

Social media and its influence on motivation for learning English in higher education

Las redes sociales y su influencia en la motivación para aprender inglés en la educación superior

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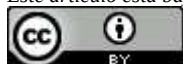
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Abstract

Social media such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp are present in students' daily lives, as a result, these platforms are part of learning process and can contribute to participation, access to academic information, and a willingness to learn English as a foreign language. Through a structured survey using a quantitative methodology, data was collected on the perceptions and interactions of 40 higher education students in Ecuador to determine if social media, implemented in an academic purpose, influences on the motivation for learning English as a foreign language, and thereby, to disseminate this knowledge through projects focused on developing and adapting innovative strategies to address the challenges of English language in higher education. The results showed that social media can act as a motivational tool to improve students' confidence, promoting independent learning, and reinforcing English language teaching; therefore, the strategic and academic integration of social media contributes to improve learning experiences, making them more dynamic and interactive.

Resumen

Las redes sociales tales como Instagram, TikTok, Youtube, Facebook o Whatsapp están presentes en la vida cotidiana de los estudiantes, como resultado estas plataformas no son ajenas en los procesos de aprendizaje y pueden contribuir a la participación, acceso a información académica y la disposición a aprender el idioma inglés como lengua extranjera. A través de una encuesta estructurada con una metodología cuantitativa, se recopilaban datos sobre la percepción y la interacción de 40 estudiantes de educación superior del Ecuador para determinar si las redes sociales implementadas con un enfoque académico influyen en la motivación de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, y de esta forma, se difunda el conocimiento mediante proyectos orientados al desarrollo y a la adaptación de estrategias innovadoras que permitan afrontar los desafíos del idioma inglés en la educación superior. Los resultados evidenciaron que las redes sociales pueden funcionar como una herramienta de motivación para mejorar la confianza de los estudiantes, promoviendo el aprendizaje independiente y a la vez reforzando la enseñanza del idioma inglés; por lo que la integración estratégica y académica de las

redes sociales contribuye a mejorar las experiencias de aprendizaje convirtiéndolas más dinámicas e interactivas.

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INTRODUCTION

Languages in constant evolution and adaptation in response to the social, cultural, and technological changes of the modern era intensified with the rise of the Internet in the twentieth century and the subsequent emergence of social networks, which accelerated linguistic evolution and transformed the way that people communicate.

In this digital environment, some languages reach farther than others due to the number of native speakers or their relevance in the technological and computing areas; that is why, Ananiadou, McNaught & Thompson (2024) state in their study that English is the most widely used language on the Internet, accounting for more than 50% of online content, despite being spoken by only 16% of the world's population. Consequently, access to certain information, applications, or services is not available in all languages, which increases the importance of English as a global lingua franca.

Likewise, the average use of the Internet and social media varies depending on the sociocultural and economic situation; according to Kemp (2024), individuals between 18 and 24 years old spend an average of 3 hours and 6 minutes per day on social media, which represents a considerable share of their leisure and entertainment time; in other words, social media use is commonly among young people. As a result, youth remain highly interconnected in digital environments, raising questions about the effects on their identity, cognitive skills, and academic performance.

In the academic field, students' lack of attention and concentration due to the use of mobile devices remains a persistent concern for instructors. However, Al-Rahmi et al. (2022) demonstrate, through a structural equation model, that the planned integration of these platforms in higher education contributes to student satisfaction and improved academic performance, provided they are used with a pedagogical approach centered on interaction through collaborative learning.

On the other hand, instructors can benefit from integrating social media into their lesson plans to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching inside and outside the classroom. These platforms provide innovative learning methodologies, interactive activities, and teaching dynamics that foster motivation and the development of students' language skills. In fact, social media can be as complementary learning environments that strengthen motivation, promote interaction, and support the development of linguistic skills (Barrot, 2022).

At the international level, Rwodzi, de Jager, & Mpofu (2020) examined how the use of social media supports the teaching and learning of English as a second language among higher education students in South Africa through applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Their findings concluded that meaningful pedagogical benefits can be achieved through the proper integration of social media, enhancing students' motivation and communicative competence.

