

Social Media as a Challenge and Opportunity for EFL Reading Development: Perspectives from Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This paper examines social media as both a challenge and an opportunity for EFL reading development among students in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. In the digital age, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, and Facebook have become part of students' daily learning and communication practices. While these platforms provide access to English content, articles, blogs, educational videos, and online discussions, they may also reduce students' motivation to engage with long-form reading. The study employed a mixed-method approach using a structured questionnaire and open-ended questions to explore 120 students' perceptions of social media and its influence on reading interest, motivation, attention, and reading habits. The findings indicate that social media can distract students from reading, encourage preference for short texts, and weaken concentration during academic reading tasks. However, the findings also show that social media can support EFL reading development when it is used purposefully through teacher-curated materials, digital reading tasks, peer discussion, and guided reading strategies. The paper concludes that social media should not be viewed only as a negative influence, but as a digital tool that can be transformed into a meaningful resource for EFL reading development. The study recommends that EFL teachers guide students to balance social media use with regular reading practice and integrate digital platforms into reading instruction in a structured and purposeful way.

Keywords: *Digital Reading, EFL Students, Karakalpakstan, Reading Development, Reading Motivation, Social Media, Uzbekistan*

Introduction

Sustainable In the contemporary digital age, social media has become an inseparable part of students' academic, social, and personal lives. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok provide learners with quick access to information, entertainment, communication, and educational content. For English as Foreign Language (EFL) students, social media can create opportunities for exposure to English vocabulary, authentic texts, online discussions, videos, articles, and other forms of language input (Jalgasbaevna & Panicker, 2025). In this sense, social media may function as a supportive digital environment for language learning and reading development. Recent studies have shown that social media can support EFL learners' motivation, interaction, and access to language-learning resources when it is used purposefully in educational contexts (Win et al., 2025).

Challenges of Social Media for Reading Habits

However, social media also presents significant challenges for students' reading habits and reading development. The frequent use of short videos, captions, comments, posts, and instant messages may encourage students to prefer short and easily accessible content rather than longer academic texts. As a result, students may experience reduced patience, weaker concentration, and lower motivation to engage with extended reading materials. Research on students' reading habits has reported that social media can create distraction during study time, even when it may also have positive effects on access to reading materials.

Reading remains one of the most important skills in EFL learning because it supports vocabulary development, grammar awareness, comprehension, academic achievement, and independent learning. For EFL students, regular reading is especially important because English is not commonly used as a daily communication language outside the classroom. Therefore, students need continuous exposure to English texts in order to improve their language proficiency. Online reading practices can contribute positively to reading comprehension when learners engage with digital texts meaningfully and consistently.

Context and Purpose of the Study

In the context of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, the influence of social media on EFL students' reading development deserves particular attention. Many students use multiple languages in their daily lives, including Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English. This multilingual environment may shape how students' access, interpret, and engage with English reading materials. At the same time, the increasing popularity of social media among young learners may affect their willingness to read longer English texts, especially academic articles, books, and study-related materials (Nargiza & Panicker, 2025). Therefore, it is important to examine both the negative and positive roles of social media in EFL reading development. This paper explores social media as both a challenge and an opportunity for EFL reading development among students in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. It focuses on how social media may distract students from long-form reading while also providing new possibilities for discovering English content, improving language exposure, and encouraging digital reading practices. By examining students' perspectives, the paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of how EFL teachers can reduce the negative effects of social media and use digital platforms more effectively to support students' reading engagement.

Thus, the study is guided by the following objectives: to examine how social media influences EFL students' reading interest, to identify the challenges social media creates for reading engagement, and to explore how social media can be used as an opportunity to support EFL reading development in the digital age.

Review of Related Literature

Social Media in Contemporary EFL Learning

Social media has become an important part of contemporary EFL learning because it provides learners with continuous access to English content, communication, and digital resources. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and Facebook expose learners to vocabulary, pronunciation, authentic language use, captions, comments, articles, videos, and peer interaction. Recent literature suggests that social

media can support EFL learners' language development when it is used purposefully and under teacher guidance. (N & U, 2025) explains that social media can contribute to vocabulary acquisition, grammar development, comprehension, and overall English proficiency, while also noting that it may create disadvantages when it is not used appropriately. Similarly, (Dadakhonov, 2024) reports that social media can create opportunities for online learning resources and academic interaction, but it may also become a source of distraction when students overuse it. Therefore, social media should not be viewed only as a negative influence; rather, its educational value depends on how students and teachers use it in the learning process.

Reading Motivation and Digital Reading in EFL Contexts

Reading is a central skill in EFL development because it supports vocabulary growth, comprehension, academic achievement, and independent language learning. For EFL students, reading motivation is particularly important because English is often not used as the main language of everyday communication. (Akobirov, Feruz Rahmatjonovich, 2017) found a significant positive relationship between reading motivation and reading comprehension achievement among English-major students, indicating that motivated learners tend to perform better in reading comprehension. This suggests that if social media reduces students' motivation to read long English texts, it may indirectly affect their reading development and academic progress. At the same time, if social media is used to introduce interesting English materials, articles, e-books, or educational content, it may increase learners' motivation to read.

