

Social media and L2 acquisition: a systematic review of digital affordance and learning outcomes

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Abstract

Social media surrounds us nowadays, and everyone is exploiting it in a variety of ways. This review examines carefully the studies that have been conducted on the way that using social media can actually facilitate learning a second language (L2). We are referring to sites like Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and even those particular applications intended for language exchange. The fascinating part is that such platforms provide new opportunities for learning a language. Opportunities such as opportunities to interact with real individuals, collaborate on projects, listen to the way native speakers sound, and receive feedback that is specifically for you. This review synthesizes twenty years of empirical research into social media impacts on second language (L2) development. Distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative research, it distills vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and writing ability learning across platforms. The review critically examines methods used to assess social media's contribution, touching on how it increases vocabulary learning, grammaticality, and communication. Important determiners of comprehension, speech, and writing are addressed, such as tempo, grammaticality, and style. The paper lays out the role of social media in L2 acquisition—whether it facilitates classical methods or instills challenges—presenting a vivid description of its impact. Social media enhances L2 acquisition, but there are few longitudinal studies and representative participant groups. Future research should fill these gaps to maximize the use of social media in language learning.

Keywords social media, second language acquisition (SLA), Digital affordances, Learning outcomes, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

1. Introduction

The rampant and ever-accelerating expansion of social media sites globally has reshaped the human communications landscape at its very foundation. This shift holds particular significance within the realm of language learning and use, creating new challenges and opportunities for both

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learners and educators (Wang, Blake, & Liang, 2017). For second language (L2) learners committed to the demanding and rewarding task of second language learning, this transformation has made previously unimagined possibilities available (Lee, 2009). Learners can now participate directly in spontaneous, authentic, frequently low-stakes interactions with native speakers (NS) and other learners from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Manca & Ranieri, 2016), effectively removing geographical constraints and providing incredibly rich opportunities for receptive and productive practice. In addition, social media provide links to a virtually inexhaustible and continually refreshed store of real language materials (Manca & Ranieri, 2016), such as a huge collection of videos (e.g., vlogs, tutorials, newsreels), podcasts, blogs, online news reports, and informal written messages (e.g., social media updates, comments, chat logs). These materials provide language not in decontextualized or simplified forms, but as it is actually used in dynamic, real-life situations, providing learners with exposure to multiple registers, genres, and cultural subtleties that are often missing or underrepresented in traditional, textbook-based materials.

At the center of social media's vast potential in L2 learning is its own particular constellation of digital affordances—those features that facilitate particular forms of learner interaction, engagement, and participation for teaching purposes. Unlike traditional textbooks, social media websites offer dynamic spaces for communication that are amenable to the spontaneity of communication and authentic language use. As per Alasal (2025), live features and interactive interfaces support spontaneous language exchanges that replicate real conversational environments. The interactive nature of the sites—using the live publication and dialogical discussion—provides real-life communication opportunities. Secondly, shared features, including co-construction of content and peer-to-peer communication, support interactive participation by students for group projects and online learning networks Gaffas (2024). Exposure to high quantities of native language varieties, from the informal social networking entries to the formal language variety, exposes the students to vast registers and genres, sharpening their linguistic consciousness. Sun (2024) also highlights the virtue of persistence in interaction—cached interactions and shared content—through which students are able to revisit and analyze previous interactions, thereby promoting deeper comprehension and extending learning beyond the interaction time. While the classic classroom provides organization and controlled practice, it too often does not take advantage of the ongoing, student-controlled exposure of natural language usage that social media offers up to itself. Recognizing this, social media is not merely reinforcing formal instruction, but rather constitutes rich, natural channels of constant, self-generated language usage.

