LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: EFFECTIVE OR ENTERTAINING?

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Abstract: *This article looks at how social media is used in learning English and whether it actually helps learners improve or simply entertains them. With the rise of platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, students are now using digital spaces to hear and practice English outside the classroom. This study combines a short review of past research with a student survey to explore how useful these platforms really are. The results show that many learners benefit from watching videos and picking up new vocabulary, but there are limits — especially when it comes to grammar or structured learning. While social media can be a fun and helpful tool, it works best when learners use it actively and with clear goals. The paper also gives suggestions for both students and teachers on how to use social media more effectively for language learning.*

Keywords: *Social media, English learning, digital learning, informal education, vocabulary, motivation, language skills*

Social media is a big part of young people's lives today. It's used not only for chatting and entertainment but also for learning. For students learning English, platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram are full of content in English — from short videos to interviews, tutorials, and music. Because English is the main language of the internet, learners can get daily exposure just by using these platforms.

Unlike formal language lessons that follow a clear structure, social media offers real-life examples and natural use of English. Many learners say they've improved their vocabulary and listening skills just by watching or listening to content online. Still, it's not always clear whether this learning is deep or long-lasting, and some worry that learners are just being entertained rather than educated.

This article explores how students use social media to learn English and whether they do so on purpose or just learn by accident. It focuses on these research questions:

1. Do students think social media helps them learn English?
2. Which skills improve the most from using social media?
3. Are students using it mainly to learn, or just for fun?

By looking at real student responses, this study aims to understand how digital tools support language learning and what challenges might come with them.

Learning theories behind digital language learning

Some education theories explain how social media may help language learning. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory says that learning happens best during interaction with

others. On social media, learners' comment, share ideas, and communicate — which supports this theory. Another idea, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, says learners improve when they hear or read content that's just above their current level. Watching English videos with subtitles or listening to podcasts can provide this kind of input.

Constructivism is another theory that applies here — it says people learn by doing and experiencing. When learners choose who to follow, decide what to watch, and interact in English online, they are building their language knowledge actively.

What other studies show

Past research has shown positive results. For example, YouTube helps learners hear real spoken English and improve listening (Wang & Vásquez, 2012). Instagram and Twitter have been useful for vocabulary development (Ghazal et al., 2019; Liaw, 2017). Also, learners often feel more motivated because of the interesting content and global reach of social media.

However, some studies point out the downsides. Blake (2016) warned that if learners don't get corrections, they might keep repeating mistakes. Benson (2011) added that even though social media allows freedom, not all learners know how to manage their learning well. Too much content and too little structure can lead to surface-level learning.

What's Missing in the Research

Most studies focus on students in places like the USA, China, or Europe. There is very little research in Central Asian contexts, where English is still growing in popularity. Also, many studies look at one skill or one platform — like just YouTube or just vocabulary — rather than giving a full picture. This study fills some of those gaps by focusing on learners in Uzbekistan and looking at their overall experiences.

Research Approach

This study used a combination of survey and open-ended questions to understand how students use social media to learn English. It focused on what skills they improve, how often they use these platforms, and whether they find them useful for language learning. 75 university students aged 18–24 took part. They came from different study backgrounds and had different levels of English (from A2 to C1). All participants used social media regularly.

Proficiency level

Students	
A2	10
B1	37
B2	22
C1	6

Data Collection

The survey was shared through Google Forms and took about 10 minutes. It included questions about:

• Which platforms students use

• What skills they think are improving
• How long they spend on social media in English
• Whether they follow educational content
• What problems they face while using social media to learn

Answers were analysed using basic statistics (e.g. percentages) and simple charts. Open - ended answers were grouped by theme (e.g. motivation, time, entertainment vs learning).

What platforms do learners use most?

Most students said they used YouTube (78%) and TikTok (64%) for English content. Instagram and Telegram came next, while Facebook and Twitter were less popular. Students often watched interviews, podcasts, language tips, and fun videos in English.

What skills improved most?

The most improved skills were:
• Listening (71%)
• Vocabulary (68%)
• Pronunciation (52%)
• Speaking (38%)

Fewer students mentioned grammar or reading.

These results match previous research showing that watching and listening activities improve comprehension and vocabulary more than grammar.

Learning vs Entertainment

61% of students said they use social media on purpose to learn English, while the rest said they learn accidentally while watching for fun. One student said: "I don't plan to learn, but when I watch English videos, I start to pick up new words." This shows that incidental learning is quite common — and sometimes effective.

Main challenges

Some common problems students mentioned:
• Getting distracted by unrelated videos
• Lack of clear structure or lessons
• Learning slang or incorrect grammar

These match concerns in earlier studies that said social media may cause fossilised errors if no one corrects learners.

The results support theories like Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, where learners improve through social interaction. Also, Krashen's Input Hypothesis explains how learners benefit from watching content in English with subtitles.

However, students often said they watch content passively. This means the learning may not be deep unless they use the material actively (e.g. repeat new words, try speaking, take notes).

Conclusion and suggestions

Social media has real potential to support English learning. Students can hear real English, pick up new words, and feel more motivated. But it's also easy to get distracted, and the learning is not always deep or structured.

What Learners Can Do

• Follow good-quality English teachers and speakers

• Watch with subtitles and repeat new words

• Limit non-educational browsing to stay focused

What Teachers Can Do

• Show how to find reliable English content online

• Use social media videos in the classroom

• Encourage students to reflect on what they watch

Social media can be both helpful and fun — but to make it truly educational, learners need to use it with clear goals. Used wisely, it can support but not replace formal language learning.

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