

## SOCIAL MEDIA, DIGITAL LITERACY IN EAP CLASSROOM

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### Abstract:

Digital literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and behaviours, including the active use of digital devices for communication, collaboration, and advocacy—it has also become vital for academic purposes. The use of digital literacy in EAP classrooms is acquiring admiration. Educators use it to facilitate learning in addition to texts and standard guidelines. The central objective of this research is to investigate to what degree lecturers and learners use social media at the tertiary level as a means of ICT within and outside of the teaching space. It also explored teachers' views and proficiency in using social media as a helpful/complementary tool in teaching. This study provides guidelines for undergraduates and instructors about using social media in digital literacy in the English classroom. The level of expertise of instructors in dealing with social media was also evaluated.

**Keywords:** Digital Literacy, Communication, EAP, ICT, social media, etc.

### Introduction

The creation of digital social media has brought a considerable change in the life and living style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for most of most digital world has turned out to be a matter of survival. Digital literacy in teaching English to speakers of other languages has always been a tough challenge for both native and non-native trainers, especially in countries where English plays the role of a second language. Understanding the difficulty of English language teaching and learning, teachers are now using many types of social media such as Viber, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and other apps to facilitate teaching and learning at different levels. Marshall McLuhan (2003), in his book, *The Book of Probes*, comments, “All media exist to invest our lives with artificial perceptions and arbitrary values” (p.199).

English holds an exciting status in India because it is one of the official languages. The teaching of English has been undergoing innovation and modernization. ‘Inquisitive students often feel lost in the humongous sea of information available on the internet’. Educational institutions

understand this and are already using this functional medium in various aspects of their day-to-day activities like classroom teaching, assigning homework, assessing students, activities outside the classroom, and delivering results, etc. Some universities are now using social media for academic purposes, so the student-student and teacher-student can keep in touch not only in the class but also outside.

The University Grants Commission has been working to enhance the quality of education and research at the tertiary level. As a continuity of this approach, digital libraries in private and public educational and research institutions have been established. Thus, it is evident that achieving digital literacy is one of the critical issues in the teaching-learning procedures at the tertiary level.

The use of social media with the accessibility of many types of apps is increasing daily. A language teacher can use it to improve language learning and teaching through social media such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, Twitter, etc. Teachers in this connection have been adopting digital techniques by using social media to make the teaching-learning process more accessible and more effective. They are getting a chance to be involved with education outside the class, which has also provided a potential scope for improving teacher-student relationships.

### **Framework**

Tertiary education deals with a substantial number of youths expected to become a strong workforce for our nation, and the issue of digital literacy is very significant. Every teacher uses it in and outside their classes. If so, how and to what extent do they use it? Are teachers adequately capable of dealing with it? Is it proving to be effective for everyone? Does it help in every situation?

### **Purpose**

This study aims to find out how and to what extent English teachers are using social media in and outside their classes. Moreover, by using social media, how are they bringing effective changes in the teaching-learning environment of English?

### **Implication and scope**

The tertiary level is considered the highest, and many teachers and students are involved in different universities. University development in terms of quality exists in knowledge dissemination and skills development. Developing digital literacy is a vital issue in this regard.

Young people are inclined toward social media, so they can be motivated to use it as a practical learning tool. This digital era has provided an opportunity to make teaching-learning an ongoing process.

This paper will give an insight into the English language teachers using social media to facilitate learners' language skills. The study's findings will help teachers and students know more about the effectiveness of using social media in teaching English and, subsequently, the value of fulfilling individual needs through it.

### **Limitation**

This research focuses on social media usage in English language teaching and learning. The research narrowed down its area from the internet to social media. To be precise, this research is focused on some productive areas; the usage and impact of social media and maximizing the teaching-learning of the English language for the benefit of both teachers and students. Thus, within the limited time frame, this study is limited to PACE Institute of Engineering and Technology, Vallur, Prakasam (Dt)

### **Research Questions**

1. Do English teachers possess the required positive attitude and skills regarding social media as a supportive/alternative tool in language teaching and related activities?
2. What social media do teachers and students use to facilitate teaching and learning?
3. What types of academic activities do students do by using these social media?
4. How far do these activities through social media assist them in their teaching-learning process?

