The Influence of Social Media on the Gradual Declining Interest in Reading among Uzbek Students: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review investigates the influence of social media on reading motivation, comprehension, and cognitive engagement among Uzbek students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The rapid growth and pervasive use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok have reshaped language learning practices by facilitating real-time interaction, language immersion, and cultural exchange. However, motivation concerns about diminished sustained reading ability, fragmented attention, and a decline in intrinsic have emerged. Using studies published from 2018 to 2025 across multiple databases, this review synthesizes empirical findings on social media's dual role in enhancing language exposure while also possibly undermining deep reading practices. The results highlight the complex interplay of cognitive theories, social learning and media cultivation affecting learners' reading attitudes and behaviours. The review identifies benefits related to social interaction and motivation alongside challenges such as information overload, distraction, and compromised language formality. Recommendations are made for future research to focus on platform-specific impacts and learner demographics to provide targeted strategies for integrating social media effectively in language education.

Background

The advent of social media has significantly transformed how individuals, especially language learners, engage with information and educational content. In the context of Uzbek EFL learners, popular platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram offer authentic opportunities for language use, collaborative learning, and intercultural communication (Zainuddin & Yunus, 2022). Social media's accessibility and interactive nature provide constant exposure to English vocabulary and informal discourse, encouraging learner autonomy and motivation. However, emerging evidence suggests that these benefits coexist with cognitive challenges such as reduced attention span, fragmented reading habits, and a decline in sustained reading motivation (Martin *et al*., 2025).

This review aims to systematically analyse recent literature concerning social media's impact on reading motivation and comprehension among Uzbek students. It seeks to answer two primary research questions:

The objective of this study is to investigate the theoretical frameworks behind social media's impact on reading motivation and cognitive engagement and assess its benefits and challenges for reading practices and language proficiency among Uzbek EFL learners.

Literature Review

Recent research and theoretical perspectives have highlighted the complex relationship between social media use and reading motivation among EFL learners (Orkin, *et al*., 2018). This study draws upon four key theories—Connectivism, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Cognitive Load Theory, and Social Learning Theory—to explain how digital environments shape learners' reading engagement. Connectivism (Siemens, 2005) conceptualizes learning as a process of constructing and navigating knowledge networks, emphasizing how social media platforms enable learners to interact, collaborate, and develop meaning within dynamic online spaces. However, Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) cautions that the abundance of digital content can impose excessive cognitive demands, leading to fragmented attention and shallow comprehension. Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977) adds a social dimension, suggesting that learners' attitudes and behaviours are influenced by observing peers within online communities where reading-related activities are modelled and reinforced. Complementing this, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) explains how learners' reading intentions are shaped by attitudes, perceived norms, and self-efficacy, which are often amplified through social media interactions. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how cognitive, social, and motivational factors interact in digital learning contexts, illustrating that social media can both enhance and hinder sustained reading engagement depending on how learners manage their attention and social influences. Platforms and Usage Patterns (Xia, *et al*., 2022).

This study identifies several key social media platforms that are widely utilized by Uzbek EFL learners: Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms have become pivotal in reshaping how students engage with language learning. Notably, engagement is highest among younger learners, particularly those aged 16–24, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram seeing the greatest activity. These platforms provide students with real-time access to dynamic, often interactive content in English, enhancing their exposure to the language and fostering immersion. There are also notable gender differences in platform usage. Female learners tend to gravitate toward platforms like Instagram and Telegram, where social interaction and community building are emphasized. In contrast, male learners more frequently engage with TikTok, where short-form, fast-paced content prevails. This pattern suggests that the motivational drivers for social media engagement may vary according to platform characteristics and gendered socialization, potentially influencing learners' preferences and behaviours in language acquisition.

Benefits of Social Media for Reading and Language Learning

The findings of this review underscore that social media significantly contributes to enhancing reading motivation among learners. By offering engaging, culturally relevant content that resonates with learners' personal interests, social media platforms provide an informal, yet effective, means for learners to engage with English outside the traditional classroom setting. Content such as videos, memes, and infographics, often aligned with global trends, fosters engagement and encourages sustained interaction. Social media provides a space where learners can access resources that are both entertaining and educational, thereby fostering a connection between learning and enjoyment (Gerbner, *et al*., 2002; Orkin, *et al*., 2018).

