

USING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AMONG DIPLOMA STUDENTS IN MALAYSIAN POLYTECHNICS

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Abstract: *This qualitative study explores diploma students' experiences and perceptions of using social media platforms to improve communicative English proficiency within a Malaysian polytechnic context. Despite extensive English instruction throughout their education, Malaysian polytechnic students often struggle to achieve effective communicative competence due to limited authentic practice opportunities. This research addresses the gap by examining how students leverage social media to enhance their English language skills and overcome linguistic barriers. Data were collected from eight diploma students using semi-structured interviews and analysed through thematic analysis. Findings reveal that social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit, provide accessible, flexible, and engaging environments for autonomous, self-directed language practice. Students strategically use different platforms to develop specific language skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, benefitting from real-time interactions and community engagement. Additionally, integrated technological tools like AI-driven language assistants and instant grammar correction significantly bolster students' confidence, promoting more frequent and effective language use. Despite these positive outcomes, potential distractions and inconsistent linguistic input highlight the necessity of educator guidance and structured integration into language curricula. This study contributes valuable insights to language education by highlighting practical strategies for leveraging social media to improve communicative English proficiency. The implications inform educators and policymakers aiming to optimize digital learning environments in polytechnic institutions.*

Keywords: *social media, communicative English proficiency, qualitative research, language learning*

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized daily life, including education and language acquisition. In Malaysia, where English is a critical second language, leveraging social media platforms presents a novel approach to enhancing communicative English proficiency among students. This introduction explores the intersection of social media usage and English language learning, focusing on diploma students in Malaysian polytechnics. It also reviews pertinent literature from the past seven years to contextualize the current study. English is prominent in Malaysia's educational landscape, serving as the medium of instruction for numerous subjects and as a gateway to global opportunities. Despite extensive exposure to the language throughout their academic journey, many Malaysian students, particularly those in polytechnic institutions, continue to face challenges in achieving communicative competence. These challenges often stem from limited opportunities for authentic language use and a lack of confidence in engaging in English conversations (Kho & Ting, 2024).

The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed communication dynamics, offering interactive and engaging environments that extend beyond traditional classroom settings. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp facilitate real-time interaction, content sharing, and collaborative learning, making them potential tools for language practice. In the Malaysian context, the widespread adoption of social media among youth suggests its viability as a medium for enhancing English language skills (Lau & Ismail, 2025). Several studies have investigated the impact of social media on language learning, yielding insightful findings. Research indicates that Malaysian university students perceive social media as beneficial for informal language learning. These platforms provide exposure to authentic language use and opportunities for interaction with native and non-native speakers, improving various language skills (Yunus et al., 2019). A study on Malaysian primary students found that integrating social media into language learning positively influenced writing skills. The interactive nature of these platforms encouraged students to practice writing more frequently and receive immediate feedback, fostering a conducive learning environment (Yunus, Zakaria, & Suliman, 2019). Investigations into lower secondary ESL learners revealed that social media could serve as an effective tool for enhancing speaking skills. The platforms' interactive features allowed students to engage in conversations, participate in discussions, and practice pronunciation in a low-anxiety environment (Annamalai, 2019).

While the potential benefits are evident, integrating social media into language learning is challenging. The informal nature of social media can lead to distractions and off-task behaviour. Students may be tempted to engage in non-educational activities, which can hinder learning (Nekson & Said, 2024). The authenticity of language used on social media varies, and exposure to incorrect grammar or slang may inadvertently affect language acquisition. Therefore, guidance from educators is essential to ensure that students benefit from quality language input (Thurairaj et al., 2015). Effective use of social media for educational purposes requires a certain level of digital literacy. Students must be adept at navigating these platforms and discerning credible sources of information (Eltahir et al., 2023). Despite the growing body of literature on social media's role in language learning, there remains a paucity of qualitative research focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of diploma students in Malaysian polytechnics. It is crucial to understand how these students utilize social media for authentic language interaction and their subjective views on its effectiveness in overcoming linguistic challenges. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring diploma students' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of social media to improve communicative English proficiency in Malaysian polytechnics.

