

Leveraging social media for language learning: Opportunities and challenges

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Abstract

Social media connects users in virtual spaces and offers a valuable avenue for language learning due to its interactive features and wide accessibility. It encourages active language use and supports learning beyond the classroom environment. While its integration into language education presents significant opportunities, it also poses notable challenges. This reviews the instructional potential and platforms of four: microblog (e.g., Twitter), collaborative wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), professional networks (e.g., LinkedIn), and informational networks. It also examines the infrastructure and resource conditions necessary to support effective classroom integration. This paper argues that the meaningful and well-structured incorporation of social media into the curriculum can lead to sustainable language learning outcomes. Drawing on the concept of social media as a *deus technique*, a dialogic medium, and the literacy model that views language as a socially situated practice, outlining strategies for using social media to foster both communicative competence and metalinguistic awareness. The practices include designing learners-centered, interactive activities, addressing data privacy concerns, and ensuring equitable digital access. Institutions are suggested to provide training focused on effective social media integration. As future research includes exploring AI-enhanced personalized learning, self-regulated learning through social platforms, and examining the long-term effects of social media use on language development, particularly in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: *Social media, Language learning, Microblogs, Informational Networks, Communicative goals, metalinguistic learning*

I. Introduction

The authors point out that the fast growth and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), notably social media, has completely

changed how languages are taught in the 21st century. According to Kim et al. (2011) and Van et al. (2019), social media sites are no longer just passive tools; they are becoming active venues where students can engage with genuine, multimodal information and communication, work together, and share culture in real time. Barrot (2022) says that as digital communication becomes more and more a part of everyday life, teachers have started to use wikis, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter (X) to teach language outside of the classroom. Chen et al. (2023) say that multimodal chats and collaborative exchanges on YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram let students use language in real-life situations, which helps them become more fluent, motivated, and culturally aware. Social media is important since it allows and helps build knowledge. Shadiev and Yang (2020) say that these affordances fit with new teaching methods that stress the importance of being able to communicate, being able to utilise technology in a responsible way, and being able to read and write in a digital world. It is not only that these platforms are popular; they also offer a wide range of language input and output.

In the same way, Smith (2024) shows that learners make meaning using text, video, audio, and interactive discourse, which are all activities that fit with both the cognitive and social aspects of language learning. It's evident that using social media in language learning isn't just a fad; it's a sign of bigger changes in how people get and build information in modern schools.

II. Conceptual Framework of Literature

2.1 Theoretical foundation

In recent years, language use and learning strategies have been influenced by new communication technologies, especially the growing popularity and widespread informal use such as email, wikis, blogs, podcasts, chatrooms, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and various participatory or multi-user virtual environments, as is clear deeply shaped by Rachmawati and Purwati (2021). Tong et al. (2022) state that the opportunities designed for social interaction, engagement, and communication with authentic language resources and meaningful tasks are believed to have a significant impact on learners' language development in both formal and informal learning environments. As the previously discussion, such the formative and summative evaluation of the language learning process can be well supported by social media use and

practice, which help create a personalized, interactive, and effective language-learning setting, were discussed by Malinee and Senthamarai (2020). The integration of social media into language learning is supported by several prominent theoretical frameworks that highlight the social, contextual, and interactive dimensions of education. One conceptual lens is the idea of social media as a “deus technique”, a dialogic medium that facilitates interaction and collaboration among learners, as introduced by Caruso (2011). This aligns closely with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process where learners progress through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with the support of more knowledgeable peers, which is a theoretical framework proposed by Vygotsky (1978). Social media platforms naturally provide scaffolding mechanisms consistent with ZPD principles. For example, learning using platforms like Twitter (X) engage in concise exchanges with proficient users, gaining real-time feedback and language input. Likewise, Wikipedia fosters collaborative writing, helping users build both language and subject knowledge.

Gee (2012) Situated Learning Theory offers another foundational perspective, emphasizing that literacy is best acquired in meaningful, culturally embedded contexts. According to Gee, learning focus most effectively when learners are part of “affinity spaces”, communities centred around shared goals and interest. Platforms like YouTube and TikTok exemplify this, providing learners access to authentic content and opportunities for content creation that supports identity formation, fluency development, and engagement in real-word discourse practices. These theories underscore the pedagogical value of social media in developing communicative competence, digital literacy, and intercultural understanding. As Chen et al. (2023) explain that social media facilitates multimodal interactions that promote both receptive and productive language skills; in contrast, Shadiev and Yang (2020) argue that collaborative online interactions foster the co-construction of meaning, reinforcing social engagement as central to language development.

