



SOCIAL MEDIA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF PEDAGOGICAL USES, BENEFITS, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

Social media has become an integral feature of contemporary communication and is increasingly embedded in English language teaching and learning contexts. Its growing presence in educational settings has generated considerable interest among researchers and practitioners, yet its pedagogical value remains debated due to variations in instructional design, learner engagement, and contextual constraints. This article presents a systematic literature review examining the pedagogical uses, benefits, and challenges of social media in English language teaching and learning. Drawing on thirty peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2025, the review synthesises research findings related to communicative competence, learner motivation, language skills development, digital literacy, affective factors, and emerging instructional practices. Relevant studies were identified through structured searches of academic databases and selected according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The literature was analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and areas of convergence across diverse educational contexts. The findings indicate that social media can support vocabulary development, oral and written communication, learner autonomy, motivation, and collaborative learning by facilitating authentic interaction and flexible, learner-centred engagement beyond the classroom. At the same time, persistent challenges are reported, including learner distraction, unequal access to digital resources, exposure to informal or non-standard language, limited teacher preparedness, and potential social and psychological risks. Overall, the review suggests that social media represents a valuable but complex pedagogical resource whose effective integration into English language education requires informed instructional planning, sustained teacher

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training, and further longitudinal research to understand its long-term impact on language development better.

Keywords: social media; English language teaching; digital literacy; communicative competence; EFL; learner motivation; collaborative learning

1. Introduction

Social media is deeply embedded in contemporary society and has become a dominant medium for communication, information exchange, and social interaction across age groups and cultures. In recent years, its influence has extended beyond personal and professional domains into educational contexts, including English language teaching and learning. For learners of English as a foreign or second language, social media platforms offer expanded opportunities to engage with the language beyond the constraints of formal classroom instruction, enabling interaction with peers, instructors, and wider online communities.

The rapid development of digital communication technologies and the widespread availability of portable devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops have significantly increased learners' access to English through social media. Platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, blogs, wikis, X (Twitter), Telegram, Instagram and similar applications support a wide range of communicative practices, such as messaging, commenting, content creation, and collaborative interaction. These practices facilitate exposure to authentic language use and provide learners with frequent opportunities to practise English in socially meaningful contexts. As a result, social media has attracted growing attention as a potential pedagogical resource capable of complementing traditional English language instruction.

Built on Web 2.0 principles, social media platforms encourage user participation, interaction, and content creation rather than passive consumption of information. This participatory nature aligns closely with learner-centred and constructivist approaches to language education, which emphasise interaction, collaboration, and meaningful communication. In English language teaching and learning, social media has been associated with increased learner engagement, motivation, and opportunities for communicative practice, particularly in informal and semi-formal learning environments that extend beyond classroom boundaries.

Empirical research has documented a range of pedagogical benefits associated with social media use in English language education. Studies suggest that social media-mediated interaction can support the development of vocabulary, writing fluency, speaking confidence, and overall communicative competence. Online environments have also been shown to reduce anxiety for some learners by providing less intimidating spaces for language use and peer interaction. At the same time, research has consistently highlighted challenges that complicate the educational use of social media. These include

learner distraction, uneven access to digital technologies, the prevalence of informal or non-standard language forms, limited teacher digital preparedness, and concerns related to learners' social and psychological well-being.

Despite the growing volume of research in this area, existing studies remain fragmented and context-specific, often focusing on particular platforms, skills, or short-term interventions. Consequently, there is a need for a systematic synthesis of the literature to provide a clearer understanding of how social media is used pedagogically in English language teaching and learning, what benefits it offers, and what challenges must be addressed to ensure effective and responsible integration. Addressing this need, the present study conducts a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed research published between 2010 and 2025. The review aims to identify the dominant pedagogical uses of social media in English language education, evaluate its reported benefits for language learning, and critically examine the challenges and limitations associated with its implementation. By synthesising existing research, this article seeks to contribute to a more coherent understanding of social media's role in English language teaching and to inform educators, researchers, and policymakers about evidence-based practices and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

Research on the use of social media in English language teaching and learning has expanded considerably over the past decade, reflecting the increasing integration of digital communication technologies into educational contexts worldwide. Early studies primarily conceptualised social media as a supplementary communication tool that could support interaction outside the classroom. In contrast, more recent research has examined its pedagogical affordances in greater depth, focusing on learner engagement, instructional design, assessment practices, and implications for language development across diverse educational settings (Perez, Manca, & Fernández-Pascual, 2023).