Integrating social media into language learning offers promising avenues for enhancing English proficiency among Malaysian polytechnic students. While existing studies provide valuable insights, further qualitative exploration is necessary to comprehend students' experiences and perceptions fully. Such understanding can inform the development of effective strategies that leverage social media's potential while addressing its challenges, ultimately contributing to improved communicative competence in English. This research explores diploma students' perceptions and lived experiences regarding using social media to improve communicative English proficiency in Malaysian polytechnics.

Research Objectives:

1. To understand diploma students' experiences using social media platforms for communicative English practice.
2. To explore students' perceptions of how social media contributes to overcoming linguistic barriers in communicative English.

Literature Review

The integration of social media platforms into educational settings has garnered significant attention, particularly in the realm of language learning. For diploma students in Malaysian polytechnics, mastering communicative English is essential for academic success and future career prospects. This literature review examines recent studies from the past seven years, focusing on two primary objectives: understanding diploma students' experiences using social media for communicative English practice and exploring their perceptions of how social media contributes to overcoming linguistic barriers.

Experiences of Using Social Media Platforms for Communicative English Practice

Social media platforms have become ubiquitous tools among students, offering interactive environments conducive to language practice. Research indicates that these platforms facilitate various aspects of language learning, including writing, speaking, and overall communicative competence. A study conducted at Ungku Omar Polytechnic investigated the role of social media as a learning tool in English language education. The findings revealed that students perceived social media to favour their learning, particularly in enhancing writing style, reading abilities, lexical diversity, communication skills, and grammatical usage. Additionally, social media was valued for knowledge sharing, acquiring learning materials, and serving as a communication medium. Similarly, research by Lau and Ismail (2025) examined the relationship between social media usage and English language performance among Malaysian diploma students. The study found a positive linear relationship between the time spent interacting in English on social media and students' Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) grades. Female students, in particular, reported spending more time and using English more extensively on these platforms, suggesting that social media can be an effective medium for language practice and improvement (Lau & Ismail, 2025).

The use of specific platforms like Instagram has also been explored. Akhiar, Mydin, and Kasuma (2017) investigated university students' perceptions of using Instagram for writing English. The results demonstrated high positive perceptions, with students acknowledging improved writing skills and increased motivation to engage in language learning activities. This suggests that Instagram's visual and interactive nature can create a conducive environment for language practice (Akhiar, Mydin, & Kasuma, 2017). Furthermore, a study by Kasuma (2021) examined the perceptions of science and non-science university students regarding the effects of Facebook on their English as a Second Language (ESL) learning. The findings indicated that science students had more positive views of Facebook for ESL learning than their non-science

counterparts, highlighting the platform's potential to facilitate language practice through social interaction and content sharing (Kasuma, 2021).

Perceptions of Social Media's Role in Overcoming Linguistic Barriers

Beyond facilitating language practice, social media platforms are perceived to play a significant role in overcoming linguistic barriers. They provide authentic contexts for language use, exposure to diverse linguistic inputs, and opportunities for real-time interaction, which are crucial for developing communicative competence. Annamalai (2019) conducted a qualitative investigation among ESL pre-service teachers, revealing that social media offers opportunities for collaborative learning and supports self-directed learning. Participants noted that these platforms simplify the teaching and learning processes, making language learning more accessible and engaging. However, challenges such as potential distractions and the risk of plagiarism were also acknowledged, indicating the need for guided and mindful use of social media in educational contexts (Annamalai, 2019). Ramalingam, Yunus, and Hashim (2023) explored learners' opinions on learner-to-instructor interaction for verbal communication learning in blended learning environments. The study highlighted that social media could enhance interaction and provide additional avenues for communication, thereby helping students overcome barriers to limited face-to-face interaction. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such interactions depends on the instructors' roles and the design of the learning activities (Ramalingam, Yunus, & Hashim, 2023). Moreover, a study by Karnine et al. (2022) investigated the difficulties encountered by ESL learners in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). The findings suggested that challenges such as limited vocabulary and time constraints could be mitigated through social media platforms, which offer flexible and accessible avenues for language practice and exposure (Karnine et al., 2022).