In Cambodian contextualization, the application of these theories becomes particularly relevant. Huot and Em (2025) emphasize that without addressing digital infrastructure and educator readiness, language education reforms in

underserved communities may stall. They advocate for systemic support in both teacher development and equitable access to technology to ensure that social media integration is effective and inclusive.

In sum, the combination of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Gee's situated learning model, and the conceptual framing of social media as a dialogic platform offers a robust foundation for exploring its inclusion of digital platforms but also inform the design of pedagogical strategies that are interactive, personalized, and socially contextualized.

2.2 Key Concepts

Several core concepts inform the use of social media in language learning, reflecting its dynamic and learner-centered nature. Social integration and engagement are central to language development, enabling learners to communicate with peers, instructors, and native speakers across digital platforms, as well as the concepts highlighted the role of digital literacy in civic engagement by Tong et al. (2022). The authors emphasize that these interactions foster a sense of belonging support, and collaboration, thereby enriching the learning environment. (Malinee & Senthamarai, 2020) state that personalized and self-regulated learning enables learners to engage with content at their own pace, tailoring their experiences to individual needs and interests. (Chen et al., 2023) indicated that multimodality, encompassing texts, audio, video, images, and hyperlinks, is naturally supposed by social media platforms, which enhance comprehension and accommodate diverse learning preferences.

Finally, the blended of formal and informal learning contexts is a defining featured of social media use in education. These platforms bridge classroom instruction and real-word language use, offering learners authentic environments to practice language beyond institutional boundaries.

2.3 Literature Review

The pedagogical affordances of social media in language learning have been widely documented in recent scholarship. Studies demonstrate that platforms such as Twitter (X) and Facebook support vocabulary development, writing fluency, and interactive learning by enabling students to engage in authentic, socially meaningful exchange, as indicated by Barrot (2021). Similarly, YouTube and other video-based platforms enhance listening comprehension and oral

proficiency by exposing learners to natural speech and culturally embedded content, as mentioned by Alobaid (2020). Nonetheless, researchers have also pointed out significant challenges, as argued by John and Yunus (2021) concerns related to privacy, digital literacy, and technological readiness, as well as the potential for distraction if platforms are not well-integrated into the learning process.

Ahmadnejad et al. (2024) note that both educators and students facing difficulties in aligning social media usage with structured learning goals, particularly when reflection and offline study are needed. As Eaton (2010) argues that social media fosters informal, de-institutionalized learning environments, requiring new pedagogical approaches to teach grammar, vocabulary, and discourse effectively. These environments often support self-directed learning, but demand carefully designed instructional models that scaffold learners' development. More specifically, Rachmawati and Purwati (2021) highlight that adult learners must engage with advanced linguistic elements such as syntax, morphology, discourse, and phonetics, domains that can be explored through both formal instruction and informal digital interaction.

To this end, Baytekin and Bergil (2021) emphasize the role of theory building in higher education, arguing for robust frameworks that rationalize social media use in structured academic settings and align it with institutional goals.

III. Critical Arguments

3.1 Benefits of Using Social Media

Such findings are consistent with the earlier conceptualization of social media, offering multiple advantages for language learning, which can be grouped into four core areas: structured input, speaking practice, writing development, and self-evaluation.

First, several scholars (Chang & Hung, 2023; Malinee & Senthamarai, 2020) support the claim that platforms like Twitter (X) and Facebook facilitate structured learning by exposing learners to a continuous stream of authentic texts, videos, and hyperlinks that align with their interests. For instance, a single tweet often contains links to multimedia resources, enabling learners to expand vocabulary and explore various topics.

Second, according to Ariantini et al. (2021), social media promotes productive skills, tools like digital video on platforms such as YouTube allow learners to record and assess their spoken language, offering opportunities for self-reflection and peer feedback.

