

Social Media in Speaking Skills

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The ubiquitous nature of social media (SM) makes it a very essential tool to use in the world of education, especially with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic which has led to a paradigm shift in the approaches used in the teaching and learning of English language skills. Findings reveal that there are improvements in speaking skills, as well as confidence to speak and a decline in speaking anxiety. Teachers and educators can now make use of the various social media platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and others to provide learners with more practice that is not only restricted to the classroom but has moved beyond it.

social media

technology

integration

speaking skills

1. Introduction

As English is accepted as a global language; it is important to learners to be able to communicate well in the language and to take part in communicative activities around them. Among the four language skills, as a productive skill speaking is noted as the most difficult skill to master by most language learners ^[1]. Ur ^[2] reinforced this outlook by stating that speaking is looked upon as being the most vital skill to master among the four skills.

In a study carried out to investigate the problems and difficulties learners face when learning speaking, Al Nakhalah ^[3] highlighted some of the factors that may hinder learning to speak, which include the fear of making mistakes, feelings of shyness, feeling anxious, a lack of confidence in speaking, and a lack of motivation to speak in the language. In another study conducted by Al-Sobhi and Preece ^[4], five factors that hinder students from speaking were identified: (1) lack of exposure to language, (2) lack of motivation, (3) students' anxiety and lack of confidence, (4) limited knowledge of English, and (5) inefficient teaching methodology. In other studies, researchers also looked at issues and problems related to the acquisition of speaking skills such as speaking anxiety, speaking difficulty, speaking challenges, speaking performance, and speaking problems ^{[5][6][7][8][9]}. ElNaggar ^[6] focused his study on preparatory students at the Al-Baha University who had problems in speaking skills as they were lacking in grammar, listening, reading, and writing skills. These students were also shy when attempting to speak. Djahimo et al. ^[8] discovered that students' speaking abilities were affected by their anxiety and led to their failure to communicate in English.

Ur ^[2] explained that the learners' psychology was the main reason for their speaking problems, as the learners had low self-confidence and feared making mistakes. These learners were also found to be lacking in ideas and were unable to take part in the speaking activities. As asserted by Saputra ^[9], speaking is perceived as the most anxiety-provoking activity as it involves interactions and communication. Therefore, it is vital that English language

teachers create interactive environments for their students to practice speaking. The fear of making mistakes is ingrained in all learners of languages, so teachers must be creative and use a variety of techniques to help their learners acquire speaking skills. One suggestion given by Rao ^[10] is to work towards learner-centered approaches by involving the learners directly in speaking activities. One way of doing this is by making use of pair or group work where learners are encouraged to work on their own and to produce more speech. At the same time, their confidence level would increase, and they may be inspired to practice speaking when the opportunity presents itself.

One way of creating more opportunities for learners to improve in their speaking skills is by utilizing technology such as social media as learning platforms for learners. Kaplan and Haenlein ^[11], grouped social media into a wide scope, ranging from low social presence or self-presentation, to medium and high ranges. In regard to social presence, social media such as Wikipedia and blogs are at the lowest end. This is followed by content communities and social networking sites at the mid-level, with examples like YouTube and Facebook. The highest level is the virtual gaming world such as World of Warcraft, which has virtual scenarios. On the other hand, Faizi et al. ^[12] grouped social media platforms into three categories. The first category is social network sites which include Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Skype, Twitter, and Tik Tok, where members of the sites can connect and share ideas and resources. The second category comprises of sites like Snapchat, Flickr, Pinterest, YouTube, Tumblr, SlideShare, and Google+, which focuses on content-sharing organization. The third category includes sites like Google Docs, PowToon, and Canva, which looks at content creation and editing. Thus, social media, in the broad sense, encompasses a wide range of tools that integrate technology, social interaction, content sharing, and content creation. Another important feature of social media applications is to bring lessons outside the classroom, allowing for more opportunities for learners to practice using the language.

With the ubiquitous nature of social media, many educators are coming to see this technology as an avenue to make learning more accessible to their students. This positive nature of social media was even more evident with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced educational institutions and schools to move online to continue with teaching and learning ^{[13][14][15][16]}. As being connected to learners was a major issue during the pandemic, social media applications or networks were viewed positively and seen as a method to get students to engage in the learning process ^{[17][18][19][20][21]}. Furthermore, social media is also accepted as a medium that helps facilitate learning in a more engaging and motivating way ^{[22][23]}.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Social Media in Education

Social media is defined as any technology that enables the distribution and sharing of knowledge over the Internet ^[24]. There are so many social media applications or websites that allow users to text, blog, or use images or videos in the course of their work. Some examples include Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Instagram, and Youtube.

What makes social media easily accepted by students and teachers alike is the ubiquitous features of the applications, which can be easily accessed using mobile gadgets and computers. Some of the notable studies that were carried out on social media focused on academic achievements [\[17\]](#)[\[25\]](#)[\[26\]](#)[\[27\]](#).