Challenges and Considerations

While the benefits of integrating social media into language learning are evident, several challenges must be addressed to maximize its effectiveness. One significant concern is the potential for social media to lead to plagiarism or cheating in language learning. A study by Che Haron et al. (2021) revealed that university students in Malaysia perceived this as a major drawback, emphasizing the need for academic integrity and proper guidance when using these platforms for educational purposes (Che Haron et al., 2021). Additionally, the cost of technology and issues related to internet accessibility can hinder the effective use of social media in language learning. Students from low-income families may find it challenging to utilize these tools, highlighting the need for inclusive strategies that ensure all students have equal access to technological resources (Che Haron et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the quality of language input on social media varies, and exposure to incorrect grammar or slang may inadvertently affect language acquisition. Therefore, guidance from educators is essential to ensure that students benefit from quality language input (Thurairaj et al., 2015). Integrating social media platforms into English language learning for diploma students in Malaysian polytechnics offers promising opportunities for enhancing communicative proficiency and overcoming linguistic barriers. Students' experiences and perceptions indicate that these platforms facilitate various aspects of language learning, including writing, speaking, and overall communication skills. However, challenges such as potential distractions, issues of academic integrity, and accessibility concerns must be addressed to maximize the benefits of social media in language education. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, providing deeper insights into effective strategies for integrating social media into language learning curricula.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore diploma students' experiences and perceptions regarding using social media platforms to enhance communicative English proficiency in a Malaysian polytechnic. This approach was chosen for its effectiveness in capturing the depth and complexity of participants' lived experiences, which are central to understanding the nuanced ways social media influences language learning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

The study involved eight diploma students enrolled in a Malaysian polytechnic. This sample size aligns with qualitative research standards, where smaller, focused groups are preferred to facilitate in-depth exploration of participants' experiences (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they had relevant experiences using social media for English language practice, thereby providing rich, pertinent data (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using open-ended questions administered through semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions are instrumental in qualitative research as they allow participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences, leading to more detailed and nuanced responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method is particularly effective in uncovering insights that may not emerge through closed-ended questioning, as it encourages participants to elaborate on their perspectives without the constraints of predefined response options (Flick, 2018).

Rationale for Using Open-Ended Questions

The study's objective guided the decision to utilize open-ended questions to delve deeply into students' subjective experiences and perceptions. Such questions facilitate an exploratory dialogue, allowing participants to highlight aspects of their experiences that they deem significant, which might be overlooked with more restrictive questioning formats (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This approach aligns with the qualitative research paradigm's emphasis on understanding the meanings individuals assign to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data Analysis Method

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the collected data. This method is widely recognized for its flexibility and effectiveness in identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The thematic analysis allows for a systematic yet nuanced examination of data, facilitating the organization and interpretation of rich, complex narratives (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The choice of thematic analysis was influenced by its suitability for capturing the intricacies of participants' experiences and perceptions. This method enables researchers to move beyond surface-level observations to interpret the underlying meanings within the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Moreover, thematic analysis is congruent with the study's exploratory nature, as it does not require adherence to a specific theoretical framework, allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Findings

Social Media as a Tool for Self-Directed and Enjoyable Learning.

Many students described social media as a space to learn English autonomously and at their own pace while engaging with enjoyable, real-world content. Social media is perceived as flexible and student-controlled, allowing users to engage with topics that interest them while building their language skills.

"Using social media platforms to practice English communication skills is very effective and stimulates online or self-directed learning methods." – *Participant 2*

"My experience by using social media platforms for practice English communication skills is one of the best choices I have made... it helps me a lot to gain knowledge." – *Participant 8*

"Usually, this platform always shows current issues, and I like to read them and practice my skills while I scroll through the internet." – *Participant 4*

Variety of Platforms for Different Language Skills

Students use different platforms to target specific aspects of English learning, such as speaking, listening, writing, and grammar. Each platform is used strategically based on its format and affordances. Visual content aids listening and speaking, while text-heavy platforms support reading and writing.

"TikTok & YouTube: Ideal for improving listening skills, pronunciation and learning something new." – *Participant 5*

"Reddit usually has many texts that should be good for me to practice my speaking skill and then for writing by copying the main topic for my practical writing exercises." – *Participant 4*

"I prefer YouTube because I can watch videos with subtitles and learn pronunciation." – *Participant 1*

Language Practice through Interaction and Community Engagement

Participants reported using social media to interact with others through comments, groups, or direct messaging, which enhanced their communicative abilities. Interactive functions of social media commenting, messaging, and group discussion encourage the communicative use of English in authentic settings, bridging the classroom and the real world.

