

## **THE USE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING PLATFORMS AS A TOOL FOR SOCIALISATION AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OF STUDENTS**

*Svitlana NYKYPORETS, the senior  
English language lecturer, Foreign Languages Department,  
Vinnytsia National Technical University, Ukraine*

The accelerating digitalisation of higher education over the past decade has fundamentally transformed the practice of language instruction. Platforms such as Duolingo, Busuu, Moodle-based language modules, and interactive virtual classrooms have emerged not merely as instructional repositories but as dynamic social environments in which learners communicate, collaborate, and form affective bonds. This shift has become especially pronounced in contexts where face-to-face instruction has been disrupted by crises – most notably the global COVID-19 pandemic and, subsequently, the full-scale war in Ukraine – forcing students and educators alike to reconceive the very purpose of the digital learning space.

Whilst the linguistic affordances of online language platforms have been extensively documented, their capacity to function as instruments of socialisation and emotional sustenance remains comparatively under-theorised. Students who engage with these platforms do not merely acquire vocabulary and grammatical structures; they also negotiate identities, seek peer validation, experience enjoyment or anxiety, and, in many cases, derive a sense of belonging that transcends the boundaries of the formal classroom. The present paper examines this dual function, arguing that language learning platforms, when thoughtfully integrated into pedagogical practice, can serve as meaningful sites of social interaction and emotional scaffolding.

The overarching aim of this paper is to synthesise current empirical evidence on the socialising and emotion-regulating capacities of digital language learning environments, with particular attention to the experiences of university-level students. In doing so, it seeks to identify the mechanisms through which platform-mediated interaction fosters positive affect, reduces foreign language anxiety, and supports learner well-being, especially in conditions of social fragmentation and educational disruption.

Since 2020, research on online language learning has increasingly emphasised emotion, motivation, social connectedness, and their influence on pedagogical outcomes. Sadoughi and Hejazi (2021) examined EFL contexts through a large-scale quantitative study and found that teacher support improved academic engagement indirectly through positive academic emotions, especially gratitude and enjoyment. Their publication is important because it links supportive instruction with affective outcomes that are also relevant to

online learning environments. Li (2022), in a literature review on social networking applications in EFL education, showed that collaborative tasks, peer commenting, and community forums can strengthen learners' commitment and enjoyment. Li's review also argued that social features in digital platforms reduce learner isolation and create a stronger sense of shared academic purpose. Huang (2023) studied 502 Chinese undergraduates in online English courses and investigated how peer support influences foreign language emotions through self-efficacy. The study found that peer support increased learners' perceived competence, raised enjoyment, reduced anxiety, and encouraged more active participation. Liu and Zhou (2024) focused on teacher emotional support in online EFL learning among Chinese university students. Their publication showed that responsive communication, encouragement, and acknowledgement of learners' difficulties significantly predicted online engagement, with enjoyment acting as a key mediator. Austin and Yanovych (2024) provided evidence directly related to Ukrainian learners by surveying 387 adult English learners. Their study found that peer support was associated with lower foreign language anxiety and greater willingness to communicate.

Overall, the reviewed publications suggest that online language platforms should be designed not only as tools for individual study, but also as emotionally supportive social environments, especially for learners affected by educational disruption and psychological stress. Collectively, these studies converge on a central theme: the social and emotional affordances of digital learning environments are neither peripheral nor supplementary to language learning. They are, in fact, constitutive of the conditions under which effective and sustained acquisition takes place.

Language learning platforms are increasingly designed to incorporate features that extend beyond adaptive exercises and vocabulary drills. Discussion boards, peer-review modules, collaborative writing tasks, leaderboards, and achievement-sharing mechanisms collectively constitute a social architecture that invites interaction and cultivates a sense of community. When students engage with these features, they participate in identity negotiation, mutual scaffolding, and shared accomplishment – processes that are socially generative in character.

The socialising function of language platforms manifests most clearly in activities that require learners to communicate with others: peer feedback on written tasks, synchronous conversation practice with native speakers or fellow students, and participation in community challenges. Such interactions generate what social psychologists' term 'social presence' – the perception that one is interacting with real, responsive human beings rather than engaging with an inert digital interface. Where social presence is established, learners tend to exhibit greater motivation, more sustained engagement, and a reduced sense of alienation from the learning process (Huang, 2023; Li, 2022).

The emotional support function of these platforms operates through multiple channels. Gamification elements – streaks, points, and badges – can mitigate the anxiety that frequently accompanies language learning by reframing error as a natural component of progress rather than as a source of shame. Peer encouragement, whether expressed through explicit commentary or simple acts of acknowledgement within a platform community, has been shown to enhance learners' self-efficacy and to buffer against demotivation (Huang, 2023). Instructor-generated emotional support, delivered through personalised feedback, responsive messaging, and visible presence within the digital environment, further reinforces learners' sense of being seen and valued (Liu & Zhou, 2024; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021).

The Ukrainian educational context lends particular urgency to these considerations. Since February 2022, Ukrainian higher education has operated under conditions of unprecedented disruption: air raid alerts interrupt synchronous sessions, students and staff are displaced across the country and abroad, and the psychological burden of conflict exerts a pervasive toll on concentration, motivation, and emotional availability. In this context, language learning platforms have assumed a role that extends well beyond formal instruction. For students who are isolated – whether geographically or psychologically – the peer communities and instructional relationships sustained through digital platforms may constitute among the most consistent sources of social contact and normalcy in their daily lives.