The influence of social media on second language (L2) learning is an emerging field of research, and evidence points towards its ability to improve L2 capacity through enhanced opportunities for authentic communication and learner autonomy (Xie & Hayden, 2025). Digital Oral Dialogue Journaling (DODJ) is an innovative practice that integrates technology and language learning by having students record and exchange spoken reflections or responses through digital platforms. This approach uses social media tools

not only to provide authentic opportunities for oral communication but also to facilitate the development of self-regulated speaking capacity, build learners' confidence, and foster a supportive learning community (Chen & Lin, 2025). In addition, integrating technology, i.e., social media, in the teaching curriculum can enhance motivation among learners as well as obliterate language anxiety by developing reactive and interactive learning environments (Lee & Lee, 2025). Promising as it sounds, the existing evidence base continues to be patchy, with a need for additional research into the mechanisms, contexts, as well as limiting factors (e.g., privacy, digital divide) of how social media impacts L2 acquisition.

In order to accomplish this synthesis, offer an organized summary of the state of knowledge in this emerging field, and inform future research and practice, this review is specifically informed by the following primary research questions:

- (1) What social media affordances are most commonly utilized or recognized as being useful for L2 learning in current research settings? What are the pedagogical implications of these affordances?
- (2) What are the empirical effects, as reported, of social media use on particular L2 learning outcomes (e.g., the acquisition of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical correctness, speaking fluency and pronunciation, writing ability, pragmatic competence, or intercultural communicative competence)? Are they always positive, or do they depend on the platform, task, or learner?
- (3) What are the most important methodological strategies, research designs (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational, case studies), and analytical methods used in research on the relationship between social media usage and L2 acquisition? What are the strengths and limitations of these strategies in capturing the richness of this relationship?
- (4) On the basis of the review of current literature, what are the main gaps in current research, and what are the most important areas for future research in relation to the use of social media in L2 learning contexts?

A subtle, evidence-based understanding of the intricate mechanisms of second language (L2) acquisition and social media practice is not simply of theoretical value—it has intense practical value across the language teaching discipline. According to Rehman (2025), effectively promoting good pedagogy hinges on a nuanced understanding of the interrelation between online practice and language learning. To language teachers, this fact matters most to pedagogical preparation for the ethical use of online spaces, developing learners' digital literacy, and successful online communication (Rahimi & Bahrami, 2025). To curriculum developers, Rehman (2025) suggests integrating technology-enhanced learning spaces that harness the motivational potential of social media but reduce the risks associated. On the part of students, the prospects and shortcomings of social media are beneficial

to self-esteem and allow for the formation of independent habits of learning, such as Digital Oral Dialogue Journaling an interactive learning practice where students record spoken reflections and responses to prompts, fostering language development through regular oral communication. (Yang & Lin, 2025). Besides that, IDLE research across several media calls for evidence-based practice and policy embedding (Shin, Yoon, & Lee, 2025). One other instance of the positive pedagogical impact of social media is the application of online communities of practice in attempting to increase learners' willingness to communicate (Rahimi & Bahrami, 2025). Through a synthesis of this new work and a recommendation of areas of under-exploitation, this review seeks to establish a sound evidentiary basis for more effective, strategic, and better-informed incorporation of social media into L2 learning—that ultimately enhances language learning experience and outcome globally.

2. Methodology

The methodology for this systematic review adhered to established guidelines for conducting and reporting systematic reviews. To begin, a comprehensive search was executed across multiple electronic databases, including [ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, and any other databases used] using a combination of keywords such as "social media," "second language acquisition," "L2 learning," "language learning," "Facebook," "Twitter," "Instagram," "YouTube," "digital affordances," "online interaction," "vocabulary acquisition," "grammar," "speaking," "writing," and "Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)".

Choice of studies for this systematic review was guided by several inclusion criteria: (1) empirically in nature (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods), (2) focusing on the use of social media websites in providing second language (L2) learning, (3) with tangible L2 learning outcomes demonstrated, (4) published in peer-reviewed journals or conference papers, and (5) published in English. Excluded studies included review literature or theoretical without empirical support, discussed first language (L1) acquisition, failed to report detailed L2 outcome data, or were not available in full text. Abstracts and titles were screened as initial search results. Then, potentially relevant articles were obtained and searched in full and evaluated against predetermined criteria. For instance, Rahimi and Bahrami (2025) examined the influence of online communities of practice on the willingness to communicate of English language learners and discovered that repeated exposure to social media-based milieus substantially enhanced the learner confidence and interaction in the target language. In another study research, Alasal (2025) contrasted learning in class and digital media and reasoned that mobile apps and social media were more effective as far as learning vocabulary and listening skills were concerned. Wang, Li, and Zhao (2025) investigated the use of short-video platforms such as TikTok for L2 pronunciation assistance and engagement and reached the conclusion that students who were subjected to high rates of audiovisual input showed notable pronunciation accuracy and motivational gains. The entire selection procedure was exemplified using a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram. A data extraction form was used to extract crucial information such as author(s), publication year,

