According to the results of the survey conducted as part of this study, it was revealed that social networks, when used purposefully, can significantly improve both language skills and media literacy. High levels of student engagement align with the connectivist learning theory, which emphasizes learning through digital networks and platforms.

The development of media competence, especially in the areas of content creation and critical information consumption, reflects an important shift in modern English language teaching. It extends beyond traditional grammar-focused instruction towards more dynamic, practical communication skills.

However, the challenges noted by teachers underscore the need for structured integration of social networks into curricula, as well as instruction in digital ethics and safety.

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