### **Literature review**

Social Media is popular not only among the young generation but also among aged people. But the use is noticeable among the young generation. Social networking sites provide an interactive platform that enables their users to communicate with other members to establish social relations to share information and knowledge related to individual experiences and activities in real life.

### **Why Social Networking Sites**

'SNSs provide a favourable platform for individuals to express themselves, establish new relationships, and maintain old relationships' (Gremu & Halse, 2012). According to Asad et al. (2012), People can share their thoughts, knowledge, and feelings through social media and connect all over the world. It is also giving its shadow on education, impacting teachers,

students, parents, and administrators (p. 499). According to Quader (2014), in Social media, people can discuss any subject or any topic they like.

Many researchers found that the students who used social media scored higher on reading skills tests and had higher grades. Through social media, students can easily get a chance to connect with their teachers. Through this, they can discuss any academic problem directly without waiting long and come out with new information, which helps them enhance their knowledge without killing time.

### **Use of SNS in Andhra Pradesh**

Social media usage is increasing daily, not only among the young generation but also among all types of people—regardless of age or gender. Income and educational status. Accessibility is limited because of many reasons. In Tertiary, the rate of using social media for learning or academic purposes is low. If the students find proper guidance, relativity with the syllabus, and an interesting way to learn, they could find it useful. It is further found that instructions are realizing the necessity and already using these mediums in various ways like classroom teaching, assigning homework, assessing students, etc. Some universities are now using social media for academic purposes so the student-student and teacher-student or student-teacher can keep in touch to share important information, do assignments, discuss any important issue or topic, and get instant feedback.

### **Positive impacts**

Students' academic learning outcomes could increase when their social learning outcomes were heightened (p. 501). Digital social media like Facebook, Twitter, Viber, WhatsApp, Google, etc., 'all these are giving impact education drastically' (Eastment, 2007). Boyd (2007) says teenagers and young adults use it to connect with others, share information, experience, etc. According to Flad (2010), communication now is very easy and quick as the youth have their cell phones which help them to access or connect faster and at any time. According to Harwood & Blackstone (2012), teachers can show they are engaged in students' Facebook learning by writing an encouraging comment to an academic post or referring in class to an interesting discussion on the page. They further say social media gives a vibe to the students that their instructor is present. These things motivate them in many ways. As the teachers are involved in the discussion, they feel more aware of delivering accurately. In this way, if the teacher does some activities through social media, they don't feel monotonous, enabling their

creativity level. According to Kern (1995), it helps students to lessen their anxiety and feel free to participate and helps them to improve their language construction.

### **Social media as a learning tool**

Social media is an entertainment site and as well as an effective tool for developing many important intellectual skills. Abe, P., & Jordan, N. A. (2013) researched this topic. He found that most student perceptions regarding the use of social media in the classroom are positive. From the teachers' view, he found that many faculty members seem aware of the different types of social media and how they may be used in the classroom. Instructors are now aware of giving assignments, making a discussion session, sharing information, etc., on social media. Social media can serve as a cost-efficient tool for educators to use.

### **Research Methodology**

We collected the primary data through a questionnaire survey among students and teachers and a focus group discussion (FGD) with students. The questionnaire survey was conducted on different streams of students in PACE. Students and teachers at the college were interviewed. We initially piloted the questionnaire on a small group of people before operating it on the target group. The pilot study helped us to fix several problems in the questions. We collected secondary data from printed and online research articles and other published and unpublished research materials and journals on relevant issues.

### **Sampling and data collection**

We conducted surveys among the students—15 from each department—through a questionnaire with 11 close-ended and two open-ended questions. The students who belonged to diverse disciplines were randomly selected—business administration, science and engineering. We separately conducted a survey among teachers with ten close-ended and three open-ended questions. They were faculty of the English department.

We also conducted an FGD with ten randomly selected students of different college streams—regarding their positive and negative attitudes toward digital literacy in English classrooms. We noted down their responses. It must be mentioned that all the students and teachers who were respondents to our survey and FGD had been active and regular users of social networking sites.

### **Analysis**

This study analyzed the survey results and presented the following descriptive statistics. The responses of the FGD were synthesized from the notes we had taken.