Likewise, Tambunan, Sari & Rasmitadila (2022) concluded that social media – particularly Instagram – functions effectively in educational settings for teaching the English language, generating higher levels of interest and motivation among university students in Indonesia. Therefore, the use of these platforms is not exclusively recreational or entertainment-oriented; they can support learning as complements to the traditional classroom when integrated with clear pedagogical objectives.

Zainal & Rahmat (2020) investigated how social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube influence vocabulary development and examined how these applications affect interest in learning the English language among higher education students in Malaysia. The study concluded that social media has a positive impact on vocabulary learning, and students reported increased motivation to learn English as they developed their linguistic skills.

In the Ecuadorian context, Barcia et al. (2025) conducted a study at a higher education institution in which 81% of students reported that social media is useful for learning English, while 10% considered it very useful; however, a small group of students believed it was not useful (5%) or not useful at all (4%). These findings suggest that most students recognize the value of social media as an effective and accessible tool for language learning.

Villalva (2022) conducted a study to analyze the influence of social media on oral skills among second-year high school students which employed a quasi-experimental methodology to assess the impact of social media platforms on these skills. The findings indicated that the experimental group – using WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube in their learning activities – demonstrated stronger oral expression skills than the control group.

The main objective of the present study is to implement social media with an academic focus, motivating the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) among students in the Ecuadorian context. In doing so, the study seeks to disseminate knowledge through projects aimed at developing and adapting innovative strategies that address the challenges of English language teaching in higher education.

This study examines the pedagogical implications of integrating social media into the teaching of English as a foreign language in higher education. It also seeks to identify the interests and perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding the use of social media, and to assess whether exposure to these platforms contributes to fostering their motivation in learning the language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study employed a quantitative methodology to objectively analyze the various ways in which higher education students interact with social media, allowing for the collection of measurable primary data. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, this methodology is applied through structured surveys to examine learning attitudes and experiences (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024).

Primary data were collected through a structured survey using five-point Likert scales, administered digitally via Google Forms. The survey consisted of two sections: the first gathered information on age and self-assessed English proficiency, while the second included 10 questions that evaluated respondents' interest in and perspectives on the use of social media in the context of teaching English as a foreign language.

The validity of the instrument was verified by submitting the survey to three experts in English language teaching pedagogy. Likewise, to ensure the reliability of the survey, we applied Cronbach's alpha coefficient, an indicator of internal consistency that reflects the coherence among the instrument's items and the homogeneity of the scale. Cronbach's alpha

is widely accepted in studies on English as a foreign language; for instance, Hoang (2024) and Sabadoust et al. (2025) respectively used this coefficient to validate questionnaires on technological integration and quality for instructors, reporting values above 0.90.

The survey participants were 40 higher education students in Ecuador selected at random. According to Rahman et al. (2022), simple random sampling ensures that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, minimizing selection bias and allowing the results to be representative. Therefore, this method avoids categorizing students by factors such as public or private institution, economic background, gender, or ethnicity.

RESULTS

The following section presents the results obtained from the first part of the survey administered randomly to 40 higher education students in Ecuador. Section 1 focuses on age range and self-assessed English proficiency.

Table 1

Age Range of Respondents

Age Range	Percentage	Students
18 – 22 years	75%	30
22 – 25 years	17,5%	7
25 years or above	7,5%	3
Total	100%	40

Note. Source: own elaboration based on the survey results.

Table 2

Self-Assessed English Proficiency of Respondents

English Proficiency Level	Percentage	Students
Basic Level	42,5%	17
Intermediate Level	35%	14
Advanced Level	22,5%	9
Total	100%	40

Note. Source: own elaboration based on the survey results.

Section 2 includes 10 questions aimed at evaluating higher education students' perceptions of and use of social media in the context of English language instruction. To determine the instrument's consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied, yielding a score of $\alpha = 0.8$, an acceptable value for establishing the survey's reliability (Kaya & Boz, 2019).

The ten survey questions were grouped into four analytical categories: use and intensity, educational exposure, educational motivation, and pedagogical value. This grouping aimed to establish internal statistical consistency within the study and to reduce dispersion among the Likert-scale items by allowing the identification of general trends rather than isolated variations for each question (Zeng et al., 2024). In addition, this approach made it possible to obtain an average value for each question and for each category across all collected responses.