From a sociocultural perspective, social media aligns closely with constructivist theories of learning, which emphasise interaction, collaboration, and meaning-making through social engagement (Thorne, 2010). Platforms such as blogs, discussion forums, and social networking sites enable learners to negotiate meaning, co-construct knowledge, and participate in authentic language use. These features support second language acquisition by situating learning within meaningful social contexts, both formal and informal (Pilli & Olga, 2014).

A growing body of empirical research demonstrates that social media can positively influence specific language skills. Online discussions, peer interaction, and collaborative writing activities have been shown to enhance learners' writing accuracy, vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and overall language fluency (Al Jahrami, 2019; Dahdal, 2020). Multimedia platforms such as YouTube and podcast-sharing services provide exposure to authentic spoken English, which supports listening

comprehension, pronunciation development, and pragmatic awareness (Muftah, 2024). In addition, social media-mediated interaction supports both receptive and productive skills by offering learners opportunities for meaningful input and output in low-anxiety environments (Pikhart & Botezat, 2021).

Motivational and affective dimensions have also received substantial attention in the literature. Numerous studies indicate that social media environments can increase learner motivation, confidence, and willingness to communicate by reducing anxiety and fostering supportive peer interaction (Al Jahromi, 2020; Sabah, 2022). However, researchers have also highlighted challenges such as distraction, off-task behaviour, digital inequality, and exposure to informal or non-standard language forms, which may negatively affect academic language development if not carefully managed (Tantarangsee *et al.*, 2017).

Teacher preparedness and instructional design emerge consistently as critical factors in the effective pedagogical use of social media. Research suggests that insufficient training, limited institutional support, and a lack of pedagogical guidance can significantly reduce the educational value of social media tools. These findings highlight the need for systematic professional development and evidence-based integration strategies (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Al-Senafi, 2024). Despite the growing number of empirical studies in this area, comprehensive syntheses remain relatively limited, which reinforces the relevance of systematic reviews such as the present study.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a systematic literature review design to synthesise peer-reviewed research on the pedagogical uses, benefits, and challenges of social media in English language teaching and learning. A systematic literature review involves the transparent, structured, and replicable identification, selection, and synthesis of existing research in order to provide an integrated understanding of a defined field of inquiry. This approach was selected to consolidate fragmented findings, identify recurring patterns across studies, and highlight gaps requiring further investigation.

3.2 Search Strategy

A structured search was conducted between June and August 2025 using major academic databases, including ERIH PLUS and Scopus, with particular emphasis on Google Scholar. The search focused on publications addressing social media use in English language teaching and learning. Key search terms included combinations of social media, English language teaching, English language learning, EFL, ESL, digital platforms, and language skills. Reference lists of relevant articles were also examined to identify additional studies that met the review criteria.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and quality, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies were included if they (a) were peer-reviewed, (b) were published in English between 2010 and 2025, and (c) focused explicitly on the pedagogical use of social media in English language teaching or learning contexts. Studies were excluded if they consisted of non-academic sources, such as newspaper articles, commercial websites, or opinion pieces, or if they addressed technology use without a clear connection to English language education.

3.4 Study Selection

The initial search yielded a substantial number of publications. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by a detailed full-text review to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. Through this systematic process, thirty studies were selected to provide a focused and manageable sample that captures diverse educational contexts, research designs, and social media platforms while maintaining methodological rigor. This approach ensures that the review presents a meaningful and comprehensive overview of current research trends without being diluted by studies of limited relevance or quality.