### **Consent, access, and Participants' Confidentiality**

Ethical issues were important while doing this study. While doing our research, we ensured that the participants' names and identities would be kept confidential. We got permission from the

concerned authorities and the participants beforehand to ensure that the information gathered would not positively or negatively affect the institution or the participants.

### **Findings of the teacher survey**

#### **The types of social media teachers use as a teaching tool for their students.**

The findings show that three teachers use Whatsapp as a teaching tool in their classrooms. The ratio is higher compared to other social media. They use it to give assignments and to do short activities with the students—as well as stay connected with the students. One teacher uses Facebook to stay connected. However, none of the teachers chose other options.

#### **Teachers' main purpose behind using these media.**

In this question, two teachers said their purpose was to foster more effective learning. One teacher said that he wanted to engage his students outside the class so they could always be aware of the need to stay updated with academic lessons and naturally develop language skills. One teacher said this is a faster and easier means of communication. However, despite their mixed reactions, they maintained that imparting lessons more effectively and engaging students in the positive aspects of social media was the primary goal. They are using it for more effective learning or outcome.

#### **Whether teachers face stress dealing with tech-savvy students**

In this century, students are really technology oriented. The tertiary level students have embraced this new way in their daily life. As the teachers are using this in their classroom, our query was to know whether the teachers feel stress when using this as the students are very much social media oriented. 1 out of 4 teachers said that sometimes they have some problems. They said all the students are not skilled enough to use the tools properly, and sometimes they divert themselves to other entertainment sides. Another interesting thing is that 3 out of 4 teachers think that it is not stressful for them. They think that it is helping them to facilitate their teaching process because they think they see a change in interest when they use social media in education.

#### **The types of social media teachers find effective teaching tools.**

In this question, three teachers replied in favour of WhatsApp, which they found to be more useful than others because it is very popular and user-friendly for teaching. One teacher said that he uses Facebook. However, all of them mentioned one point in cases of emergency; they use both to adjust to the situations that arise. One noticeable issue: no one expressed their fondness for YouTube or Twitter as they are much less suitable for regular communication.

#### **Teachers' achievement of goals through social media**

A mixed reaction was evident. They thought it depended on the situation and learners' receptive abilities, which decided whether the goal would be achieved. Two teachers said their goal had been partially achieved, while the other two responded in full affirmation. None of the teachers denied the impact of social media, regardless of the extent of their success as a teaching tool. Teachers were unanimous in their responses that social media made teaching easier and faster by achieving goals depending on other external reasons beyond their control. They maintained that they could use social media with further conscious planning and effort—and institutional support could be fully achieved.

### **Whether teachers would recommend their other colleagues to use social media**

In this question, three teachers said they would not recommend other teachers to use it regularly because that might reduce students' habit of reading books. Working only on social media will destroy students' interest in books. One teacher said he would recommend it. However, they maintained that using social media in the classrooms had not been a widely appreciated practice among the teachers. The reasons are twofold: not every teacher is skilled enough to use it, and not every teacher is willing to use it frequently for other social reasons.

### **The types of academic activities teachers conduct through social media.**

Teachers gave examples of varieties of activities that they conduct for students using social media depending on the demand of the topics or subject matters. Teachers gave writing blogs, sharing thoughts, doing projects, commenting on a topic, and other assignments. Two teachers said they use it to give groups or do projects; one teacher uses it as a platform for students' sharing of ideas and plans on topics; sometimes they do this as assignments, and sometimes to verify their knowledge or enhance participation outside the classroom. One teacher uses it where students can write blogs, but it depends on their teaching class. Advanced learners do write blogs. It also shows their interest in inventing new ways to conduct the class.

### **Whether students enjoy working with this approach**

Two teachers mentioned that the students enjoyed working with this approach. They thought it reduced their monotonousness, and they enjoyed it because it was something which they had been familiar with. Two teachers thought that students enjoy themselves sometimes; they prefer a balance between these two. No teacher chose 'never' as an answer. One of the fourth teachers said it depends on the type of work they are doing. One teacher said that they always enjoy it. Moreover, students are different and come from different states. Everyone has different perceptions, so it is impossible to expect every student to feel the same.