Table 3

Analytical Grouping of the Survey Question

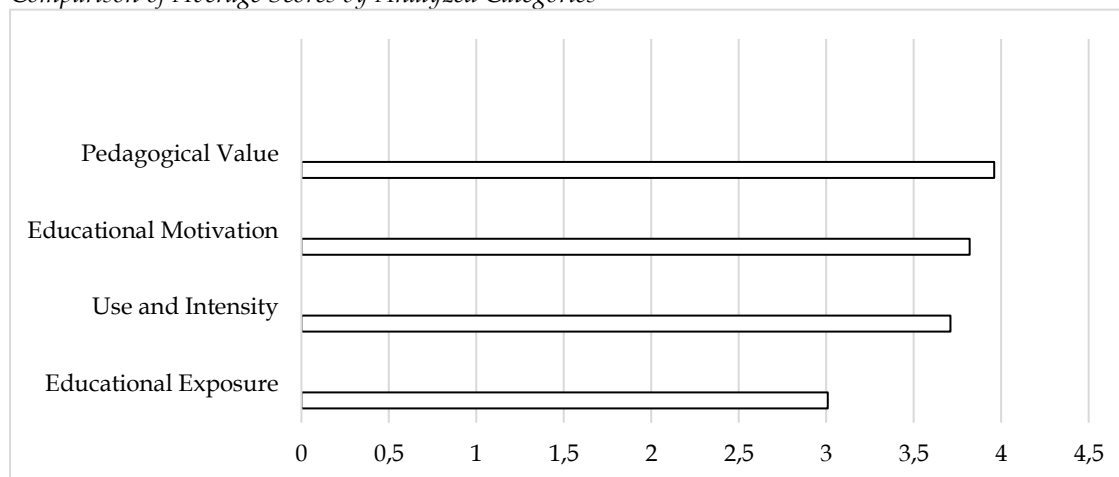
Category	Questions	Average
Use and Intensity	I have more than five social media platforms installed on my phone	3.70
	I spend more than five hours per day viewing content on social media.	3.73
	Category Average	3.71
Educational Exposure	I follow accounts, platforms, or content creators specifically related to learning English.	2.53
	Watching English content on social media motivates me to practice.	3.50
	Category Average	3.01
Educational Motivation	Social media helps me learn new English vocabulary and expressions.	4.00
	I feel more motivated to improve my English when I interact with content on social media.	3.70
	Using social media increases my motivation to continue learning English.	3.77
	Category Average	3.82
Pedagogical Value	I prefer learning English through accounts, platforms, or content creators rather than traditional methods.	3.85
	Social media is a valuable complement or alternative to traditional English learning methods.	4.08
	Using social media contributes to my overall engagement and participation in English learning activities.	3.90
	Category Average	3.96

Note. Source: own elaboration based on the survey results.

On the other hand, Figure 1 presents a bar chart comparing the categories from highest to lowest average score, allowing the existing differences to be clearly visualized. For example, it can be observed that the categories “*Pedagogical Value*” and “*Educational Motivation*” register the highest scores, followed by “*Use and Intensity*,” and finally “*Educational Exposure*.”

Figure 1

Comparison of Average Scores by Analyzed Categories



Note. Source: own elaboration based on the survey results.

DISCUSSION

According to Table 1, 30 of the surveyed students fall within the 18–22 age range, representing 75%; 7 students are between 22 and 25 years old, representing 17.5%; and only 3 students are over 25 years old, representing 7.5%. These results align with data from the National Survey of Employment, Unemployment, and Underemployment. In fact, 61.14% of undergraduate university students are between 18 and 22 years old, while 29.81% are between 23 and 29 years old, indicating that the average age of university students ranges from 18 to 25 years (Bonilla-Marchán, Delgado, & Stefos, 2019). As a result, students share recent educational trajectories in English instruction, leading to comparable levels of similar learning practices.