Meanwhile, other studies have been conducted to investigate the perception of different users of social media. In one study conducted in Saudi universities with teachers, the researchers discovered that the participants strongly believed in the advantages of social media as a tool for teaching [\[20\]](#). Sobaih et al. [\[28\]](#) examined the need to use or not to use social media among faculty members in Egyptian higher education institutions; the findings of the study showed that social media has a tremendous value for academic related purposes.

In contrast, some studies did reveal that social media usage has some risks or negative impacts such as procrastination and addiction, and harmful communication aspects such as cyberbullying, writing, and spelling problems [\[26\]](#)[\[29\]](#). In a study carried out in Malaysia, it was also discovered that the participants of the study, who were primary school pupils, lacked the experience of learning English on social media sites [\[30\]](#). Another study conducted in Malaysia used the approach of creating videos and uploading them to YouTube as a fun and engaging way to improve learners' self-confidence as well as increasing the motivation level of the learners [\[31\]](#). These studies proved that the use of social media use needs to be done in a proper manner so that learners may acquire the best of these resources. As many of the studies were focused on learners in higher institutions and colleges, and were more general in research topics [\[32\]](#)[\[33\]](#)[\[34\]](#)[\[35\]](#)[\[36\]](#), there is a need for more focused research in the primary and secondary school levels.

2.2. Social Media—A Constructivist Perspective

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning describes learning as a social activity, and teaching becomes more interactive, student-centered and practical while giving meaningful authentic experiences [\[37\]](#). In this sense, social media is seen through the perspective of social constructivism. Therefore, the idea of interaction and collaboration is encouraged and valued where social media is concerned. Furthermore, meaningful communication is encouraged with authentic learning tasks assigned to learners to encourage interaction and collaboration. In this way, learners interact, learn, discuss, collaborate, and share information and skills through social media platforms. As scaffolding is an important aspect of the socio-cultural theory, a teacher or an experienced peer may act as a guide for learners to achieve their potential within the Zone of Proximal Development [\[37\]](#). Here, the learners act as support for their peers and this role is reinforced by the teachers or facilitators who also give support in the teaching and learning process.

3. Social Media Integration to Teach Speaking

Learners are already familiar with social media use for communication and entertainment; this made it easier for the researchers to apply social media applications like Tik Tok, YouTube, Instagram, Skype, Facebook, Whatsapp, WeChat, and Telegram in teaching speaking skills. Some were new, or not so commonly used, such as ooVoo, Ted Talks, Imo, and Voice Thread. YouTube was the most frequently used social media platform, used with seven

studies [38][39][40][41][42][43][44]. This is followed by WhatsApp, with five studies [45][46][47][48][49], and Instagram, also with five studies [50][51][52][53][54]. TED Talks comes next with three studies [55][56][57], and Telegram also with three studies [55][56][57]. Facebook was next, [58][59] and three studies used a single social media application: Tik Tok [60], Skype [61], and Voice Thread [62]. All of these studies utilized social media applications to carry out speaking activities, and the findings in all the studies clearly indicate improvement in speaking skills, including confidence in speaking as well as the motivation to speak in English. Among all the social media applications reviewed, YouTube emerged as the highest in number. This may be due to the versatile nature of Facebook, where students are able to view visuals as well as hear the spoken language. WhatsApp and Instagram also seem to be popular among researchers, as seen in the articles reviewed. From the studies done, it has been shown that researchers were able to use WhatsApp effectively to increase oral communication outside the limits of the classroom. This was equally effective in the use of Instagram, which is a very popular social media platform among young people. In a study that made use of Instagram, the response from the learners were positive, and they perceived this application as a tool which is comfortable to apply in learning to speak, even for weak and passive learners [51].

Overall, the response was positive, and showed indication of improvements in speaking skills as well as motivation and confidence to speak. The study by Nilayon and Brahmakasikara [53] suggested using social media platforms like Edmodo and ooVoo to help provide learners with lower English-speaking proficiency with appropriate remedial activities. Ghoneim and Abdelsalam [62] also highlighted the fact that the aspect of social interaction is the key to the improvement of speaking skills. This is also stressed in another study by Sevy-Biloon and Chroman [63], who emphasized that using video chat functions enables learners to practice speaking in authentic and meaningful communicative activities which are purposeful. This would enable educators and teachers to encourage practicing speaking in a more natural and relaxed environment that would also reduce students' anxiety level and help increase their confidence [60][38][51][64][54]. Zaitun et al. [60], who used Tik Tok as a medium for speaking activities, showed that the students were able to use the application interactively and improve their speaking skills, as well as having the opportunity to express their ideas freely on Tik Tok. The study conducted by Rahmah [54] was unique, where the researcher used photographs shared on Instagram as a method of increasing the students' confidence in using the language. The results from the study showed that Instagram helped in improving the students' confidence. In addition, the use of visual images is a useful method which can aid in understanding. At the same time, it would cater to learners who are more visually inclined.