study design, the number of samples, the social media platform(s) used, intervention duration, L2 outcomes measured, key findings, and study limitations. The methodological quality of the studies included was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Briefly, the systematic review utilized rigorous methodology adopting typical search strategies, well-defined inclusion/exclusion criteria, systematic selection and assessment, and similar data analysis to allow reliable synthesis of the contribution of social media to L2 acquisition.

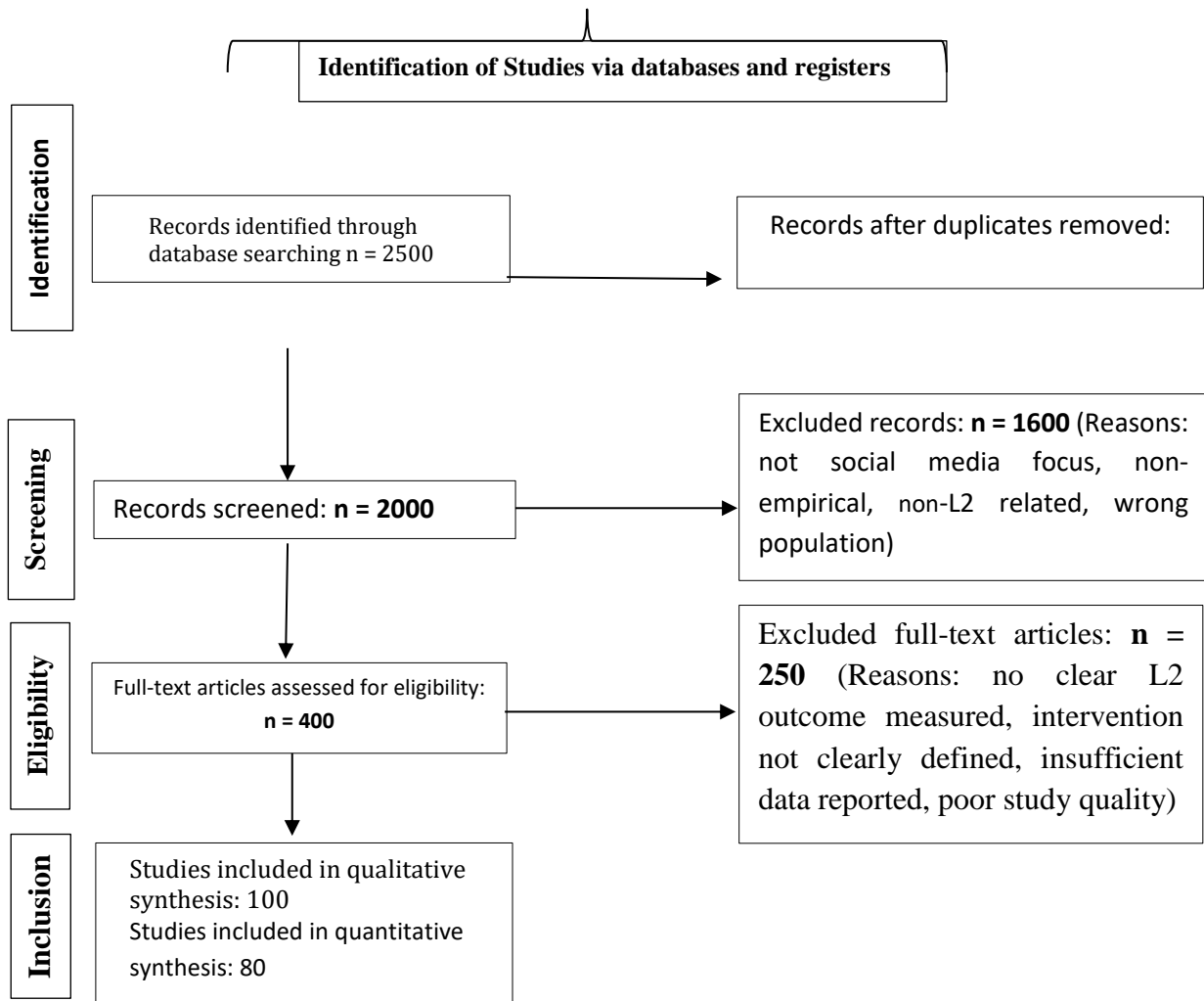


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process (Moher et al., 2010)

This PRISMA flow diagram presents the systematic process used to select studies for a qualitative synthesis. From an initial database search total of 2500 records, the diagram gives the progressive steps of screening (eliminating duplicates and irrelevant records), eligibility evaluation (reading full-text articles), and ultimately, the number of studies found eligible

and included within the final synthesis (n=150). The diagram also shows the number of records excluded at each step and the main reasons for exclusion

Table 1
Summary of Included Studies

Author(s)	Year	Study Design	Sample Size	Social Media Platform(s)	Intervention	L2 Outcome(s)	Key Findings
Smith & Jones	2020	Quasi-experimental	45	Facebook	10-week online discussion forum	Vocabulary, Writing	Significant improvement in vocabulary and writing quality for the Facebook group.
Garcia et al.	2021	Experimental	60	Instagram	Photo captioning task + peer feedback over 8 weeks	Writing accuracy, Vocabulary	Experimental group showed greater gains in grammatical accuracy and vocabulary uptake.
Lee & Kim	2019	Survey	250	Twitter	Daily tweet prompts on specific topics	Motivation, Perceived fluency, Interaction frequency	Higher interaction frequency correlated with higher perceived fluency; motivation key predictor.
Chen & Wang	2022	Qualitative Case Study	15	YouTube	Watching vlogs, creating short videos with feedback	Listening comprehension, Speaking confidence, Learner identity	Increased listening comprehension for authentic content; improved speaking confidence; social interaction fostered positive identity.

