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Tel: 0 535 952 92 98

Yayın ve Dağıtım işleri * 0 543 486 23 09
İzmir İrtibat/Ofis * Çatalkaya Mahallesi
Sessiz Sokak No: 4 Narlıdere-İzmir

Genel Dağıtım * Odak Dağıtım-Point A.Ş.
Akçaburgaz Mah. 1584 Sk. No: 21
Esenyurt-İstanbul

gunceyayinlari@hotmail.com
www.gunceyayinlari.com

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editör
DOÇ. DR. **MURAT GÜR**

Günce Yayınları

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Exploring the Role of Influencers in French Language Teaching on Social Media

Özge ÖZBEK[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the interest of both adults and young people in technological devices and screens has been increasing. A result of this trend is that young people create accounts on social media platforms at a very early age, following numerous individuals, both nationally and internationally, whether they know them in real life or not. Young people can chat with many people through these platforms, particularly by using Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Twitter, or Facebook. At the same time, students are turning to platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and other services where videos can be created, as well as computer-assisted language learning applications like Duolingo, where people from all over the world can chat to improve their foreign language skills. Consequently, those who wish to learn or enhance their knowledge of a foreign language also use social media and other services as tools.

The numerous studies conducted in recent years on the impact of social media on foreign language learning/ teaching highlight the significance of this subject[2]. According to Reinhardt[3], using smartphones and technology for foreign language learning has become a part of out-of-school learning environments for some students. Additionally, these technologies allow students to easily access a wide range of authentic materials and discourses in foreign languages.

According to a study examining the period between 2017 and 2021, 39,906 articles published in the Education Resources Information Center

[1]PhD Research Assistant, Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, French Language Teaching Department. ozgekaracadal@gazi.edu.tr orcid: 0000-0001-6386-2191

[2] Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Elverici et al., 2018; Fleck et al., 2014; Hazaymeh & Khasawneh, 2024; Li, 2017; Malik et al., 2019; Pikhart & Bozetat, 2021.

[3] Reinhardt, "Metaphors for social media-enhanced foreign language teaching and learning", p. 1.

(ERIC) database related to the research trends of foreign language learning through social media[4]. However, these articles exhibit variations based on the language of composition, the type of social media they focus on, and their methods and objectives of the studies. For example, Eren's study[5] was conducted exclusively with a sample of 48 university students who were Facebook users enrolled in an English preparatory class. The study concluded that language activities conducted via Facebook can be used to supplement English instruction and that students displayed a positive attitude toward this approach. In another study[6] examining the impact of social media on speaking and grammar learning in foreign languages, an experimental research design involving pre-tests and post-tests was conducted with 392 students. The results revealed a significant increase in grammar proficiency among students in the experimental group during the post-test phase. According to this study, it is possible to assert that social media positively affects learning grammar and speaking skills in a foreign language. The study specifically focused on YouTube language lessons and Instagram live sessions.

Another study[7] investigating the impact of using YouTube, blogs, forums, and wikis on foreign language learning emphasized that these tools significantly enhance student-student interaction, which students prefer over student-teacher interaction.

Some individuals, referred to as "influencers" on social media, stand out as significant leaders in the diffusion of foreign language learning and teaching materials. Often boasting a large following, these influencers utilize their platforms to share educational content, ranging from grammar

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[4] Abdelhamid, Yahaya, Ahmad, & Nazmi. "Foreign Language Learning Through Social Media: A Review Study", p. 1424.

[5] Eren, "Students' Attitudes towards Using Social Networking in Foreign Language Classes: A Facebook Example", p. 288.

[6] Hazaymeh & Khasawneh, "Examining the use of social media in teaching and learning foreign languages and the impact on students' speaking abilities", p. 69.

[7] Li, " Social Media in English Language Teaching and Learning. International Journal of Learning and Teaching", p. 148.

lessons to suggestions of words and phrases commonly used in everyday language, making language learning more accessible and frequently enjoyable for a broader audience. The interactive nature of social media on an international scale allows these influencers to connect with their followers in real time, engage in communication, answer questions, offer personalized advice to individuals, and even conduct live lessons that traditional classroom settings may not always be able to provide.