"I also join online groups and participate in discussions, which help me improve my writing and speaking skills." – *Participant 1*

"Twitter, Threads... to engage in discussions, share thoughts." – *Participant 5*

"Facebook is useful for joining groups where I can communicate with others through comments and messages." – *Participant 1*

Accessibility and Technological Support as Motivators

Students appreciated how social media and related digital tools are accessible, often free, and offer built-in support like translation and grammar correction. Tools integrated within or alongside social media platforms are appreciated for their convenience and usefulness. This ease of access motivates consistent use and enables learning in various contexts.

"To access social media, you just need a proper gadget and a good Wi-Fi connection." – *Participant 8*

"Google Translate and ChatGPT... offer quick language translation processes. They also help correct sentence construction." – *Participant 2*

"Google Docs and ChatGPT... these platforms have been updated with advanced systems and help us gain knowledge." – *Participant 8*

Students' perceptions of how social media contributes to overcoming linguistic barriers in communicative English.

Building Confidence Through Repeated Exposure and Interaction

Students expressed that social media platforms provide repeated opportunities for practice, allowing them to grow comfortable using English in both formal and informal situations. The platforms offer a low-pressure, familiar space to experiment with English, leading to greater self-assurance when speaking or writing in academic and real-life situations.

"Social media platforms are very helpful in improving my confidence. By interacting with people from different countries, I feel more comfortable using English." – *Participant 1*

"Social media platforms boost my confidence in using English throughout communication with ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence... it gave me the confidence to answer questions whenever lecture asks questions during class." – *Participant 8*

"To me, social media platforms it is really helpful for me to improve my confidence in English." – *Participant 4*

AI and Grammar Correction as Confidence Boosters

Tools like ChatGPT, Google Translate, and language-enhancing apps help students correct their grammar, making them feel more prepared and accurate in their communication. The availability of instant feedback from AI tools provides students with a sense of linguistic control, which reduces fear of making mistakes and encourages risk-taking in communication.

"The app gives me much high confidence because the app fixes the grammar and the correct way of ordering my English language." – *Participant 3*

"When unsure how to form a correct sentence or choose the right words, I ask ChatGPT. This platform provides me with immediate suggestions and corrections." – *Participant 2*

“Social media platforms... help corrected my English grammar and phrases.” –
Participant 9

Real-Life Language Exposure Enhancing Vocabulary and Fluency

Students noted that social media exposes them to authentic language use, such as slang, idioms, and conversational tone, which are often missing in traditional English classes. This natural exposure allows learners to internalize conversational English, bridging the gap between textbook English and real-world communication.

“I used to struggle with vocabulary and sentence structure... by watching YouTube videos and reading captions on Instagram, I learned how to use new words in context.” – *Participant 1*

“Social media provides exposure to a wide range of content... which can help learners get accustomed to different tones, vocabulary, and language styles.” –
Participant 7

“I gained more confidence in expressing myself, learned new vocabulary, my grammar natural.” – *Participant 4*

Practical Communication and Social Engagement as Language Practice

Social media platforms offer real-time, interactive communication opportunities such as commenting, chatting, or creating posts, which simulate authentic language use and make learning engaging. Engaging in real-time exchanges helps students apply what they have learned in context, reinforcing both confidence and competence through active use.

“Interacting in comment sections or chatting with international friends on platforms like TikTok and Instagram helped me practice conversation.” – *Participant 4*

“I use WhatsApp and Instagram to communicate with my friends in English without my mother tongue language to enhance my confidence to speak.” – *Participant 6*

“Social media has helped me to overcome difficulty... for example, my speaking improved a lot by reading text, and my accent changes.” – *Participant 5*

Discussion

This study investigated diploma students' experiences and perceptions of using social media platforms to enhance communicative English proficiency in Malaysian polytechnics. The findings indicate that social media provides an engaging and effective medium for students to practice English autonomously, reinforcing existing research highlighting social media's potential to facilitate informal and self-directed language learning (Yunus et al., 2019; Lau & Ismail, 2025).