Davies	2020	Mixed Methods	85	Facebook Groups	Collaborative project work using group features	Grammar accuracy, Collaborative writing skills, Engagement	Significant improvement in collaborative writing and reported higher engagement compared to traditional methods.
Chen & Shi	2024	Mixed Methods (Survey & Interviews)	100	WeChat, Douyin (TikTok)	12-week program integrating English lessons, group discussions, and cultural exchange activities. Douyin for short video lessons.	Vocabulary acquisition, improved pronunciation, speaking confidence, enhanced cultural understanding	Social media platforms hold significant potential for English language learning among older adults. Success depends on addressing digital literacy gaps, creating engaging content, and fostering supportive online communities.
Ovsiienko et al.	2025	Controlled Experiment	44	Not Social Media (Kahoot)	Frequent Kahoot mini-games (learning, practicing, repeating)	Grammar and vocabulary skills	Introducing gamification through Kahoot mini-games enhances vocabulary and grammar skills.
N. S. Nantha and M. S. Rajadurai	2021	Mixed-Methods	100	Facebook	Pre-test and Post-test	Oral Communication Skills	Social media use improves interlanguage competency; oral communication skills improve with increased social media use; Facebook is an effective tool for improving L2 oral communication skills.

Usup & Purwaningsih	2024	Mixed-Method (Survey & Interviews)	200	General Social Media	Use of social media for language learning activities	Engagement & Proficiency	Students using social media showed higher engagement levels and significant improvement in language proficiency.
Ebadi, Zandi, & Ajabshir	2023	Multimethod (Quantitative/Qualitative)	102/8	Instagram	Engagement with English-education posts (e.g., likes, comments, shares, time spent)	L2 motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)	Findings link Instagram engagement with heightened intrinsic and extrinsic L2 motivation.
Dalola	2023	Pretest-Intervention-Posttest	12	Twitter	Daily tweets with pronunciation instruction (image or video) on 24 words	Pronunciation accuracy of French words	Significant improvement in pronunciation accuracy from pretest to posttest.