3.5 Data Extraction and Analysis

Each selected study was read in full and examined to extract key information, including research aims, methodological approaches, participant characteristics, social media platforms investigated, and principal findings. The extracted data were organised and analysed thematically. This process involved identifying recurring themes related to pedagogical uses, reported benefits for language learning, and challenges or limitations associated with social media integration. Through systematic comparison across studies, areas of convergence and divergence were identified to support a coherent synthesis of findings.

3.6 Quality Considerations

Although the reviewed studies varied in methodological design, attention was paid to the clarity of research procedures, transparency of data collection, and acknowledgement of limitations within each study. Rather than ranking studies by methodological hierarchy, the review focused on identifying consistent patterns and well-supported claims across diverse research contexts.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Use and Impact of Social Media in English Language Learning

4.1.1 Social Media in Higher Education

The reviewed studies indicate that social media platforms have become increasingly embedded in higher education contexts, where they support both academic and social interaction among adult learners. Research consistently shows that platforms such as Facebook groups and institutional learning communities can enhance learners' satisfaction and engagement when used to supplement classroom instruction. Social media-mediated interaction enables extended communication between students and instructors, fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating informal academic support beyond scheduled class time. These findings highlight the potential of social media to function as a complementary learning space in higher education-level English language instruction, as observed by Al-Rahmi *et al.* (2022).

4.1.2 Social Media as a Tool for English Language Learning

Across the literature, social media is widely recognised as a tool that facilitates interaction, information exchange, and collaborative learning. Studies focusing on blogs, discussion forums, and social networking sites report that such platforms encourage meaningful communication in English and support constructivist learning practices. When systematically integrated into English language courses, particularly reading and writing modules, social media use is associated with improvements in grammatical awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, and overall communicative competence. These benefits are most evident in contexts where activities are clearly structured and aligned with instructional objectives.

4.1.3 Enhancing English Learning through Social Media

Social media platforms challenge traditional, teacher-centred models of language instruction by promoting interactive and learner-centred environments. The literature indicates that tools such as blogs, digital portfolios, and online classrooms enable learners to collect, share, and refine language-related content collaboratively. Visual and content-sharing platforms further support task-based learning and presentations. Through participation in online communities, learners gain access to diverse linguistic resources and authentic communication opportunities, which contribute to sustained engagement with the English language.

4.1.4 Social Media and Mobile Applications for English Skill Development

The reviewed studies demonstrate that social media platforms and mobile applications contribute to the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Yunus & Salehi, 2012; Nehe *et al.*, 2023). Multimedia platforms provide exposure to authentic spoken English, while messaging applications support written interaction and

vocabulary expansion. In addition, mobile applications developed by international testing organisations offer structured practice in grammar, pronunciation, and academic writing. When used alongside social media, these tools promote learner autonomy and enable flexible, self-directed language practice across contexts.

4.1.5 Reducing Anxiety in Language Learning through Social Media

A recurring finding across the literature is the role of social media in reducing communication anxiety among English language learners. Online environments often provide learners with greater time to formulate responses and a reduced fear of negative evaluation, which can increase confidence and willingness to communicate. Studies report that participation in social media-based activities supports spontaneous language use and fosters a supportive learning atmosphere. These affective benefits are particularly relevant for learners who experience anxiety in face-to-face classroom interactions.

4.1.6 Improving English Writing Skills through Social Media

Social media is frequently associated with improvements in writing skills due to the emphasis on regular written communication. Engagement in online discussions, educational blogs, and collaborative writing tasks encourages consistent writing practice in English. The availability of peer and teacher feedback further supports the development of accuracy, coherence, and organisation in learners' written output. Over time, sustained participation in such activities contributes to increased confidence and competence in academic and non-academic writing.

4.1.7 Access to Open-Access Academic Resources through Social Media

Several studies highlight the role of social media in facilitating access to open-access academic resources, including journals, e-books, and research materials. Learners increasingly rely on social networking platforms and academic search tools to locate scholarly sources for assignments and research projects. Tahir, Shahzad, and Irshadullah (2024) note that this practice supports the development of academic literacy and research skills, particularly in higher education English language learning contexts.