Third, as recent findings by a group of scholars (Binsaeed et al., 2020; Naseem et al., 2020; Ray et al., 2020), microblogging on platforms like Twitter, which limits posts to 280 characters, encourages concise and meaningful writing, fostering vocabulary use and sentence construction.

Additionally, Bailey et al. (2021) indicate that social media supports synchronous communication and interaction, though they acknowledge its limitations. Hamadeh et al. (2020) question whether written exchanges online effectively translate into real-life speaking skills. Similarly, Lambton et al. (2020) and Lonn (2022) note that communication on these platforms often lacks authentic spontaneity and tends to prioritize social or personal themes over academic discourse. Nevertheless, Sampson and Yoshida (2020) report positive outcomes in studies involving Japanese learners, where Facebook groups facilitate identity expression and intercultural exchange.

3.2 Challenges and Limitations

One major challenge in integrating social media into educational purposes is the issue of privacy. The authors note that students frequently express concerns about sharing personal data with peers or third-party platforms (Dennen & Burner, 2020; Jain et al., 2021; Sanfilippo & Strandburg, 2021). To address this, maintaining private Facebook groups is often suggested, as it allows moderators to control access. However, Escribano et al. (2021) and Ghounane (2020) caution that overly restrictive privacy settings may hinder wider participation and limit opportunities for peer learning. Even when using institutionally integrated platforms like Facebook Workplace, efforts to separate personal and professional interactions do not eliminate concerns over third-party data tracking, especially in widely used learning management systems such as Blackboard, Canvas, and other CALL tools (Chappell, 2022; Gamba et al., 2020).

Moreover, Manca (2020) stresses that the importance of educators carefully evaluating which aspects of students' data should remain confidential, while

institutions must establish clear guidelines for digital responsibility. Building students’ digital literacy is presented as a core component of ethical pedagogy. The authors, Engeness (2020) and Virtue (2020) argue that fostering awareness of ethical digital identity and safeguarding data is a crucial institutional duty the digital era. Additionally, (Quach et al., 2022) warn that institutions must remain vigilant against commercial interests that may seek to exploit student data.

3.3 Varied Social Media Experiences

The authors emphasize that social media platforms vary in their affordances for language learning. Manca (2020), Shan et al. (2020), and Zhang and Zou (2020) note that requiring learners to use a single platform may restrict their engagement, whereas encouraging interaction across multiple platforms can offer more diverse and enriched learning experiences. (Kaur et al., 2021) state that most platforms support flexible content creation, allowing both teachers and students to contribute. On Facebook, learners often revisit posts initially written in their native language and revise them into the target language, using the platform’s history feature to monitor progress (Bucher & Sand, 2022; Lee, 2021). Meanwhile, (Krüger, 2023) and (Tulenova, 2024) highlight YouTube’s value in providing access to language tutorials, listening exercises, and native-speaker content, noting that active viewing and note-taking significantly enhance both comprehension and language production.

Emerging platforms like TikTok and Instagram are transforming language use through short-form, visually engaging content. These platforms foster creativity, but also pose challenges, such as misinformation, digital literacy gaps, and cognitive overload. As learners increasingly use these spaces, factors like age, culture, and content relevant become crucial for successful integration. Incorporating case studies, comparing platform affordances, and providing practical strategies for teachers can help address these concerns. These points are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Key Elements of Emerging Social Media in Language Learning

No.	Element	Description
1.	Role of social media in Language Learning	Exploration of TikTok and Instagram's features (short-form videos, interactivity) in enhancing language acquisition.

No.	Element	Description
2.	Research Gaps	Examining how age and cultural background influence social media use in language learning.
3.	Innovative Classroom Settings	Use of case studies or empirical data from lesser-known classroom environments to provide fresh insights.
4.	Platform Comparison	A comparative analysis of TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook for their effectiveness in language learning.
5.	Challenges	Misinformation, digital literacy gaps, and cognitive overload in social media-based learning.
6.	Solutions to Challenges	Practical examples and studies showing how educators can overcome these barriers.
7.	Contribution	Enhancing the originality and depth of the manuscript, making it valuable for researchers and educators.