Additionally, some influencers design their videos or photos to be tailored to the language proficiency levels of their followers, creating categories aimed at beginners, intermediate learners, and more advanced students. Social media becomes a valuable tool for foreign language education when this adaptability to language level is combined with the convenience of on-demand access to learning materials. Consequently, the role of influencers in language teaching/learning has significantly expanded, providing learners with diverse, engaging, and flexible resources that can complement traditional educational methods. For this reason, this study will examine the online French language teaching materials shared by influencers and discuss their usability in educational contexts.

2. AIM AND METHOD

In this study, the focus is on highlighting the content shared by influencers on social media regarding teaching French as a foreign language, emphasizing the topics they utilize to engage their audiences. For this purpose, some influencers' profiles and personal websites will be analyzed, and examples will be given to illustrate how they can be applied in classrooms where French is taught or learned as a second language. The significance of this study lies in the abundance of influencers and language educators' posts on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, and the lack of any previous analysis of these posts. This research will examine these posts for educational purposes and discuss their applicability in classroom settings.

Studies observing the use of social media for educational purposes have been identified, and some of these will be examined in the subsequent.

Creswell[8] outlines the qualitative analysis method utilized in this study as follows:

> *Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes […]*

As stated by the author, researchers are regarded as "a key instrument" in qualitative research because they gather data directly through interviews, observations, or document analysis. In this research, the documentary analysis method, a qualitative research method, will be utilized.

As Rapley[9] suggests, the internet constitutes a substantial potential resource for documentary analysis, with a wide array of materials available online being incorporated into academic research. It is worth noting that social media, particularly Instagram, is also a valuable online resource, underscoring its considerable potential as a source for documentary analysis. However, this potential has yet to be fully explored by researchers in the domain of French language teaching in Turkey.

Instagram consistently reflects traces of people's daily lives, cultures, and histories. The influencers to be examined are native French speakers and French language teachers. As a result, their posts often feature authentic dialogues or texts. These materials will serve as valuable guides for both teachers and students.

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[8] Creswell, "Qualitative inquiry & research design. Choosing among five approaches", p. 37-38.

[9] Rapley, "Doing conversation, discourse and document analysis", p. 14.

3. ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCERS' VIDEOS AND PHOTOS AS A TEACHING/LEARNING MATERIAL

Many teachers or influencers are gaining more followers by sharing content related to foreign language instruction, especially on Instagram. These influencers have established websites and provide foreign language lessons online. This study will not focus on influencers who share humorous videos, discuss current events, or post about fashion. Instead, it will examine individuals sharing content related to French language teaching/learning.

3.1. Français avec Pierre (1,1 M followers)

Pierre has been working in French language teaching for many years and, as of August 24, 2024, has shared 1,744 posts with 1.1 million followers on Instagram. In terms of French grammar, he has shared various resources: verb conjugations, the use of the pronouns y and en, the difference between the verbs voir and regarder, and the correct usage of prepositions, etc. For vocabulary, he provides examples of different language registers, such as gueule/visage/physionomie or fric/argent/numéraire or pépin/problème/obstacle. In this way, he discusses the differences between informal, standard, and formal French (familier/courant/soutenu), illustrating how the same word is used in different contexts. He also occasionally highlights how the same verb can be used in different forms, such as 'Je regrette + noun'; 'Je regrette de + infinitive'; or 'Je regrette que + subjunctive'. In this way, he demonstrates to students how to use various structures with a single verb and guides them on which tense or form to use in the continuation of the sentence. Pierre also occasionally shares explanations of common expressions or idioms used in everyday life, making them understandable for students, as shown in the examples below:



3.2. Learn French with Clémence (1M followers)

Clémence Arbib, who manages a popular Instagram profile dedicated to French language teaching, has garnered a following of 1 million people as of August 20, 2024. In addition to this, she also runs another profile focused on English language teaching, which boasts 6.8 million followers under the name "Learn English with Clémence.". Clémence has created separate websites for both English and French language teaching and offers private French lessons online, ranging from A1 to B2 levels. For those who wish to determine their proficiency in either French or English, her website provides free quizzes through Kahoot, a Web 2.0 tool (https://www.learnfrenchwithclemence.com/). Students who wish to do so can take this quiz to determine their proficiency in French or English. The following visual provides an example of the questions found in one of the French quiz:



Through her Instagram profile, Clémence shares numerous grammar-focused materials, including the conjugation of various French verbs across different tenses, as well as the usage of prepositions demonstrated through reading, contextual examples, and written explanations. Additionally, she provides a wide range of resources such as synonyms, near-synonyms, antonyms, commonly made mistakes, and dialogues frequently used by French speakers in daily life. Teachers can easily adapt these free resources to their students' language levels and incorporate them into specific classroom activities. Additionally, students can independently study by accessing Clémence's Instagram profile and utilizing the materials for free. By simultaneously pointing to the sentences or words she writes, either with her finger (as shown in the image on the left below) or with the help of another icon (such as a croissant in the image on the right), Clémence enhances students' ability to develop both their reading and listening skills concurrently. For students who have limited exposure to the foreign language they are learning in their own countries, Clémence's materials offer a significant opportunity.

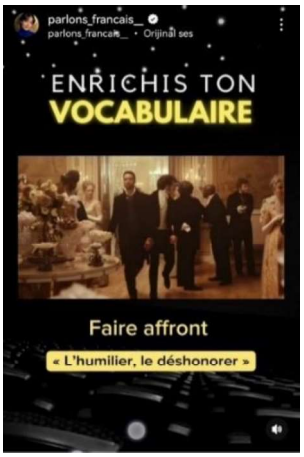




3.3. Parlons Français (Layla Khamlichi) (1 M followers)

Layla Khamlichi, the creator of the Instagram profile "Parlons Français," has reached one million followers as of July 1, 2024. For students with advanced proficiency in French writing, she offers numerous writing patterns and synonyms, such as Dans ce cas / En l'occurrence; Malgré / En

dépit de; En plus / Qui plus est; Comme / Tel que; En tout cas / Toujours est-il que; Raison / A fortiori. Additionally, she sometimes adds French dubbing to non-French Netflix series like "Bridgerton", highlighting challenging vocabulary within the context. She plays the dialogue containing the difficult word and provides explanations, as exemplified below:



In this manner, the student first hears the challenging word used within the context and simultaneously sees it in written form. Following this, they both hear and see the explanation or synonyms of the word in written form. Given the limited availability of language learning materials for students at advanced proficiency levels, it becomes evident that Layla's content is highly beneficial. She also explains challenging vocabulary by sharing sequences of political discourse intended for advanced French learners, such as a video in which former French President Sarkozy speaks. This approach allows students who engage with social media content to enhance their listening and reading skills. Moreover, much of the 'Parlons français' content, as exemplified below, encompasses cultural and political characteristics related to France or the daily lives of the French people. "Language is a sociocultural phenomenon"; through such content, not only

can students' vocabulary be enhanced, but their sociolinguistic skills concerning France and the French people can also be developed[10].



3.4. Learn French with Maud (819,000 followers)

Maud creates authentic videos to simulate specific communication scenarios, demonstrating various ways to express something in French. For example, in one video, she shows herself climbing a mountain. She emphasizes that instead of repeatedly saying 'je suis fatigué,' one can express fatigue in several different ways, such as "je suis claqué(e) / je suis exténué(e)/ je suis HS (hors service) / or je suis au bout de ma vie". A noteworthy aspect of Maud's videos is her inclusion of both written and spoken French sentences, interspersed with English. This approach is particularly advantageous for individuals, such as those in Turkey, who first learn English as a foreign language and then attempt to acquire French as a second foreign language.

With 580 posts on her Instagram profile, Maud frequently shares videos on topics such as prepositions or tenses, dialogues drawn from everyday life, the meanings of gestures and facial expressions, and common mistakes in French. In one of her videos, as illustrated below, she

[10] Conseil de l'Europe, "Cadre Européen Commun de Références pour les langues: Apprendre, Enseigner et Évaluer", p. 142.

discusses various phrases that can be used to describe an unbearable person in daily life:



Like many other French teachers or influencers sharing content on Instagram, Maud has established her own website and linked it to her Instagram profile. However, Maud's use of this website to publish podcasts sets her apart from other influencers. Each Wednesday, Maud produces a podcast, and every Sunday, she creates a video, text, and audio newsletter featuring her voice, personal experiences, and travels while also discussing aspects of French culture, French history, and historical landmarks. By providing students with captivating content, she enhances their French listening and reading skills. Additionally, transcripts and English equivalents of the videos or podcasts are available, allowing students to practice specific sentences or vocabulary through related activities.

