

"The Impact of Social Media Platforms on Language Learning: A Case Study of English Language Majoring Students at Kuwait University"

Researchers:

Khalid Jamea Al-Azmi

English Language Instructor and a Researcher in Linguistics

BA in Linguistics – Kuwait university

Khalid Talib Al-Obeid

English Language Instructor and a Researcher in Linguistics

BA in Linguistics – Kuwait university



Abstract:

Social media platforms have become essential in every person's phone. These platforms serve to provide us with the latest news while entertaining us and teaching us new information we were unaware of. However, these platforms come at a great cost; they are affecting languages worldwide. In this paper, we examined this phenomenon in the English language among English-major students from both the College of Education and the College of Arts. The data was collected from 42 participants, from both male and female students. The data was collected via a survey that was designed online. It included questions such as how much time they spend on social media, whether media affects language, and whether the effect is beneficial. The results showed that all participants agreed on the existence of an impact that affects languages. Furthermore, the participants believed that their vocabulary was heavily affected by social media. Our results also showed that YouTube was the most influential platform that had the highest impact on the participants' vocabulary.

Keywords: Social media, platforms, language learning, Kuwait University.

1. Introduction:

Social media platforms have had a significant impact on languages worldwide, regardless of whether it is a positive or a negative one. The main question that this research paper seeks to answer is: Can social media platforms be considered a good contributor to language learning? Listed here in this paper are some literature reviews of some books and articles that were compared to our findings to get as much information as possible. Some reviews contradict each other in terms of agreement to our research question, but we overlook them and focus on their relevance and key findings instead. We also delve deeper into knowing the nature of the learners' activities towards social media, their opinion on whether languages are susceptible to distortion due to external factors, and their reaction to social media in general. Moreover, we tackle the four skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, to see which skill has the highest vulnerability in front of social media. Not only that, but also the specified platforms that contribute to the spread of these vulnerabilities.

2. Literature Review:

In a study that was conducted in the academic year of 2014-2015 in Turkey, author Tutku Basoz came to the conclusion that "social media gives language learners access to more authentic language use" (Basoz, 2016). Basoz's article simply looks at how EFL teachers feel about learning languages through social media. The data that the author collected was from a questionnaire that was directed to native speakers of Turkish and was then analyzed descriptively. However, the author set an age limit that went from 18 to 35. This would not be applicable in our modern day, given the fact that more younger people have easy access to social media platforms nowadays.

To further emphasize the existence of an impact on language learning from social media, a book was published that was called Digital Language Learning and Teaching. As the name implies, the book delves into the matter of measuring the power that technology has in language learning. And as we all know, social media cannot exist without technology. Some interesting models that this book introduced are SAMR (substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition) which helps educators integrate technology into teaching and learning. Another model, abbreviated as TPACK, was introduced to "help teachers see the interrelationship of pedagogical and technological knowledge." (Carrier et al., 2017). The authors of this book surrendered to the fact that digital learning is not going anywhere. Rather, they claimed that we should embrace it instead.

In 2018, author Jonathon Reinhardt further carried on the task of investigating the effects of social media on language learning in more detail. He argued that sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and others have many benefits when learning a language. Furthermore, he distinguished between the formal and informal aspects of users' usage of the internet. What Reinhardt came to notice is that weblogs, commonly known as blogs, "were arguably the first social media because they were designed to support interactive readership and multimedia embedding from their inception in the late 1990s." (Reinhardt, 2018). The author also claimed that blogs are important for learning about one's culture, developing literacy and identity, and maintaining a balanced vocabulary. Although Reinhardt's research was successful, his main focus was on blogs. What really matters to us, however, is how language learning is affected by the use of social media as a whole, not only weblogs.

Instagram, among other social media platforms, was one of the first platforms to ever have verified accounts. With that said, authors Nurianti Sitorus and Ince Dian Aprilyani Azir decided to dedicate a study on Instagram's verified accounts'

ability to determine whether or not they can benefit language learners' reading and listening skills. They claimed that such accounts are "authentic and notable" (Sitorus & Azir, 2021). The methodology that they followed was an experimental study by Moleong (1989) that was applied to thirty students in their fourth semester. They combined quantitative and qualitative methods to acquire their final results. The outcome of their study showed that students improved remarkably from Instagram's verified accounts. Again, this would not be appropriate in our modern day, now that any individual can pay to have their account verified.

In a unique study that took place when COVID-19 was the main international concern, author Muneera Muftah found her way to conducting a research paper regarding the Impacts of Social Media on Learning the English Language During the COVID-19 Pandemic. In her methodology, she included 166 undergraduate students, to whom she sent a questionnaire to gather the data. The results were positive, as she had noticed an enhancement in students' writing style, lexical variation, listening, and others. However, one cannot really rely on such findings, not when high school, middle school, and preliminary school students are learning English. That is, if one is trying to find more accurate results on whether social media platforms really affect language learning, one should at least include a sample of almost every language learner in society.