3.4 Engagement Strategies

Engagement strategies are crucial for optimizing the educational benefits of social media in language learning. Richards and Richards (2022) emphasize that well-structured communicative activities can enhance cognitive processing, reduce learner anxiety, and increase exposure to both linguistic input and output. Manca (2020) notes that social media platforms further these benefits by allowing learners to use the target language autonomously and interact across cultural boundaries with minimal teacher intervention. According to Kim (2020) and Kumi-Yeboah et al. (2020) learners engage in a variety of interactive tasks, including posing questions, offering peer feedback, sharing content, and participating in informal conversations. Correspondingly, Yadav (2021) points out that features such as Facebooks “like” and “comment” functions create a supportive environment, while Twitter’s brevity encourages clarity and quick exchanges. In the views of Almdni (2021) and Shi (2021) argue that writing and revising blog posts or microblogs foster creativity, a sense of ownership, and logical reasoning. Getie and Popescu (2020), along with Zhang and Zou (2020) indicate that when engagement is driven by personal interest, learners exhibit higher motivation and confidence in their language use.

However, Zarrinfard et al. (2021) caution that surface-level interactions, such as brief replies or emoji responses, offer limited cognitive and linguistic gains. In response, Seven (2020) recommends that educators design meaningful prompts that activate higher-order thinking, thereby cultivating both language proficiency and critical thinking skills.

Emerging platforms also enhance engagement in diverse ways. TikTok and Instagram support vocabulary and cultural learning through creative short videos; YouTube and Reddit provide deeper interaction with authentic content; Facebook encourages collaborative group learning; and Telegram facilitates structures exchanges through chat features and file sharing.

3.5 Real-Word Examples

Social media platform offers powerful opportunities for language learning by enabling authentic interactions such as messaging, content creation, and role-playing, which immerse earners in naturalistic language use and support curricular integration (Alobaid, 2020). However, as Wilde et al. (2019) caution, challenges such as accountability and the need for robust empirical evidence remain. Alkadi (2020) emphasizes that meaningful engagement through social networks enriches the learning experience by providing both valuable input and social relevance.

Drawing from classroom-based case studies, Thomas (2020) explores the sue of platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Second Life to support language practice and linguistic awareness. Bond (2020) and Shadiev and Yang (2020) highlight how these platforms, when thoughtfully implemented, can offer practical strategies for educators aiming to enhance language learning through digital tools.

3.6 Lesson-Learned

The effective integration of social media into language learning requires thoughtful planning and remains a concern for many educators amidst rapid ICT development. Greenhow and Chapman (2020) note that instructors often struggle to harness the educational potential of these platforms due to multiple influencing factors. A critical first step is selecting social media tools that align with specific course objectives and learner profiles. As Bailey et al. (2021) suggest that instructors must define clear learning goals and assess the

advantages and limitations of various platforms for different tasks and collaboration modes.

Additionally, Brown et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of developing assessment rubrics to evaluate learners' participation, guiding instructors in how to structure and moderate engagement effectively. Teaching efficacy is also linked to instructors' digital competency; Hennessy et al. (2022) highlight the need for teachers to assess adequate skills to utilize social media tools meaningfully. From a technology acceptance perspective, John and Yunus (2021) argue that EFL instructions must overcome barriers related to technology readiness, particularly those with lower technical literacy.

Furthermore, learners' attitudes, prior educational experiences, and perceptions of English learning play a key role in shaping their engagement and outcomes (Rahim & S. C., 2020). As Huot et al. (2024) indicate, the features of digital tools influence student's participation patterns, affecting both their learning behavior and the pedagogical approach adopted by teachers. Therefore, understanding these variables is essential for maximizing the educational benefits of social media in language instruction.

3.7 Mobile Learning

Undoubtedly, language learning via the platforms and mobile devices has become a vibrant trend that challenges the traditional classroom-based model of language instruction that this trend does not only involve the integration of mobile learning and social media for language education but also the necessity of innovating mobile learning attributes (Han, 2022). A variety of new educational technologies are supported by the flourishing mobile market which the current mobile learning research addressing the use of these advanced technical tools for educational purpose is limited but innovative (Valverde et al., 2020). For instance, Yimam et al. (2020) and Chen et al. (2023) designed many different educational apps and applied them into collaborative learning settings in order to enhance engagement and learning performance. It is evaluated their newly designed mobile assessment tool for a flipped classroom model by Khullar et al. (2024) and Husain et al. (2021).