This age homogeneity reduces external variability and allows for a more precise interpretation of the results, demonstrating coherence between the survey and the national population by improving the study’s representativeness and defining the scope of the findings for university populations. Therefore, the age range prevents the generalization of the results to groups with different educational characteristics.

Table 2 shows that 17 respondents self-assess their proficiency as basic (42.5%), 14 students as intermediate (35%), and 9 students as advanced (22.5%). However, this does not represent their actual English proficiency, as it is not based on standardized tests. Even so, it serves as an important indicator of students’ perceptions of their linguistic abilities, which influences activities related to motivation, preferred learning methods, and confidence in their command of English.

These results are consistent with the study by Almeida, Castillo, & Rosero (2021), in which the outcomes of a mock PET-B1 test administered in three higher education institutions in Ecuador showed average scores below the threshold required to reach the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This reinforces the correlation

between respondents' self-assessments and the real challenges of language learning faced by higher education institutions in the Ecuadorian context.

For an accurate analysis, the ten questions were categorized to strengthen statistical consistency. As a result, the category "*Pedagogical Value*" obtained the highest average ($P = 3.96$), indicating that students consider social media a useful and effective tool for learning English as a foreign language.

The category "*Educational Motivation*" reached the second-highest average ($P = 3.82$), indicating that exposure to English-oriented digital content increases students' willingness to practice the language. On the other hand, the category "*Educational Exposure*" recorded the lowest average ($P = 3.01$), suggesting limited engagement with accounts or platforms specialized in English instruction. However, low exposure does not necessarily translate into low motivation or reduced educational value.

This highlights that higher education students are not widely exposed to educational accounts, yet they still feel motivated and view social media as a legitimate method for English instruction. In this context, Zhou (2021) notes that social media fosters active participation and learning engagement, but its pedagogical impact diminishes when its use remains at an informal and superficial level. Therefore, the use of social media must be oriented toward academic contexts with clear educational purposes for its impact on students to be effective.

Likewise, the differences among the four categories reflect a clear pattern: strategic exposure to educational content is low, yet the perceived pedagogical value and the motivation generated by social media are high. This represents an advantage for higher education students, who are accustomed to using new technologies, thus facilitating the implementation of more dynamic and interactive resources in academic settings.

The surveyed students perceive that social media supports English learning in areas such as vocabulary and expressions, and that its use increases motivation and participation in activities involving nontraditional methods. This is supported by evidence showing that social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube contribute to vocabulary learning, increased motivation, and active student engagement (Rafiee & Kassaian, 2024).

The pedagogical implications of social media in the teaching of English as a foreign language are undeniable, and their influence in motivating students to learn the language is evident. However, inadequate use of these platforms does not contribute to the development of students' linguistic abilities.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the integration of social media for pedagogical purposes can become an effective tool to strengthen the motivation and interest of Ecuadorian higher education students in learning English as a foreign language. This aligns with the findings of Azar & Yousofi (2022), who demonstrated that the use of social media increases engagement among English learners.

The students who participated in this research are between 18 and 25 years old, a range that demonstrates openness to the use of digital platforms in their learning process and reflects a willingness to adopt innovative teaching methods aligned with their technological reality in the modern era.

Moreover, the results confirmed that students devote a considerable portion of their time to social media, and that part of this usage is directed toward acquiring English vocabulary and expressions. However, it is important to note that the educational contribution of these platforms depends on the type of content consumed and the way the digital tool is used by learners. As such, exposure to general or entertainment-focused

material without defined academic purposes significantly reduces the expected progress among higher education students (Badr et al., 2024).

Higher education institutions in Ecuador should direct the use of social media toward educational objectives by incorporating these platforms into the design of teaching strategies. Given that social media is already part of students' daily lives, institutions can leverage this digital familiarity as a resource that strengthens academic development in the area of English.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of educational innovation in the incorporation of everyday technologies with a structured and pedagogical purpose, given that social media can become a key tool for improving motivation, interaction, and performance among higher education students learning English as a foreign language.

Conflict of Interest

The author and co-author declare that there are no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct or presentation of the results of this study. The research was carried out exclusively for academic purposes and without sponsorship from external or private institutions or organizations.

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