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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATORS

**Sevinc Eyvazova Arif gizi ¹, Gulnara Aliyeva Vaqif gizi ¹,
Subi Ganbarova Shahhin gizi ¹, Akhundova Elnara Arif qizi ¹,
Ahmedova Gunel Rzagulu qizi ¹**

¹ Senior Teacher at Azerbaijan University, "Department of Foreign Languages"

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Abstract

This article examines the role of social networks and mobile messenger programs as integral components of information and communication technologies in the educational environment, particularly in foreign language teaching. The study analyzes the use of modern technologies in language instruction, synthesizing findings from practical experiences in secondary schools and higher education institutions. Special attention is paid to factors such as increasing student motivation, parallel development of competencies, organization of the teaching process (including distance formats), and enhancement of institutional status. Among the negative aspects identified are the length of the adaptation process, attention distraction factors, and incomplete digitalization of society. The article presents scientific publications explaining the necessity of using information and communication technologies in language teaching and highlights the advantages of applying existing social networks in the teaching process.

Keywords: *information technologies, social network, website, electronic portfolio, student, teacher, educational resource*

1. Introduction

Language is considered the most powerful tool for facilitating people's connections with the world. Language learning is influenced by many factors such as cognitive abilities, preparation level, cultural and social characteristics, desire to learn, and adaptation to the native language and environment. The application of technologies in education and their integration with various fields is gaining popularity. New learning opportunities

are created through the use of the internet and the World Wide Web. Thus, teaching and learning styles evolve, necessitating changes to adapt to these new experiences.

In modern times, educators are required to leverage the power of social networks when teaching subjects. Currently, half of the world's population, amounting to 3.8 billion people, uses social media. Moreover, this number continues to grow steadily. In 2019, internet users spent an average of 2 hours

and 24 minutes per day on social networks. Thus, social platforms provide significant opportunities to attract target audiences and establish long-term relationships.

In the field of education, modern trends dictate the necessity of using new sources for language teaching. This is primarily driven by the widespread adoption of the Bologna education system worldwide and the rapid development of the internet and computer networks. The importance of social media for language learners lies in how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Skype, and others contribute to creating learning communities.

Theoretical Foundations of Social Media in Language Education

Sociomedia theory since the 1990s claims that its works and activities have been influential in the functioning of human consciousness, especially in second language acquisition. This approach highlights the necessity of learning language in natural environments where individual, situational, cultural, and social factors shape language production and development (Qing Ma, 2017). Based on this understanding, today's information and communication technologies, which have become integral parts of society and culture, significantly impact language learning and education across various fields.

Therefore, various internet tools, including social media, are introduced into educational environments to enhance student learning. Language learning programs that integrate computer and mobile technologies provide multimedia content such as video, audio, graphics, and text, facilitating the comprehension of learned information.

The use of information technologies in language learning has emerged prominently as a profound impact of the rapid evolution of educational technology. Researchers find it increasingly challenging not to acknowledge the pivotal role of mobile technologies, which have become increasingly important in the field of language learning in recent years. Today's mobile technologies are uniquely positioned to guide individuals in learning a second language while engaging in their social and cultural activities. Extensive research has demonstrated how mobile tech-

nologies are applied to language learning in various languages (Burston, 2013).

While the popularity of using information technologies and social media networks in education is increasing day by day, the exact impact of these technologies on learning is still not clear. However, although many studies investigate how teachers use modern technology in language instruction, there are few that explore why teachers integrate the internet into language teaching and learning. The purpose of this research is to uncover why technology and social media should be used in second language learning and instruction, and how this impact unfolds.

The Use of Technology and Social Media in Language Learning

Language learning is both an individual and collaborative process, and the cognitive processes that underpin learning, especially for the new generation, are facilitated through social media (Mondahl and Razmerita, 2014). Individual learning depends on both the teacher and the surrounding environment in the acquisition of language. Each learner has unique characteristics and learning abilities. It is crucial for language learners to determine how best to learn their target language. Personalized learning generally encompasses aspects such as motivation, learning styles and strategies, learning beliefs, strategic knowledge and skills, and personal preferences related to what and how to learn. In this type of learning, the role of mobile technologies and social media is undeniable.