In addition, they have started exploring the possible weaknesses associated with current mobile learning tools and language practices in social media and have developed critical curricula to enhance mobile language learning. Egbert

(2004) reviewed apps designed for ELT and suggested that English language teachers become more sophisticated consumers of apps.

Additionally, a diversity of future-oriented strategies, theories, software and social media have been informed by mobile learning, the focus of which is not merely on "the functions of free and low-cost social media platforms" but also "the underlying digital literacies relevant to learning and working in this mobile world". These innovative developments will help language teachers to both create and facilitate authentic, yet systematically scaffolded, learning opportunities via large-scale networked collaborative activities powered by social media Husain et al. (2021).

Moreover, ongoing research focusing on the design and creation of innovative mobile learning technologies, in conjunction with research that examines successful mobile-assisted language learning strategies and students' learning experiences, will provide valuable insights that guide educational approaches and technological designs, enriching this vital educational endeavor for second language learning, teaching and assessment (Grant, 2019).

3.8 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Opportunities and challenges of artificial intelligence language learning technologies in social media language learning can greatly benefit from AI language learning tools (Kannan & Munday, 2018). If tuned correctly, AI learning tools can provide interactive personalized support, offering conversational language practice, creating opportunities for learner generated content production, making use of diverse social media types or features, automatically personalize content, and offering scaffolding through multimedia input (Schmidt & Strasser, 2022).

Although AI language learning technologies are booming in the start-up world and are slowly appearing in the more established materials markets, they are deployed within social media integrations through the plugins proposed in this article. Although there are indeed opportunities for dialogue and interaction in social media, learners struggle to activate engaging language learning tasks within the platforms (Metruk, 2022). Learners may stare at their vocabulary, wondering how they can use it in a way that readers seem to find compelling that the automatic language learning tools can alleviate much of this decision

overwhelm and these technologies offer personalized support and task suggestions, helping learners use language more effectively (Atlas, 2023).

IV. Conclusion

Both positive and negative aspects of social media integration have prompted increased interest in learner training and traditional institutional support for social media learning endeavors. As different learning outcomes depend on social media usage patterns, there is also a call for a more flexible approach to accommodate diverse learner needs and aspirations. Such a need has also resulted from the changing pedagogical landscape; social media encourages and engages learners across the board. It also awakens the learner's researcher in practice and the learning-oriented practitioner in research. All these sensitize the researchers to a myriad of behaviors while providing multiple heuristic perspectives on the benefits of social media-motivated learning, which, if well directed, could be harnessed to grow a community of learners. With these diversified perspectives, it is not an easy feat to argue that social media has been a distraction or slow in coming, as that depends on how well they were embraced, used, and integrated into the teaching and learning activities despite the challenges.

While the potential of social media for effective learning has been witnessed and indeed many have joined the bandwagon, the major pondering questions are tied to whether self-regulated learning through social media actually takes hold and how students and teachers perceive it as a pedagogical aid. As such, panel members who are leading the frontiers in pedagogical research and development of social media tools were invited to debate on the "big ideas" of social media. Their responses provide some clues as to where the low-hanging fruits and the pitfalls of social media lie and define models for future practice in this domain. According to the panel, learning through social media has surfaced as a fruit-bearing tree with lots of fruits on it. For learners to savor the fruits, they need to have the inner motivation and use social software tools to overcome the maddening distractions by finding the right context at the right time of content. Indeed, the learning potential that motivates learners should stimulate studies to investigate the flavor of the reward, the spit out of the stone, or even the distaste of a flavor-style promise. Focus will be needed on how the medium of the message whether it is usefully arriving socially or

visually and how the feeling of emotional intelligence accumulates and stimulates learning. Online learning communities that are so well accepted in the new e-world should not be overlooked as a catalyst that transforms learning into a lifelong love for the fruits of understanding and knowledge.

Educators should receive targeted training to design social-media-integrated activities that enhance higher-order thinking. Learners must be empowered for self-directed learning through authentic digital content. Instructions should build supportive infrastructure and address equity and privacy concerns. As for future research, scholars should examine how social media supports self-regulated learning so that it should be explored the use AI to personalize language learning experiences. Studies can investigate how social media helps preserve linguistic diversity. Long-term research is needed to assess its impact on language proficiency over time.

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