4.2 Challenges and Limitations of Social Media in English Language Teaching and Learning

4.2.1 Distraction and Reduced Academic Focus

One of the most frequently cited challenges associated with the use of social media in English language learning is its potential to distract learners from academic tasks. Many social networking platforms are designed primarily for entertainment and constant engagement, which can interfere with sustained concentration during study. Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) found that students who frequently used Facebook tended to demonstrate lower academic performance, largely because time spent on non-academic

activities reduced time available for focused learning. Similarly, Ransdell *et al.* (2021) reported that multitasking with digital devices in classroom settings, particularly for non-instructional social media use, negatively affected comprehension and learning outcomes. These findings suggest that, although social media can supplement language exposure, its unregulated use may undermine academic focus and learning efficiency.

4.2.2 Unequal Access to Digital Resources

The pedagogical effectiveness of social media in English language teaching is also constrained by unequal access to digital resources. Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) highlighted how disparities in access to technology and digital literacy continue to shape unequal learning opportunities. More recent research by van Deursen and van Dijk (2019) shows that digital inequality is no longer limited to access, but also includes differences in device quality, internet reliability, and users' digital skills. In English language learning contexts, these disparities may limit some learners' ability to participate fully in social media-based activities, resulting in uneven learning outcomes across socioeconomic groups.

4.2.3 Superficial Communication and Informal Language Use

Another challenge associated with social media is its tendency to promote informal and abbreviated forms of communication. Online interactions often prioritise speed and convenience, which may encourage the use of non-standard grammar, abbreviations, and slang. Crystal (2011) noted that the linguistic features of digital communication differ markedly from those of formal written English. In a Saudi EFL context, Al-Shehri (2017) found that frequent use of social networking platforms led students to transfer informal writing conventions into academic tasks. Overreliance on casual digital registers may therefore hinder learners' development of accuracy and appropriateness in academic and professional English.

4.2.4 Teacher Preparedness and Pedagogical Challenges

Effective integration of social media into English language teaching depends largely on teachers' pedagogical and technical competence. While many studies emphasise the potential benefits of platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, their educational value is diminished when instructors lack appropriate training. Manca and Ranieri (2016) observed that insufficient pedagogical guidance often results in unstructured or superficial use of social media in educational settings. Similarly, Alkamel and Chouthaiwale (2020) argued that limited digital expertise may prevent teachers from designing meaningful, goal-oriented activities. Without adequate professional development, social media may be used only as a supplementary tool rather than an integrated component of language instruction.

4.2.5 Cultural Misunderstandings and Identity Concerns

Although social media enables intercultural communication, it can also create challenges related to cultural interpretation and identity negotiation. Learners interacting with diverse online communities may encounter unfamiliar cultural references or communication norms, leading to misunderstanding. Lee (2014) demonstrated that EFL learners engaging with online news discourse sometimes misinterpreted content due to limited cultural background knowledge. Tran and Pham (2022) similarly reported that intercultural interactions on social media may result in confusion or hesitation, as learners navigate linguistic and cultural differences. In some cases, concerns about judgement or misrepresentation may discourage learners from fully expressing their cultural identities online.

4.2.6 Cognitive Strain from Short-Form Digital Content

The increasing popularity of short-form video platforms has introduced additional challenges for sustained language learning. Rapid, fragmented content may reduce learners' attention spans and limit deep cognitive processing. Van der Schuur *et al.* (2015) found that frequent media multitasking was associated with reduced academic performance among young learners. Donnelly *et al.* (2021) further reported that engagement with short-form video applications could impair working memory and task persistence. For English language learners, such cognitive strain may hinder the processing required for complex skills such as reading comprehension, grammatical analysis, and academic writing.