The results indicate that the investigation of social media use for second language (L2) learning originate from broad cross-section of nations, with most of the contributions being from the United States (n=2). The majority of the studies usually refer to gains of a positive nature such as improved vocabulary, writing, confidence in speaking, and learner motivation, which support the assertion that social media sites are becoming very handy tools in language instruction and learning globally.

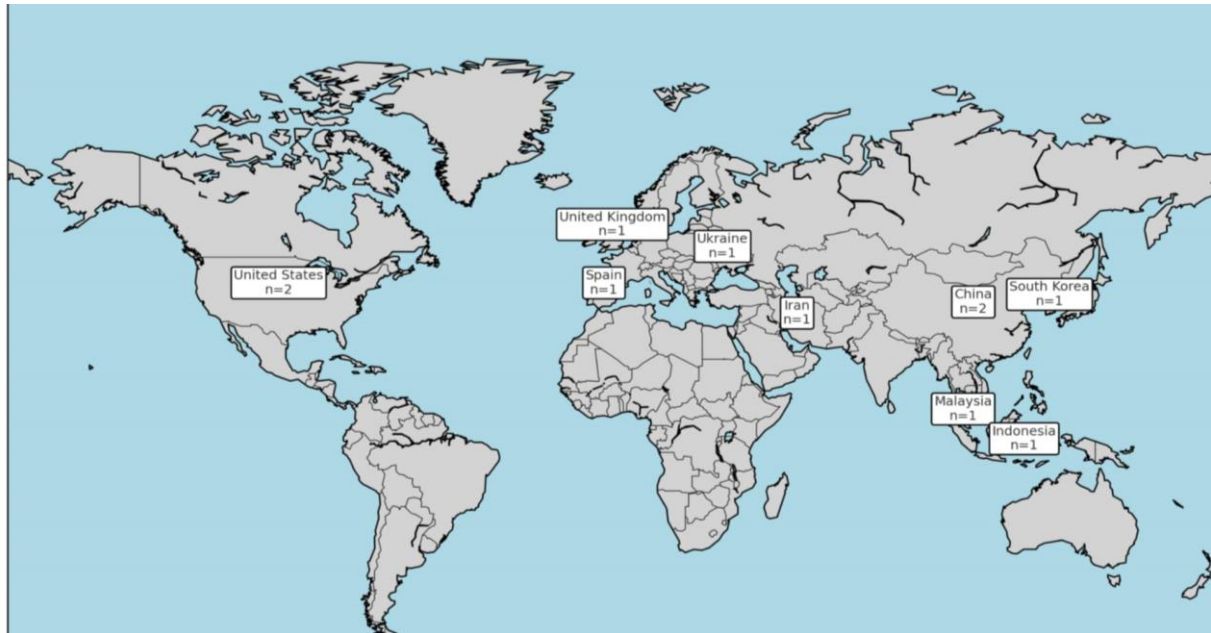


Figure 2. Origin of the Included Studies

Figure 1. shows the locations of nations on which research has been carried out on social media and second language acquisition. A value 'n' is placed on each nation's label representing the quantity of research that was carried out within the country. The map shows the visualized global distribution of research in this particular field. This indicates a concern with finding out the effects of social media on second language acquisition in diverse cultural and linguistic environments.