Evidence from Austin and Yanovych (2024) suggests that Ukrainian learners place considerable weight on peer support as a determinant of their willingness to communicate and their capacity to manage anxiety. This finding implies that language learning platforms serving Ukrainian student populations carry a heightened responsibility to cultivate supportive community dynamics, not merely to optimise linguistic outcomes. Educators and platform designers working with or for this population ought to prioritise the integration of social interaction features, ensure that instructor presence is visible and responsive, and develop mechanisms through which students can access peer support in a structured yet non-threatening manner.

It is equally important to acknowledge the limitations and potential risks associated with this model. Platform-mediated social interaction, however carefully designed, cannot fully substitute for the depth and spontaneity of in-person human contact. Poorly moderated community spaces risk becoming sites of comparison, performance anxiety, or exclusion rather than support. Furthermore, unequal access to reliable internet connectivity – a persistent challenge (Nykypporets, 2026) in conflict-affected and underserved regions – means that the benefits of platform-based socialisation are not equitably distributed. These constraints must inform both the design of platforms and the pedagogical choices of the educators who deploy them.

A further dimension worthy of attention is the role of instructor training. The evidence reviewed by Liu and Zhou (2024) and Sadoughi and Hejazi (2021) suggests that the affective quality of a digital learning environment is substantially shaped by the manner in which instructors engage with students online. Yet many language educators have received (Kravchenko et al., 2025) little formal preparation for the affective demands of online teaching. Professional development programmes that equip instructors with the skills to provide emotional support in digital environments are therefore a necessary complement to any platform-level intervention. Recognising the emotional dimension of online pedagogy (Sachaniuk-Kavets'ka et al., 2025) as a professional competence, rather than a personal trait, is a prerequisite for systematic change.

**Conclusion.** The present paper has argued that language learning platforms, by virtue of their social architecture and instructional design, possess a significant capacity to function as vehicles of socialisation and emotional support for university students. Drawing on current empirical research, it has been shown that peer interaction, teacher emotional support, and community-building features embedded within digital platforms are associated with increased engagement, reduced anxiety, enhanced self-efficacy, and a greater sense of belonging among language learners.

These findings carry several practical implications. First, platform developers should prioritise the integration of peer interaction and community features as structural, rather than optional, components of their products. Second, language educators deploying digital

platforms should attend deliberately to the affective dimensions of online presence, recognising that instructional and emotional support are mutually reinforcing rather than distinct concerns. Third, in contexts of educational disruption – such as that experienced by Ukrainian higher education during the ongoing conflict – the social and emotional functions of language platforms merit explicit institutional recognition and strategic support.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies tracking the emotional trajectories of students engaged with specific platforms over extended periods, as well as context-sensitive investigations that account for the particular socio-political circumstances of learner populations. Research designs that incorporate qualitative methods alongside quantitative measures would deepen understanding of the subjective dimensions of platform-mediated social experience. Ultimately, treating language learning platforms not merely as linguistic tools but as social environments with genuine affective consequences represents both a theoretical advance and an ethical imperative in contemporary language education.

### References

1. Austin, G., & Yanovych, A. (2024). Affect and conation in second language learning: Survey data from Ukrainian learners of English. *Data in Brief*, 52, 110090. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib.2024.110090>.
2. Huang Y. (2023). Examining the relationship between peer support and foreign language emotions in online learning: the mediating effect of self-efficacy. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1148472. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1148472>.
3. Kravchenko, K., Ketsyk-Zinchenko, U., Suduk, I., Nykyporets, S., & Cherednychenko, V. (2025). Effectiveness of online platforms in developing language skills of higher education students. *Revista Eduweb*, 19(3), 303–314. <https://doi.org/10.46502/issn.1856-7576/2025.19.03.19>.
4. Li, B. (2022). Boosting EFL learners' commitment and enjoyment in language learning through social networking: A literature review. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 13: 999586. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.999586>.
5. Liu, Q., & Zhou, W. (2024). The impact of teachers' emotional support on EFL learners' online learning engagement: The role of enjoyment and boredom. *Acta Psychologica*, 250, 104504. [10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104504](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104504).
6. Nykyporets, S. S. (2025). Effects of English-mediated project work on soft-skills development and quality-of-life outcomes in early-career engineers: A mixed-methods evaluation. In T. Pokusa & T. Nestorenko (Eds.), *Quality of Life in the Global Uncertainty Dimensions* (pp. 233–245). Publishing House of the Academy of Applied Sciences – Academy of Management and Administration in Opole. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18229725>.
7. Nykyporets, S. S. (2026). Creative thinking in engineering education: Project-based English instruction with generative AI tools. In *Transformations in conditions of turbulence: Selection of adaptation models and mechanisms: Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference* (Kielce, Poland, February 25, 2026). Research and Educational Innovation Center of Social Transformations. <https://doi.org/10.54929/REICST-Conf-2026-02-25-03-04>.
8. Sachaniuk-Kavets'ka, N. V., & Nykyporets, S. S. (2025). Developing critical thinking in students of technical specialties through the mathematics of uncertainty and educational debates in English: An integrated experimental-methodological model. *Bulletin of Science and Education. Series "Pedagogy"*, 11(41), 1524–1541. [https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-6165-2025-11\(41\)-1524-1541](https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-6165-2025-11(41)-1524-1541).