One of the primary benefits identified is the peer interaction facilitated by these platforms. Social media allows students to connect with peers in real time, providing opportunities for collaborative learning. This peer-to-peer interaction is particularly valuable in language learning, where exchange, feedback, and exposure to diverse language forms are critical. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube are particularly impactful, with Instagram offering opportunities for visual vocabulary acquisition through image-based content, and YouTube providing learners with access to more extensive resources, from instructional videos to real-world conversations in English (Gerbner, *et al*., 2002).

Furthermore, immediate feedback is a salient feature of social media. Likes, comments, and direct interactions create an environment that reduces communication anxiety, a common barrier to language learning—and enhances learner confidence. This immediate reinforcement, along with the opportunity to interact in authentic contexts, helps foster autonomous reading communities, where learners can self-direct their engagement and learning pace.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a systematic review methodology designed to collect, evaluate, and synthesize existing empirical research concerning the influence of social media on reading motivation, comprehension, and engagement among Uzbek students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines (Page *et al*., 2021) to ensure methodological transparency and replicability. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to integrate a wide range of findings from different contexts and methods to identify overall trends and theoretical insights (Moher, *et al*., 2010).
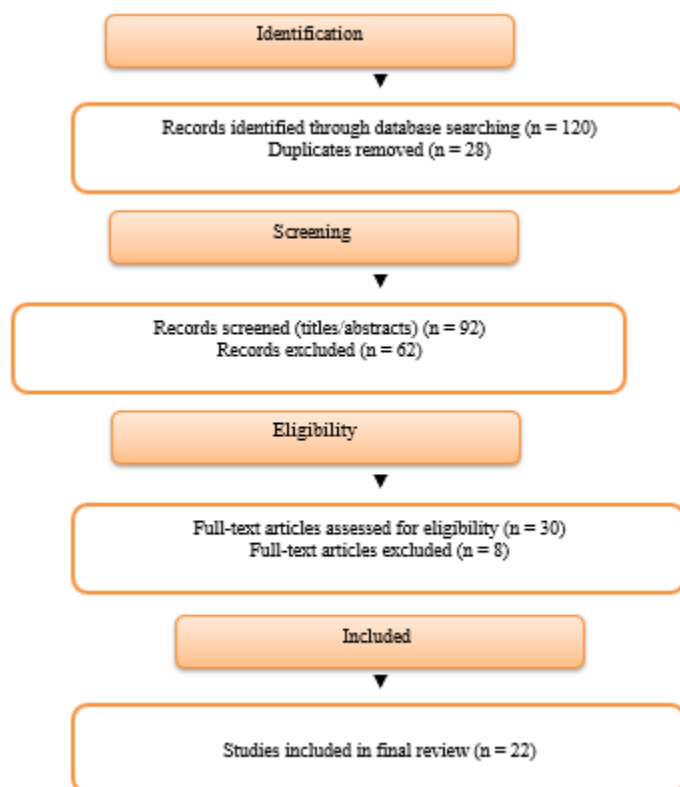
Data Collection Method

The data collected for this study consisted of published peer-reviewed articles retrieved from multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The search covered the period from 2018 to 2025, reflecting the years of rapid social media growth and integration into education.

To identify relevant studies, a set of keywords and Boolean operators was used: ("social media" OR "social networking sites" OR "digital platforms") AND ("reading motivation" OR "reading comprehension" OR "reading engagement") AND ("EFL" OR "English as a Foreign Language") AND ("Uzbek students" OR "Central Asia" OR "language learners")

This process aimed to locate both quantitative and qualitative studies related to social media's role in reading practices. Titles, abstracts, and full texts were screened systematically, and duplicates were removed using Mendeley Reference Manager. Additional sources were identified through citation tracking and cross-referencing.