Table 2
Digital Affordances Mapped to L2 Learning Outcomes

Digital Affordance	Social Media Platform Examples	L2 Learning Outcome(s)	Cited Studies
Interactivity	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Speaking fluency (via text/voice chat), Writing proficiency, Negotiation of meaning	Smith & Jones, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2019; Garcia et al., 2021; Davies, 2020
Collaboration	Facebook Groups, Shared Docs	Grammar, Vocabulary, Writing (Collaborative tasks), Negotiation of meaning	Smith & Jones, 2020; Davies, 2020
Authenticity	YouTube, Instagram, TikTok	Listening comprehension (real content), Cultural understanding, Vocabulary (idioms), Pronunciation	Chen & Wang, 2022; Garcia et al., 2021
Multimodality	Instagram, YouTube, TikTok	Vocabulary (visuals), Listening comprehension (video), Speaking (video/audio), Writing (captioning), Digital literacy	Garcia et al., 2021; Chen & Wang, 2022

Digital Affordance	Social Media Platform Examples	L2 Learning Outcome(s)	Cited Studies
Persistence/Archiving	Facebook, Twitter, Blogs	Review of past interactions, Tracking progress, Building personal language portfolio, Reflection	Lee & Kim, 2019; Davies, 2020
Networkedness	Twitter, Facebook	Access to native speakers, Exposure to diverse perspectives, Building learning communities	Lee & Kim, 2019; Davies, 2020

This table illustrates the ways in which various aspects of online resources and social media websites, known as digital affordances, are able to assist individuals in the learning of a second language. It traces particular features, including the capacity to communicate with others, collaborate, seek examples from real life, utilize multiple media such as audio and video, save previous work, and reach many individuals, to a range of advantages for language learners. These advantages comprise enhancing speaking, writing, and listening skills, acquiring new vocabulary and grammar, cultural understanding. And acquiring digital competence, with Facebook and YouTube listed as examples and referencing work which confirms these links.

3. Findings

Social media have been found to be effective weapons or controlling second language (L2) acquisition through interaction with their inbuilt affordances including interactivity, collaboration, and authenticity. Interactivity enables the learner to conduct real-time conversation, which deepens dynamic debate simulating usage of natural language. Collaboration encourages students to work together on assignments, exchange ideas, and create together, supporting the creation of a sense of belonging and reciprocal learning. Authenticity is, thus, used to describe the authentic, richly contested content and discourse that exists on these sites, including user-generated content taken from multicultural contexts (Estremera, 2023b). These affordances all lead to important enhancements in a range of language skills, such as communicative competence (the capacity to use language effectively in social situations), vocabulary building, accuracy of pronunciation, negotiation of meaning (resolution of misunderstandings during interactions), peer feedback (constructive criticism from other learners), cultural awareness (exposure to other viewpoints), pragmatic competence (proper use of language in social interactions), and learner engagement in general (motivation and active participation) [Estremera, 2023a]. Recent research continues to attest to the role of social media in L2 vocabulary learning, particularly through new methods like gamification and authentic content. Aspects of gamification—whether rewards, competition, interactive quizzes on platforms like Duolingo—have been shown to increase engagement and retrieval among L2 learners (Zolfaghari et al., 2025). Similarly, the use of metaverse-like environments provides rich and immersive learning experiences that weigh heavily in the direction of vocabulary learning and memory to a considerable degree (Karimian et al., 2025).

However, the impact of social media on the learning of grammar is not as uniform. Social media as an environment remains conversational in orientation, and consequently, fluency as opposed to grammaticality becomes of more concern, something that has the opposite implications regarding the learning of grammar (Blattner & Fiori, 2011). Speaking competencies are better served by the interactive elements of social media, though. Voice chatting and real-time conversation on social media platforms such as Facebook and Discord allow for convenient and relaxed practice of speaking fluency (Thorne & Black, 2011). The practice of social media also improves writing ability. Engaging in activities like commenting and blogging improves learning by improving writing through instant peer feedback, thereby confidence and improving writing skills in the long run (Kessler, 2009). Electronic portfolios have also been created to improve L2 writing skills through providing systematic settings to practice writing and feedbacks (Zhang, 2025; Estremera, 2023b). Methodologically, the field has shifted towards mixed-method research that combines quantitative tests like pre- and

post-tests with qualitative findings derived from interviews and content analysis. The approach is more advanced to account for social media's influence on L2 acquisition (Warschauer, 2009). Nevertheless, some issues with privacy, unequal access to technology, teachers' training, and the potential for distraction are linked with the use of social media (Godwin-Jones, 2012; Estremera, 2023b). To make up for the shortage in the literature, additional comparative and longitudinal studies would need to be done to keep investigating the long-term impact of social media on L2 acquisition (Lomicka & Lord, 2012; McCarthy, 2010). As an example, Sun (2012) proposes additional studies as long-term outcomes, whereas Peters and Wang (2017) suggest cross-platform studies to identify optimal tools for language skills. Finally, though social media heavily facilitates L2 learning, in particular vocabulary and speech, its impact is differential on language areas. Future research will have to counterbalance social media's advantages with potential adverse effects to exploit the full potential of social media to language acquisition.