Mobile-supported language learning promotes personalized and learner-centered learning opportunities through accessible and agile programs, thus gaining importance in language education. Interpersonal exchange of information is one of the most crucial aspects of language learning (Chappell, 2014). Therefore, mobile-supported language learning technology, combined with social networks, can contribute to more effective and original foreign language acquisition. One of the positive effects of social media is its enhancement of relationships and mutual interaction among students, teachers, and their peers, which contributes to positive educational outcomes.

Social media also helps enhance student motivation. Technology-based foreign language communication environments expose students to lower levels of stress in face-to-face communication. Thus, communication environments established through social media become an important tool for developing speaking and writing skills in foreign languages for language learners.

Research conducted on some social networks has shown that communication on such sites reduces students' anxiety about using the target language (Chartrand, 2012). However, while students may feel more comfortable and less inhibited in oral conversations on social media, they may lean towards being more formal in written conversations because they are more aware of their mistakes. According to Evans, the internet is a powerful learning tool. The presence of information technology tools in language learning environments brings new perspectives to language acquisition and allows learners to create a more comprehensive and interactive learning environment.

Nowadays, students can easily benefit from facilities such as computer laboratories, multimedia laboratories, projectors, interactive whiteboards, language labs, and training programs. This enables students to learn the target language both inside and outside the classroom. According to Agarwal, internet-based language learning and teaching practices are widely used in language education. The internet connects more people through social media platforms, providing comfort and motivation for both teachers and students.

Dogoriti, Pange, and Anderson (2014) conducted a survey on the effects of Facebook on language learning, comparing the results of a group of university students who received education with Facebook support and another group who did not use Facebook. Similarly, Blattner and Fiorini expressed that the use of Facebook in foreign language education positively affects students' attitudes towards the language. Such mobile technologies facilitate communication regardless of time and place, as long as there is internet access.

The Use of Technology and Social Media in Language Teaching

Recently, the use of technology and social media in language education has been

evaluated as an effective teaching strategy (Anas & Musdariah, 2018). The use of mobile technology in language education can be discussed in two parts. Firstly, mobile devices such as laptops, smartphones, and tablets serve as versatile tools that assist students in their language learning process. Secondly, the internet offers virtually unlimited resources that can be continuously updated and supplemented with electronic tools.

The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has fundamentally transformed language teaching pedagogy at all levels. According to Allam and Elyas (2016), foreign language teachers participating in their study acknowledged that social media is an integral part of life and have embraced it as a pedagogical tool in language classes. The popularity of the internet as a means of teaching foreign languages stems from its ability to facilitate visual and written interactive communication with native speakers, as well as providing access to visual materials, news, texts, games, films, and educational resources (Kern, 2014).

Conclusion

As we advance towards a more digital world, computers and mobile devices are increasingly becoming crucial technological tools, especially in the field of language learning and teaching. These technologies create learning opportunities, enable access to ideas and information from various sources, and facilitate the sharing of ideas and information on local, national, and international networks.

Research has shown that information technologies are effective educational tools and aid in students' individual learning. The use of technology and social media in educational environments allows students to apply language in real-life contexts. Several factors influence the use of technology in language education. It is essential to prepare teachers to make the most of technology and to inform students about technological resources. Language teachers should develop technological literacy and skills to use information technology tools effectively in teaching and learning languages.

Recent research shows that the new generation learns differently from previous ones and relies on the Internet to obtain infor-

mation and interact with others (Benson & Avery, 2008). The use of social media in educational environments is crucial and particularly promising for language learning.

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© Eyvazova S.A., Aliyeva G. V, Ganbarova S. Sh., Akhundova E. A., Ahmedova G. R.

Contact: Sevinj.Eyvazova@au.edu.az; gulnara.aliyeva@au.edu.az;

suby.ganbarova@au.edu.az; axundova.elnare@list.ru; gunel.ahmedova@au.edu.az