Participants emphasized social media's role in fostering enjoyable and flexible learning environments where authentic language interactions could occur. This aligns closely with prior research by Akhiar, Mydin, and Kasuma (2017), who found that platforms like Instagram significantly boosted motivation and engagement through visually appealing content and interactive opportunities. A distinctive insight from this study, however, is the students' strategic selection of different social media platforms according to their specific language learning needs—listening and speaking skills through video-based platforms like YouTube and

TikTok, and reading and writing through text-intensive platforms such as Reddit. This strategic and purposeful platform selection is a novel finding that adds depth to existing literature primarily focused on general engagement and motivation.

Another significant insight from this research relates to how social media interactions effectively build students' communicative confidence, thereby overcoming linguistic barriers. Students frequently noted the low-pressure environments offered by social media, allowing them repeated and authentic exposure to English, ultimately boosting their confidence and communicative competence. This finding extends the work of Annamalai (2019) and Ramalingam, Yunus, and Hashim (2023), who argued that digital platforms facilitate greater interaction and help alleviate anxiety associated with language learning.

Moreover, integrating artificial intelligence (AI)-driven language tools, such as ChatGPT and Google Translate, was frequently highlighted as critical in students' experiences. Students valued these tools for instant grammar corrections and language suggestions, significantly boosting their confidence in English usage. This result expands upon previous research by Che Haron et al. (2021), who noted concerns regarding academic integrity in technology use, suggesting that guided and ethically aware integration of such tools can effectively support language proficiency while mitigating potential drawbacks.

However, consistent with previous research (Nekson & Said, 2024; Thurairaj et al., 2015), challenges were evident, such as distractions inherent in social media and potential exposure to incorrect language use or informal slang. Participants acknowledged the need for structured guidance from educators to maximize the educational benefits of social media, affirming the importance of instructor involvement in mediating content quality and maintaining productive learning engagements.

Implications from this study suggest educators and curriculum developers should consider structured integration of social media into language curricula, complemented by training students in digital literacy and critical language use to minimize exposure to inaccurate linguistic inputs. Furthermore, educators should leverage platform-specific affordances to strategically target distinct language skills, a practice validated by students' selective platform usage highlighted in this study.

This study's limitations include its small sample size and exclusive reliance on qualitative data from a single polytechnic institution, which may limit generalizability. Future research should consider broader, mixed-method approaches incorporating quantitative data for more comprehensive insights. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of social media usage on communicative competence development.

This research contributes meaningfully to the existing body of literature by providing qualitative depth regarding Malaysian polytechnic students' nuanced experiences with social media as a language learning tool. By highlighting the students' active agency in choosing and leveraging specific platforms and digital tools to meet their language learning needs, this study offers practical insights for educators seeking to enhance communicative English proficiency through innovative, technologically integrated pedagogical strategies.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored diploma students' experiences and perceptions regarding using social media platforms to improve communicative English proficiency in a Malaysian polytechnic setting. The findings underscore the significant potential of social media as an innovative, accessible, and engaging tool to enhance language learning among students. Students reported that these platforms enabled self-directed, enjoyable learning experiences, providing opportunities to practice language skills autonomously and interactively. Due to their diverse formats and interactive functionalities, platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit were identified as beneficial for specific language skill development, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Importantly, participants perceived social media platforms as instrumental in overcoming linguistic barriers by building confidence through repeated exposure and practice, aided by instant feedback from AI-driven language correction tools. Real-time interactions and community engagement on social media platforms facilitated authentic language use and contributed substantially to vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and overall communicative competence. Despite these positive outcomes, considerations such as potential distractions, variable quality of linguistic input, and digital accessibility underline the necessity for guided and strategic integration of social media into educational contexts. Educators must take active roles in providing structured guidance to optimize the educational value of social media and mitigate its inherent limitations.

In conclusion, the findings contribute valuable insights to the existing literature by demonstrating how social media platforms can be effectively leveraged to support English language proficiency among diploma students in Malaysian polytechnics. Future research could expand on these insights by examining larger samples and different educational contexts, incorporating quantitative measures to validate these qualitative findings further. This study enhances understanding of digital learning tools and offers practical implications for curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and policy formulation to enhance English communicative proficiency within Malaysia's higher education landscape.

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