Another study reviewed showed the effect of social media integration, and focused on the fact that social media integration was an advantage for teachers to compensate for the lack of time in class, and to carry out of class practice to teach pronunciation [57]. Social media integration like the use of YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, or Skype in teaching speaking is also perceived as being able to improve teachers' creativity and enhance their teaching procedures while utilizing online applications [65][66]. The results of one study done with Skype instructions revealed gender-specific positive results in their speaking skills, where the female respondents scored higher in their pretest and posttest as compared to the male respondents [61]. Albahlal [43] used YouTube to look at how a group of forty male EFL English teachers were able use this social media application in many ways, such as getting the students to point out details in videos or asking them to share information as well as opinions regarding the materials in the videos. The outcome of the study revealed that the teachers had positive perceptions about

utilizing YouTube in helping students improve their speaking skills. Consequently, knowing how a specific gender reacts or responds to a certain social media application may help teachers and educators to plan their activities to suit their students' needs. Another aspect of speaking skills is public speaking skills [67] or oral presentation skills [64] where the researchers used TED Talks as the social media application to improve learning to speak confidently in English. As such, students would acquire the practice of speaking in front of an audience in a more conducive environment which would help to reduce the feeling of inhibition.

It can be seen that social media has grown and expanded with pedagogical affordances that help teachers and educators to use this platform for teaching and learning and is not seen as only being beneficial for entertainment and socializing. It is evident that social media is perceived as a viable tool to include in the teaching and learning activities to improve speaking skills, as seen in the articles reviewed. In the study conducted by Poramathikul et al. [68], the bilingual and multilingual students found that using a variety of social media networks, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Line, Skype, and Wechat, helped them to improve their speaking skills, where they were able to speak English fluently. Besides this, Baron [65], who also looked at students' perceptions, found that students were interested in learning English using social media applications. Among the social media applications that were used were YouTube, WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Hangouts. In another study carried out with engineering students, Akkara [46] revealed that there was a vast difference in the students' speaking skills as well as a considerable change towards their perceptions in learning to speak in English. All these studies clearly indicate that it is vital and timely for educators and learners to incorporate social media usage into their language practices in order to move beyond the classroom and to provide learners with an authentic and engaging new environment. Learners are also given opportunities to speak in a conducive and relaxing atmosphere which greatly reduces their inhibition as well as their speaking anxiety.

Another important thing to note is the digital divide which exists when a person has access to various resources and communications technology and another person does not have the same privilege of access to the same information [69]. As such, there is an inequality in terms of knowledge distribution and access, which is very much vital where social media is concerned. As stated by Izquierdo and Lozano [70], the digital divide can be categorized according to a lack of access to a number of factors such as mental knowledge, material and network possessions, digital skills, and usage opportunities as related to information and communications technology. In other words, some students may have better access to computers or mobile phones, and may have better knowledge as well as the opportunity to go online and share content or access information. In the studies reviewed for this paper, the majority of the students or learners were from higher institutions of education such as universities [40][41][71][67][72][62], or students enrolled in secondary schools [60][38][39][50][52] or a language institute [55]. These students most likely already had access to technology, either personally or at the institutional level. Therefore, the issue of digital divide was not highlighted in any of the studies, and all of the studies did show improvements in the mastery of speaking skills. The tasks assigned to the learners, or the activities carried out during the research process, were also conducted successfully. These learners were able to use the technology appropriately, and were able to access the information required to complete their tasks. For instance, in the study that Xodabande [57] carried out with 30 EFL learners, the learners were able to practice speaking using a variety of materials shared with them via Telegram such as pictures, text messages, and audio, and also video clips.

From the various social media platforms available, providing learners with the opportunities to use the language meaningfully and effectively has become more feasible, as students can connect with their teachers and peers as well as explore new resource landscapes and use them to improve their learning through collaboration and communication [65][68][63][48][73]. Much of the research done on social media has pointed out that the benefits far outweigh any negative effects [18][74][28][67][75][76]. However, as stated by Ogugou et al. [17], learners must be guided in the use of social media applications so that they do not acquire the negative effects while utilizing social media. This was reaffirmed by Gedik and Cosar [29], who said that students can be taught to use social media correctly and efficiently by exposing students to social media use via seminars and conferences.

4. Conclusions

Social media has always been embraced by people for its unique features of connecting people as well as providing platforms for communication and entertainment. Social media helped students to reduce their speaking anxiety, gain confidence in speaking and, at the same time, become more motivated to use the language. This shows that social media affordances make it a versatile, flexible, and useful tool in helping educators to become innovators and mediators of knowledge, rather than just information or knowledge givers.

It cannot be denied that social media use has received some negative feedback in terms of addiction or time spent using social media applications, as well as the effect of the digital divide which still exists in many countries. Nevertheless, the need to connect to learners and to engage them in conducive learning environments far outweighs the negative effects of social media integration to teach speaking. As it is imperative for teachers to move forward with the changes that are happening around them, teachers must be open to the idea of using social media as a medium to conduct their activities for teaching the English language. This is especially vital as teaching and learning have moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers must be open to new ideas and accept that social media integration is something that they cannot avoid and something that they must embrace.

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