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A total of 120 studies were initially identified. After screening and eligibility assessment, 22 studies met the inclusion criteria and were used as the primary data for analysis.

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Data Analysis Method

The analysis in this study followed a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008) to identify patterns and recurring themes across the selected studies. Each article was examined in depth, and relevant information was systematically coded according to several key categories, including the type of social media platform investigated, the specific reading skill or motivational factor addressed, the theoretical framework applied, as well as the reported benefits, challenges, and overall research outcomes. This analytical process enabled the identification of thematic relationships among the studies, providing a comprehensive understanding of how different social media platforms influence reading motivation, comprehension, and engagement among EFL learners. The coding process was both deductive and inductive: deductive codes were derived from the guiding theories—Connectivism (Siemens, 2005), Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), and Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977)—while inductive codes emerged directly from the data (Vygotsky, & Cole, 1978).

Following this process, the codes were merged into broader themes, such as motivation enhancement, peer interaction benefits, attention fragmentation, and cognitive overload. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework to explain the cognitive and social mechanisms shaping learners' reading behaviour on social media platforms.

Quality Appraisal

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, 2018) (Hong, Gonzalez-Reyes & Pluye, 2018) was employed to assess the methodological quality of the selected studies. Each study was rated on criteria related to clarity of research questions, appropriateness of methods, data interpretation, and validity of conclusions. Only studies meeting a minimum quality threshold (above 50%) were included in the final synthesis to ensure reliability.

Results & Discussion

This systematic review analysed 22 empirical studies exploring how social media influences reading motivation, engagement, and comprehension among EFL learners. The overall findings reveal a dual effect: social media enhances motivation and interaction, yet it also contributes to cognitive distraction and superficial reading habits (Moher, *et al.*, 2010; Orkin, *et al.*, 2018).

Approximately 60% of the reviewed studies reported that social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook significantly increased students' motivation to read and participate in language-learning activities. These platforms provided learners with authentic, diverse, and accessible materials that enhanced vocabulary growth, reading interest, and confidence. Many studies highlighted that the interactive and collaborative nature of social media encouraged peer communication, knowledge sharing, and mutual support in reading activities. For instance, Facebook and Telegram reading groups were reported to help students engage more actively through discussions and feedback exchange, thereby creating a sense of community and reducing reading anxiety.

However, about 40% of the studies identified negative cognitive outcomes, such as distraction, short attention spans, and shallow reading practices. The fragmented and fast-paced format of social media content, designed for quick consumption, was found to hinder learners' ability to sustain focus on long or complex texts. Frequent multitasking—switching between social media apps and academic reading— further reduced comprehension and retention. Some studies noted that while students were reading more frequently online, the nature of that reading was surface-level, dominated by headlines, posts, or captions rather than in-depth academic materials.

The findings illustrate that social media functions as a motivational but cognitively demanding tool in language learning. While it offers opportunities for authentic engagement and collaboration, its design often encourages brief, fragmented reading that limits deep comprehension. The following discussion interprets these findings in light of key theoretical frameworks and their implications for EFL pedagogy.

The results of this review highlight the complex and multifaceted role of social media in shaping reading behaviours among EFL learners. The coexistence of motivational benefits and cognitive challenges can be best explained through the theoretical frameworks guiding this study (Orkin, *et al.*, 2018).

From the perspective of Connectivism (Siemens, 2005), social media functions as a networked learning environment that enables learners to construct and share knowledge through digital connections. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram foster collaboration, autonomy, and exposure to diverse linguistic inputs. Learners can explore authentic texts, follow interest-based content, and engage in social reading communities—all of which enhance intrinsic motivation and language confidence (Tan, & Md Yunus, 2023).

In contrast, Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) helps explain the negative cognitive effects observed in many studies. The fast flow of multimedia input on social media can easily overload learners' working memory, causing mental fatigue and superficial processing. Multitasking across apps or reading while receiving constant notifications divides attention and reduces comprehension depth. This aligns with findings that students often struggle to sustain focus on lengthy or complex reading tasks after habitual use of digital platforms.