Recent studies on digital reading show that students increasingly engage with texts through screens, online platforms, and multimodal materials. (Kdirbaeva & Usenova, 2021) found that university students use digital reading strategies such as goal setting, skimming, and avoiding unnecessary links or advertisements while reading online materials. However, the same study also showed that only half of the students who read from screens demonstrated full comprehension, suggesting that digital reading may create cognitive challenges if learners do not use effective reading strategies. This finding is important for EFL reading development because social media reading often includes hyperlinks, images, videos, comments, and notifications, all of which may increase cognitive load and reduce deep comprehension.

Challenges of Short-Form Content and Habitual Scrolling

One major challenge of social media for EFL reading development is the popularity of short-form content. Short videos, reels, captions, and brief posts encourage fast consumption of information and may influence students' patience with longer academic texts. (Polatovna & Uli, 2020) found that frequent exposure to short reels on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube might reduce undergraduate students' attention span and impair academic performance. Their study also suggests that teaching strategies can help reduce the cognitive overload caused by short media consumption. This supports the argument that social media may weaken students' ability to concentrate on extended reading tasks, especially when they become accustomed to quick and entertaining content.

In addition to short-form video exposure, habitual scrolling may also affect students' attention and reading engagement. (Jaakkola, 2025) found that short-form video use and scroll immersion were associated with attention difficulty, working memory disruption, and cognitive fatigue among social media users. This is relevant to EFL reading because

successful reading requires sustained attention, memory, and active comprehension. When students frequently move from one short item to another, they may find it more difficult to remain focused on long English texts, academic articles, or book chapters. As a result, social media can become a challenge for developing stable reading habits and deep reading skills.

Social Media as an Opportunity for EFL Reading Development

Despite these challenges, social media can also serve as an opportunity for EFL reading development. (Mirqodirova, 2025) found that social media applications can support second language learning, especially listening, speaking, and reading skills, although they emphasise that such use should be guided and supervised by professional teachers. This means that teachers can transform social media from a distraction into a learning tool by selecting suitable English reading materials, sharing reliable links, connecting social media posts to full articles, and encouraging students to discuss what they read. In this way, social media can become a bridge between students' digital habits and meaningful EFL reading practice.

The literature also highlights the importance of teacher mediation in the digital age. Since students already spend considerable time on social media, teachers can use this familiarity to encourage reading rather than completely reject digital platforms. For example, teachers may begin with a short post, video, or news headline and then guide students to read a full article, story, or academic text on the same topic. Reading logs, digital annotation, peer discussion, teacher-curated links, and classroom rules for phone use may also help students manage distraction and develop stronger reading routines. This is consistent with recent research suggesting that the educational impact of social media depends on moderation, purpose, and instructional design rather than frequency of use alone.

In the context of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, this issue is especially important because EFL students often study English within a multilingual environment where Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English may all be used in different domains. Social media may expose students to English content beyond the classroom, but it may also increase reliance on short, mixed-language, or entertainment-based content. Therefore, the present paper views social media as both a challenge and an opportunity for EFL reading development. It may distract students from long-form reading and reduce attention, but it may also provide access to authentic English materials, increase motivation, and support digital reading when used with appropriate pedagogical guidance.

Objectives

This article aims to examine how social media influences EFL students' reading interest and engagement in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. It seeks to identify challenges posed by platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok, particularly the tendency to prefer short, easily accessible content to extended academic texts. The study aims to analyse the effects of distraction and reduced concentration during study time, while also recognizing the importance of continuous exposure to English texts for vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension development. Another objective is to explore opportunities offered by social media, including authentic language input, online discussions, and digital reading practices that can support language proficiency.

The research further intends to investigate students' perspectives on how social media can both hinder and enhance reading development. It aims to assess the role of multilingual environments in shaping students' engagement with English texts and to evaluate strategies that teachers can adopt to minimize negative impacts while leveraging digital platforms effectively. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to EFL pedagogy by providing insights into how educators can balance the challenges and opportunities of social media, encourage meaningful reading practices, and foster sustained motivation for long-form English reading in the digital age.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design to examine social media as both a challenge and an opportunity for EFL reading development among students in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. This approach was appropriate because it enabled the study to collect measurable data through questionnaire responses and deeper insights through open-ended answers.

The participants of the study were 120 EFL students from Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. They were selected because they study English as a foreign language in a multilingual context where Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian, and English are commonly used. The participants represented different demographic backgrounds in terms of age, gender, language use, digital device access, internet access, preferred social media platforms, daily social media use, daily reading time, and preferred reading format. A structured questionnaire was used as the main research instrument. It consisted of five sections: demographic profile, social media's influence on reading interest, pedagogical strategies to reduce the negative effects of social media, pedagogical strategies to foster reading habits in the digital age, and open-ended questions. The closed-ended items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. These procedures helped identify general patterns in students' perceptions of social media and EFL reading development. The qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were analysed thematically to identify key issues such as distraction, reduced motivation, preference for short texts, discovery of English materials, and teacher-guided reading support. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, participation was voluntary, and all responses were treated confidentially and used only for academic purposes.