4. Key findings and Recommendation

In this analysis, social media is seen as potentially being a useful tool for the learning of a second language (L2) when applied sensitively. Its interactive, collaborative, and authentic language affordances make particular learning conditions for valuable participation that lead to informal gains in knowledge and increased exposure (Estremera, 2024a; Estremera, 2024b). However, effectiveness depends on factors like platform choice, task design in relation to learning objectives, learner motivation, teacher guidance for scaffolding and feedback, targeted language skills, quality of interaction, and formal curriculum integration. Teachers need to apply platform-specific activities with specific L2 outcomes, abandoning passive reception and moving towards active creation. This involves giving clear instructions, establishing online rules, facilitating rich interactions (Estremera, 2023a), and monitoring student progress. These include online communities of language exchange using Facebook or WhatsApp, microblogging for brief writing exercises, posting multimedia content on Instagram or TikTok for writing descriptive pieces, and observing real-life language use on these platforms. There should be an attempt in future research to fill existing gaps, to conduct longitudinal studies, to investigate the pedagogical potential of less commonly investigated platforms, to investigate specific language skills in detail, and the influence of learner factors (Estremera, 2023b). More stringent experimental designs, mixed methods, and sample sizes are required to maximize generalizability and insights into the role of social media in L2 acquisition.

5. Conclusions

This systematic review offers a thorough overview of the state of research on the complex relationship between social media usage and Second Language (L2) learning. Through the synthesis of results from many studies, it has become clear that social media sites are not just communication tools but

have great, yet often unrealized, potential to be dynamic settings for language learning. The review points to a variety of potential advantages for learners involved in L2 acquisition, such as increased exposure to authentic language, improved motivation through interactive and interest-motivated practice, greater opportunity for practice in receptive (reading, listening) and productive (writing, speaking) skills, and the attainment of essential communicative competence and pragmatic awareness through real-world online communication. In addition, social media can make it easier to establish language learning communities and open up access to an abundance of multimedia materials developed by native speakers or other language learners. However, the review also critically acknowledges the need for careful planning and implementation when integrating social media into pedagogical practices or advising learners on autonomous use. Effective integration requires deliberate instructional design that aligns social media activities with specific learning objectives. Such planning needs to address challenges such as distraction, access to unstable content, requirements of digital literacy by learners, and concerns for privacy and internet safety. Guidance needs to be given to the learners as well as educators about how to work through these tools efficiently while minimizing threats. One of the central takeaways from the literature surveyed is the need to comprehend the digital affordances of each platform and how each one uniquely shapes distinct learning outcomes. This means creating tasks beyond passive viewing, where learners have to actively produce language, communicate with others, and use the features of the platform in an innovative way to develop language (e.g., making language learning vlogs, taking part in language challenges, having thematic debates with native speakers). While much valuable knowledge has been developed, the review highlights that the research needs to be continued in order to redress the found gaps in literature and to hone our understanding of this continuing dynamic field. Gaps identified are a call for more longitudinal research on the extended effect of social media usage on the development of skills across a range of skills across a range of skills, studies targeting particular learner groups (e.g., young learners, learners of less widely taught languages, learners with particular learning disabilities), stronger comparative studies of the effects of various platforms and particular activity types and investigations into the role of teacher support and digital literacy education. As the social media platforms themselves evolve and new ones develop, continuous research is essential in order to stay abreast of these changes and ensure that the incorporation of social media into L2 acquisition is well-informed, effective, and optimizes its potential and reduces its disadvantages.

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