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*Social Media
in Teaching and Learning*

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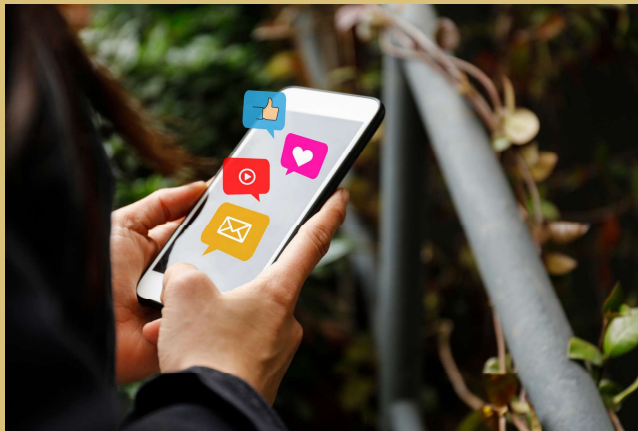


Social media or social menace- the damage that social media may cause in language learning

AFNI ANIDA ADNAN
UiTM KAMPUS SEREMBAN

A quick search on the internet (Wikipedia, to be exact) lists social media as “interactive technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing and aggregation of content, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks”. It goes on to add that “social media refers to new forms of media that involve interactive participation”.

However, to most of us, applications or websites that may or may not encourage participation qualifies as social media. Many of us view Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter) and TikTok as social media. These applications and sites, which mostly started as social platforms to socialize, have morphed into economic tools, with many people using them as business platforms, sometimes earning them millions of dollars (or ringgits) in mere minutes (think Khairulaming.com).



Besides commercial value, these social media are also fast becoming teaching and learning tools, with many ‘teachers’, some qualified and some not, taking on the teaching scene using these platforms. While many will be quick to claim that these applications are heaven-sent to the younger generation, as they are often helmed by very attractive teachers with excellent graphic and multimedia skills to churn out equally attractive content, one must also wonder about the quality of the content that is made available.

As a (qualified) language teacher, my main concern is the number of errors being made by the so-called teachers of most of these apps. In addition, English, like any other language, is fluid and living, so much so that there isn’t really a ‘one size fits all’ solution to the never-ending confusion on (English) grammar. Then again, this, too, isn’t the only concern. There are also other components of English that warrant attention- the phonetics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics aspects, amongst others, vary greatly in the world of English, or Englishes.



I am not going to be the first to admit that the social media craze has long taken me captive too. As such I too spend a considerable amount of time on Facebook, and of late, TikTok. This has brought me to realize that sometimes, these social media are really not the best of teachers for the following reasons:

1. There is a great variety of spoken Englishes on social media – British, American, Australian, Non-Native and the list goes on. Even within these variations, there are even other variations of dialects and accents – Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Cockney, The Queen’s English, Southern English, The Texan Drawl, The New York Speak, Singaporean English (Singlish) and our very own Malaysian English (Manglish), to name a few. These

varieties may cause confusion amongst learners who are new and uninitiated to the types of English available.

2. There are 'informal' teachers – which, in my humble opinion, does even more damage than ever, especially to non-native speakers. These are very simply people who attempt to use English but who may or may not deliberately distort the spelling or pronunciation, or meaning of English words, sometimes even coining new words altogether. What is even more detrimental is the speed at which these words catch on, hitting an all-time high in popularity and usage. Examples of these are:

Try and error – (Trial and error)

Infect – (In fact)

Hesmes – (Handsome)

Shuben – (Husband)

Ironless (tudung) – (scarves that) do not need to be ironed

3. Very often, these English 'lessons' are terribly short and choppy, leaving many of the language concepts half-explained or, even worse, not really explained at all. The examples given are often sorely lacking in context. This may be due to the duration allowed per video by the application designers or simply the fact that these 'teachers' have little material to go by.

4. There is very little interaction that allow for 'testing and evaluation' of the 'subject matter' taught. Live interaction on social media is almost always reserved mainly for selling things to buyers, but not when it comes to teaching and learning. Most of the 'lessons' on social media are one way, with very low reciprocity, and little room for question- and- answer sessions. Interaction and testing are two very important elements in teaching and learning as they allow clarification, additional information and the gauging of comprehension. Unfortunately, this important element is largely absent when teaching and learning through social media takes place.

Thus, it is very important that all of us, especially those seeking to improve their skills, be it in language or other subjects, be selective and cautious when deciding to 'follow' social media channels that offer knowledge. This is because there is no regulatory body to control the 'knowledge' available, given the sheer volume of videos on the internet. Many of us are susceptible to half-baked teachers who might be spewing the wrong things, and worse, many of the 'teachers' themselves may not be aware of the damage they are causing.