For instance, in a podcast titled "Les Mystères du Louvre: Bien plus que la Joconde", Maud discusses the Louvre Museum in Paris. She offers only a portion of this content for free on her website, while access to the full content requires payment (as of 21.08.2024). Similarly, her materials include lessons on topics such as Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the singer Jacques Brel, Lake Switzerland, Louis Vuitton, and cinema evenings by the river.

3.5. French School Tv (Vincent Bouen) (645,000 followers)

Collaborating with Didier Publishing, Vincent Bouen has shared 2,490 posts on Instagram under the profile "frenchschooltv" as of August 28, 2024. His videos cover topics such as French culture and the regional linguistic variations within France, focusing on pronunciation and intonation. Additionally, to illustrate specific communication scenarios, he creates dialogues with his friends, records these conversations, and shares them, including examples such as expressing surprise.

In all of the content he shares, the dialogues can be seen in written form without exception; however, some include English translations, while others do not. Occasionally, he also shares idioms and set phrases commonly used in everyday language in the form of photos, explaining their meanings, using them in sentences, and, as seen in the example shared for C1 language level below, providing their English translations.



One of the commendable aspects of Vincent's profile is that he labels each video with the language proficiency level it is intended for. For instance, a teacher seeking B2-level lesson materials or a student at that level can easily access the appropriate videos without opening each one individually. This feature significantly saves time for both students and teachers.

For example, in the video on the right above, while speaking, he pauses to present a choice to the student, as if it were a grammar quiz: when

translating the sentence ‘Most shops are closed’ into French, he demonstrates how the verb 'to be' should be used depending on whether the subject/object is singular or plural. A French teacher with B2-level students could use this video at the beginning of a lesson as part of the anticipation phase or at the end as a summary related to the topic, adapting it to fit the lesson's design.

4. CONCLUSION

Today, many French language teachers have become social media influencers and frequently share content. Given that platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok are widely used, particularly by young people, the presence of foreign language teachers on these platforms and the content they share hold significant importance. Like individuals who produce content in other fields, French language teachers face time-consuming content creation stages. These stages include finding topics, sourcing dialogue partners if necessary, creating texts or dialogues, producing photographs or videos, and editing. Each of these steps requires significant time and effort. Moreover, French speakers must use the digital educational material produced daily and adhere to French language and grammar rules. It should also include engaging activities or dialogues to prevent student boredom. Additionally, from a pedagogical perspective, the material must not conflict with educational approaches and perspectives and should be understandable for students; therefore, adding subtitles or transcripts to videos or photos is necessary.

In the current study, French language teaching materials shared on Instagram profiles and personal websites of five different influencers were examined and evaluated from an educational perspective. These influencers ranged from having the highest follower count of 1.1 million to the lowest of 645,000. As a result, it is appropriate to state that teachers can adapt these materials to fit lessons designed according to the needs and language levels of the target audience in French language classes. Since these materials are authentic, current, and mostly entertaining products

prepared and published by native French speakers who are also teachers of French as a foreign language, utilizing them as teaching resources in the French classroom would be advantageous for educators. Additionally, students can easily access these materials online and study French to suit their needs or interests, thus advancing their language skills.

Additionally, students can easily access language teachers, influencers from various fields, and individuals with whom they can practice the foreign language they are learning through these social media platforms. As a result, it can be said that the content produced by language teachers who are influencers on social media requires significant effort, strategy, discipline, and planning, thus bringing an innovative approach to language education and warranting their support.

For future research, it is recommended that influencers' French content be examined on social media platforms other than Instagram. Furthermore, qualitative studies could be conducted by interviewing French learners to explore which influencers they follow and how they utilize the content provided by these influencers.

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