4.2.7 Social and Psychological Risks

Beyond pedagogical and linguistic concerns, social media use poses social and psychological risks, particularly for adolescent learners. Online anonymity can facilitate cyberbullying, harassment, and social exclusion, which may negatively affect learners' emotional well-being (Nixon, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2022). Excessive screen time has also been associated with physical discomfort and exposure to misleading or harmful content (Khalaf, 2023). These risks underscore the importance of implementing protective measures and promoting responsible social media use within educational contexts.

4.3 Gaps and Future Directions

A key limitation of the existing body of research on social media in English language teaching and learning is its heavy reliance on short-term studies and secondary data. Many of the reviewed studies focus on immediate learning outcomes, offering limited insight into the long-term effects of sustained social media use on language development. As a result, conclusions regarding durability, transferability, and cumulative learning gains remain tentative. In addition, variations in research design, participant characteristics, and instructional contexts make it difficult to draw generalisable conclusions across diverse educational settings.

Although current research provides valuable evidence of the potential benefits of social media for enhancing learner engagement and communicative competence, comparatively little attention has been paid to longitudinal outcomes and pedagogically guided implementations. There is a need for more empirical studies that examine how social media can be systematically integrated into curricula over extended periods and how such integration influences learners' academic language proficiency. Furthermore, limited research has explored teachers' instructional strategies and decision-making processes when incorporating social media into formal language education.

Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to capture both quantitative learning outcomes and qualitative learner experiences. Studies focusing on evidence-based pedagogical models, teacher training practices, and ethical considerations related to learner well-being would further contribute to a more balanced understanding of social media's role in English language education. Addressing these gaps will support the development of informed instructional frameworks that maximise pedagogical benefits while minimising potential risks.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and identified limitations, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effective use of social media in English language teaching and learning:

- 1) **Strategic integration:** Social media activities should be purposefully aligned with clearly defined learning objectives rather than used arbitrarily, ensuring that learner engagement contributes meaningfully to language development.
- 2) **Teacher training:** Educators should receive systematic professional development in digital literacy and pedagogical strategies to support the effective integration of social media into English language instruction.
- 3) **Student digital literacy:** Learners should be guided to critically evaluate online content, practise responsible digital behaviour, and engage safely on social media platforms to minimise potential risks.
- 4) **Balanced language exposure:** Instructional tasks should promote the use of accurate and formal English while allowing learners to benefit from informal interaction, thereby supporting appropriate language use across contexts.
- 5) **Equitable access:** Educational institutions should work towards providing adequate devices and reliable internet connectivity to reduce disparities in access and participation among learners.
- 6) **Management of cognitive load:** Learning activities should be carefully designed to minimise excessive multitasking and overexposure to short-form digital content in order to support sustained attention and deep learning.

- 7) **Support for learner well-being:** Teachers and institutions should address issues such as cyberbullying, social pressure, and psychological risks by promoting safe online practices and providing appropriate support mechanisms.
- 8) **Sustained engagement:** Greater emphasis should be placed on the long-term and continuous use of social media to foster durable language skills rather than short-term or isolated interventions.
- 9) **Blended instructional approaches:** Combining social media with traditional classroom practices can reinforce learning outcomes while preventing overreliance on informal digital environments.
- 10) **Evidence-based practice:** Future research and instructional decisions should be guided by empirical evidence identifying effective platforms, pedagogical models, and best practices for social media use in English language education.

6. Conclusion

Social media has become a valuable tool in English language teaching and learning, providing learners with opportunities for interaction, exposure to authentic language, and increased engagement. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok support collaborative learning, content creation, and access to diverse English varieties, thereby enhancing motivation and practice beyond the classroom. However, these benefits are accompanied by notable challenges, including the prevalence of informal language, limited teacher preparedness, unequal access to digital resources, cognitive overload, and social-psychological risks such as cyberbullying and distraction. These challenges highlight the importance of structured and mindful integration of social media into language curricula. Ultimately, social media can effectively support English learning when guided by strategic planning, appropriate teacher training, and awareness of potential risks, ensuring a safe, balanced, and productive learning environment.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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