### **Whether it is effective to make students work in pairs/groups on social media**

Two teachers said that they found it effective when students work individually. Nevertheless, such could not be said about group and pair work. However, the effectiveness depends on the type of work. Two teachers said that working in pairs or groups on social media seemed effective, while one teacher responded in disagreement. One of the four teachers said that sometimes it is effective, and no one chooses 'never'. By and large, all teachers thought that it is the concerned teacher's responsibility to divide the activities into individual, pair, and group work by meticulous judgment based on his/her goals.

### **Analysis of Teachers' Responses**

From teachers' responses, it is evident that judging social networking sites as a key element of digital literacy has become a necessity as it yields added value in teaching and learning English. As the world is changing and developing, so are technologies, and social media is playing a vital role in making a bridge between educators and students. Communication is rapidly changing, and so are the ways of teaching. Now educators and students communicate instantly through social networking sites. Our analysis shows how easy and time-friendly it is to contact or communicate or do any activity on social media. They think students are learning faster as they are mostly available on social media.

### **Syntheses of teachers' responses to the open-ended questions**

#### **Social media will be used deliberately after five years.**

The impact of social media as an inseparable part of human life can never be denied; people use it all the time. Sooner or later, the use of social media in the educational sector will rise high. Teachers will be more knowledgeable and creative about digital literacy in five years. However, the fact also remains that teachers should get proper guidance from experts about using it in and outside the classroom. If possible, this should be included in the teacher training manuals.

#### **Skills of teachers and the relevance of other social media**

Teachers can handle digital literacy, but they should attain more skills to foster their creativity. At the same time, the relevance of other social media should not be undermined. More social media options can be used in the educational sector as people are using those all the time too.

### **Findings of the student survey-open ended questions**

#### **Whether all English teachers use social media as a teaching tool**

In this question, 50% of the students said that some of the teachers used social media; 25% said those very few teachers used it, while the remaining 25% said teachers did. Overall, they wanted



to say that the use of social media was not frequent, but teachers used those to a very lesser degree in the teaching process.

### **The types of social media students have been using.**

In this question answer, the students wanted to select more than one option, but they made their choices based on their priority of using these. 70% of students said that they used WhatsApp most, but they used other media as well. 10% used YouTube, 15% used Facebook, and 5% of students used Twitter. That 70% of students have done most of the work in WhatsApp, like pair, individual, or group work. They think that it has more options than other media.

### **The types of academic work students do on social media.**

This question was asked to know the types of academic work they usually did through social media. In other ways, their responses reflect the types of activities teachers conduct via social media. 60% of students said they used these to do project work like survey-based group projects, issue-based solo projects, etc. 20% of students said they used them to share thoughts on some topics. Sometimes their teachers judged them based on their comments on some education-related topics. 10% of students said that they used it to comment on some topics that the teachers had decided and posted.

### **Whether students enjoy working with this approach**

In this question, 50% of students said that they enjoyed using social media in their learning process in the language classroom, while 15% did not. 30% of students enjoyed it sometimes, while 5% never did. Though the result is somewhat mixed, the majority responded favourably.

### **Whether teachers assign pair or group work through social media**

Pairwork and group work are usual practices in English language classrooms that teachers conduct to facilitate learning. 35% of students said that teachers gave pair and group assignments. 30% of students said that teachers gave very often, and 25% said that teachers never gave any pair and group work. The remaining 10% of students said the teacher always gave pair and group work.

### **Whether it is effective to work in pairs/groups on social media**

This question indicates whether the pair work is helpful when teachers give on social media. In this question, 40% of students felt these had a positive impact and thus were very effective. They said that pair work enabled collaboration between students. 20% of the students said that it was not effective. 30% of students said it worked sometimes. They also shared that proper learning depended on what type of work they did on social media.

### **The most comfortable social media**

This is one of the questions that some students took more time to answer. 80% of students said WhatsApp was more comfortable for them as they were more familiar. When teachers used it to teach or give any work, they felt it was much more comfortable than other tools.

### **Whether using social media in the classroom helps to improve English skills**

35% of students said that it helped to improve their English language skills as they communicate in English most of the time. Reading, watching, and hearing videos helped them improve their language skills. Moreover, it emerged an interest in the language. 20% of people said no; they thought using short writing on social media weakens their writing skills. They did it several times on paper. Educators deducted their marks for that reason. 40% said it slightly developed their English speaking skills, as they could communicate in English outside the classroom.