The indication is that social media has a dual influence on EFL students' reading development in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. It functions both as a challenge and as an opportunity, depending on the purpose of use, the amount of time spent on social media, and the level of teacher guidance provided. The responses suggest that social media is not simply a negative digital distraction; rather, it is a complex learning environment that can either weaken or support students' reading engagement. When students use social media mainly for entertainment, scrolling, short videos, and instant communication, it may reduce their interest in long-form reading. However, when social media is used purposefully for accessing English materials, following educational content, and engaging with teacher-curated resources, it can support EFL reading development.

Overall, this methodology provided a balanced understanding of how social media can both hinder and support EFL students' reading development in the digital age.

Findings and Discussion

One of the major findings is that social media may reduce students' interest and motivation to read longer English texts. Many students are frequently exposed to short texts, captions, comments, reels, and videos, which may encourage them to prefer quick and easily understandable content. This preference can make academic reading appear more difficult, time-consuming, and less attractive. In an EFL context, reading already requires additional cognitive effort because students need to understand vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, and meaning at the same time. Therefore, when students become accustomed to short-form content, they may find it harder to remain patient and focused while reading longer English texts. This suggests that social media may gradually reshape students' reading behaviour by encouraging surface-level reading rather than deep and sustained engagement with texts.

The findings also show that social media affects students' attention and reading discipline. Notifications, messages, continuous scrolling, and algorithm-based content can interrupt students during reading tasks and reduce their ability to concentrate. As a result, students may postpone planned reading, read for a shorter period, or choose social media over reading during their free time. This is significant because successful EFL reading depends not only on language knowledge but also on sustained attention and reading stamina. If students frequently shift their attention between reading and social media, their comprehension and engagement with English texts may be weakened. Therefore, the findings suggest that social media distraction is not only a matter of time management but also a challenge related to attention control and self-regulated learning.

At the same time, the findings reveal that social media can also create opportunities for EFL reading development. Students may encounter English posts, articles, blogs, news, e-books, educational videos, and discussion threads through social media platforms. These materials can increase students' exposure to English outside the classroom and introduce them to topics that match their personal interests. In this way, social media can act as a gateway to reading, especially when students are encouraged to move from short online content to longer and more meaningful texts. For example, a short post, video, or headline can be used as an entry point for reading a full article, story, or academic text. This indicates that the educational value of social media depends on how it is used and whether students are guided to engage with content critically and purposefully.

The findings further highlight the important role of teachers in managing the influence of social media on reading development. Teacher guidance is essential in helping students balance digital media use with regular reading practice. Classroom rules limiting phone use, reading goals, reading logs, quizzes, annotation, summaries, and peer discussions can help students stay focused and accountable during reading tasks. Teacher-curated links and digital reading activities can also guide students from short social media content to extended English reading materials. These strategies show that teachers should not only restrict social media use but also teach students how to use digital platforms responsibly for learning.

Overall, the findings suggest that social media can either weaken or support EFL students' reading development depending on the way it is integrated into students' learning practices. It becomes harmful when students use it mainly for passive entertainment, short-form content, and continuous scrolling. However, it becomes useful when teachers integrate it into reading instruction in a structured and purposeful way. In the context of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, where students learn English in a multilingual environment, social media can provide valuable exposure to English beyond the classroom. Therefore, EFL teachers should help students develop digital reading awareness, manage distractions, and use social media as a bridge toward stronger reading habits and deeper engagement with English texts.

Conclusion

This paper examined social media as both a challenge and an opportunity for EFL reading development among students in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. The discussion showed that social media can negatively affect students' reading habits by reducing their interest in long-form reading, distracting them during study time, and encouraging a preference for short and easily accessible content. These challenges may weaken students' motivation, concentration, and engagement with academic English texts. At the same time, social media can also support EFL reading development when it is used purposefully. It provides students with access to English posts, articles, blogs, news, e-books, educational videos, and other digital materials. Therefore, social media should not be viewed only as a harmful influence, but as a tool that can create meaningful reading opportunities if guided properly.

The paper highlights the important role of teachers in helping students manage social media use and develop stronger reading habits. Strategies such as classroom phone rules, reading goals, reading logs, annotation, summaries, peer discussions, teacher-curated links, and digital reading tasks can help reduce distraction and encourage students to engage with longer English texts.

Overall, social media has a dual role in EFL reading development. It may become a barrier when students use it mainly for entertainment and continuous scrolling, but it may become a valuable learning resource when integrated into reading instruction in a structured and purposeful way. Therefore, EFL teachers in Karakalpakstan should guide students to use social media critically, balance digital media use with regular reading practice, and transform online platforms into supportive spaces for English reading development.

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