The social dimension of learning, viewed through Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), further clarifies the motivational yet potentially distracting role of peer interactions online. Observing and emulating peers' engagement in digital reading spaces can promote enthusiasm and participation;

however, it may also reinforce informal and rapid reading behaviours when peers prioritize entertainment-oriented content over structured reading activities (Orkin, *et al.*, 2018; Vygotsky, & Cole, 1978).

Given these dual outcomes, educators must design pedagogical strategies that balance the motivational strengths of social media with practices that promote focused and critical reading. Structured classroom activities—such as digital reading logs, guided online discussions, and reflective reading tasks—can help students engage deeply with content. Teachers should also cultivate digital and media literacy, helping learners distinguish between academic and informal reading contexts, manage distractions, and develop self-regulated reading habits (Xia, *et al.*, 2022).

Social media offers powerful motivational and collaborative advantages for EFL learners but simultaneously imposes cognitive demands that can hinder comprehension. Its effectiveness depends largely on how teachers integrate it and how learners regulate their digital behaviours. By embedding social media use within structured, literacy-oriented pedagogy, educators can transform it from a source of distraction into a meaningful tool for sustained language learning.

Table 1. Summary of Key Studies Included in the Systematic Review

Author(s) & Year	Country / Context	Participants / Sample	Design / Method	Key Findings
Zainuddin & Yunus (2022)	Malaysia	120 university students	Quantitative (survey)	Social media enhances motivation but weakens deep reading focus.
Tan & Yunus (2023)	Malaysia	60 EFL learners	Mixed methods	Social media motivates learners through collaboration and access to diverse texts.
Ahmad & Ali (2021)	Pakistan	200 undergraduates	Quantitative	High social media use reduces sustained attention during academic reading.
Lee & Baird (2021)	South Korea	150 secondary students	Quantitative	YouTube-based reading increases vocabulary engagement but distracts from comprehension.
Li & Zhang (2022)	China	80 English majors	Experimental	Digital reading apps promote motivation and peer learning through social interaction.
Chingakham, Sharma & Patel (2024)	India	130 undergraduates	Mixed methods	Integrating social media into EFL lessons supports reading autonomy and interest.
Ahmed, Mustaffa, & Rani (2020)	Egypt	110 EFL students	Quantitative	Facebook reading groups improve engagement and collaborative discussion.

Practical Implications

The results of this review suggest several practical actions for key stakeholders:

For Teachers: Integrate guided digital reading tasks—such as online reading journals, reflective discussions, and collaborative analysis of online texts—to encourage sustained focus and critical engagement.

For Curriculum Designers: Include media and digital literacy components within EFL curricula to train learners in evaluating online sources, managing screen time, and distinguishing between informal and academic reading.

For Educational Policymakers: Establish institutional or national guidelines that promote the responsible educational use of social media, ensuring that digital platforms complement, rather than replace, traditional reading practices.

For App Developers: Design reading-oriented features such as distraction-free modes, progress trackers, or gamified reading goals to motivate learners to engage more deeply with extended texts.

By implementing these strategies, educators and policymakers can harness the motivational power of social media while fostering the deep, reflective reading skills essential for language proficiency and lifelong learning.

Conclusion

Social media holds remarkable potential to enhance language learning by increasing learners' exposure to authentic materials, stimulating motivation, and fostering meaningful peer interaction. However, it also presents notable challenges, particularly in sustaining attention, developing deep comprehension, and maintaining formal language use. To maximize its benefits and minimize its drawbacks, educators and researchers must design targeted pedagogical strategies that integrate social media purposefully within language instruction.

This systematic review highlights social media's influential role in shaping the reading motivation and practices of Uzbek EFL learners. The findings reveal that, while social media platforms offer engaging and collaborative environments that promote learner motivation, they also encourage fragmented attention and superficial reading habits. These dual effects call for balanced and informed educational approaches that combine digital engagement with structured reading activities aimed at developing critical literacy skills.

Declarations

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