### **Students' preference between learning through social media and the traditional approach**

In this question, 70% of students said they enjoyed working in both ways as they balanced their interest levels. They did not feel monotonous or bored. They got a chance to combine both approaches. Between these two different approaches, they favoured social media more as they felt they got new opportunities to learn in more diversified ways. However, they expressed their desire to learn in a combination of both approaches as they had been habituated to following the traditional way. 20% of students said that they liked the work in papers because working in social media meant not working in a particular way; the multiple options distracted them from their focus on work which they did not feel when they worked on papers. It distracted their focus from the main work.

### **Whether social media makes learning easy or tough**

In this item, 50% of students said that it made their learning process easy as they got to work outside the class and communicated with their teachers whenever needed. If they felt confused about anything, they got the solution faster. 15% of the students said that it was tough. 25% of students chose both and showed interest in both things. They thought that it was neither easy nor tough.

### **Whether teachers are skilled enough to deal with social media as a teaching tool**

In this question, students showed mixed feelings. 55% of students thought that teachers were skilled enough to use it. They learned a lot, and still, they were learning. Teachers used many innovative ways with them, which they found very interesting. The students shared that some works were so interesting and learnable that no one could teach them without proper skills or

knowledge. The students said they did not know whether the teachers did not use it for the lack of proper training, but they thought if the teachers got proper training, it would motivate them to use it in some complicated topics.

### **Analysis**

Social networking sites are influential media by which people get connected. The teachers invented many ways and strategies to conduct the class, to make the study more interesting, and to relate to the students all the time. The findings showed that most of them use WhatsApp as their favourite, and most students usually spend a big portion of their time on social networking sites. Students use SNS for academic purposes. The tertiary-level students are connected with the teachers via social media, and they can formulate group discussions where they can exchange their ideas, thoughts, experience, and opinions and share course-related materials and information. The teacher can give assignments. Whenever students write anything on social media or chat or converse with anyone, they get more conscious about their writing. It helps them to improve their writing. In addition, social media helps students to learn new words/idioms/phrases from their friends or some writing in social media, and later, they use those in their formal writing like assignments, exam scripts, etc. It also affects their speaking.

### **Focus Group Discussion:**

In our questionnaire, students were asked about their overall feelings regarding social media usage. Students' overall feelings were mixed. They think social media is a powerful area nowadays and like its use in the educational sector. They think both ways are important to enhance their English language skill. They support learning traditionally because they think that depending fully on social media will distract them from their main work as it has multiple options.

Students think the teacher should invent more interesting ways to teach them on social media, and some teachers should get proper training. It is impossible to deliver authentic work without the proper skill and knowledge. As drawbacks, students shared that sometimes they faced problems in their writing. However, they think doing assignments and projects on social media enhances their writing ability because they try to write with proper grammar structure, correct spelling, and appropriate sentence structure, which motivates them to improve their English language. They said that it minimized the gap between them and their teachers.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigates the influence and usage of digital social media at the tertiary level in and outside the classroom in English language learning. The findings show that most students use WhatsApp as their favourite tool to communicate with others. It shows that students are using it not only for nonacademic purposes but also for academics. Students like it when teachers are using it to facilitate the teaching-learning process. They do not feel monotonous. For the teachers, it is different. Most teachers feel that proper training is very important in the educational sector. They think it can be used more if the teacher knows its usage for academic purposes. The teachers think that the use should be limited. Excessive use is bad for anything. This research study suggests that if the teachers and the students properly utilize digital social media, it will benefit them to enhance their English language.

### Recommendations

The influence of SNS in every area of teaching and learning is pervasive. The teacher can give a topic and ask students to share their thoughts in the comment section. The teacher can also open a discussion board where the teacher and the student can post different articles, share their thoughts and opinions, and can discuss different issues as well. In these kinds of activities, the teacher can set a circle where every student will be asked to use proper sentence structure, correct vocabulary, grammar, and sentences in a proper sequence. Based on these, teachers can conduct elaborate discussion sessions in the class. The teachers can do role-play sessions in the class based on the topic they discussed on social media. It will save time as well.

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