We also looked for articles that tackled a similar topic online to find a website by Meredith Kreisa that was named Fluentu where she suggested five platforms that could help in language learning. She claimed that the five platforms, italki, speaky, HiNative, Lingualia, and UniLang could grant access to native speakers around the world to help with the language learning experience. These platforms may actually connect learners with native speakers; however, one must think about credibility before taking a course on one of these platforms. Not to mention, the sessions are most likely one-on-one, meaning that there could be a lack of censorship, monitoring, and authenticity aspects. In addition, these platforms require paid subscriptions in order to have access to them, which may limit the learning experience for some learners.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Data Design:

In this research, a quantitative approach was adopted for the study. A design using descriptive analysis was used to analyze the collected data to achieve the goal of the research. We were considering using a dual approach (quantitative/qualitative). However, due to the decline of the participants for the intensive time the interview would take, the shortage of time, and upcoming exams on our end, we have decided to utilize only a quantitative approach.

3.2 Participants:

The participants of the research were a total of 42 students; they were all Kuwait University English majoring students from both the College of Arts and the College of Education. Furthermore, they were colleagues from past courses, as they gave us the consent to be part of our study. The initial goal was to accumulate more than 100 participants for the study. However, the outcome ended up being far less than we had expected.

3.3 Instrument:

A survey via Google Forms was designed as a tool for data collection; the survey was composed of twelve organized questions with one single page. Using multiple choice questions, the first part of the page was dedicated to the students' general information regarding their age, which college they were from, gender, GPA, and the credits they have passed so far. The second part of the page, on the other hand, was devoted to asking about the impact itself. Also, we asked the participants how many hours they spend on social media on a daily basis. Another question was which social media platform they have been using the most, their opinion on whether they believe that social media affects language learning or not, and whether this effect is positive or negative. Lastly, we asked them whether they felt confident in their language skills after using social media for learning purposes.

3.4 Data Collection:

The survey link was sent through various English language majoring students' WhatsApp groups at Kuwait University, and it reached approximately 100 individuals. They were selected randomly and, with their permission, have been asked to take part in the survey. However, only a total of 42 students participated in the survey within a week. During

the time we sent the survey link, the students were engaging with their midterms; this may have been the major reason for the low participation rate for the survey.

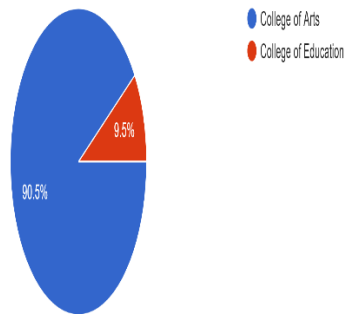
3.5 Data Analysis:

After collecting the responses from our participants, the data were analyzed with the use of graphs and charts. Also, descriptive statistics were applied to summarize and analyze the variables related to the impact of social media. The reason why we have chosen to take the participants' responses and turn them into graphs, charts, and numbers is to help us understand them better. Noticing the way people use social media might help us see to what extent it affects language learning more clearly.

4. Findings:

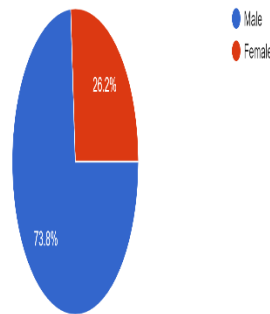
2. Which English teaching college are you from?

42 responses



3. What is your gender?

42 responses



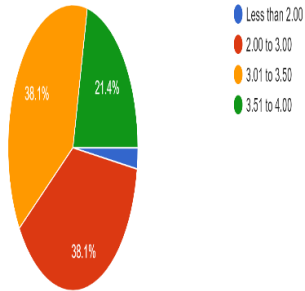
English teaching college	Arts	Education
Number of participants	38 (90.5%)	4 (9.5%)
Gender	Male	Female
Number of participants	31 (73.8%)	11 (26.2%)

Table 4-1 information regarding the participants' gender and college of study.

Among our forty-two participants, four (9.5%) students were from the College of Education, whereas the other 38 (90.5%) were from the College of Arts. Also, the participants were a total of thirty-one male students (73.8%) and eleven (26.2%) female students.

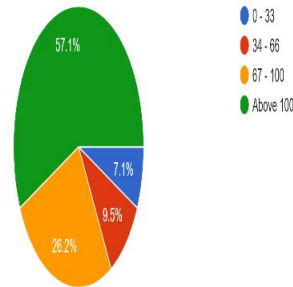
4. What is your GPA?

42 responses



5. How many credits have you passed?

42 responses



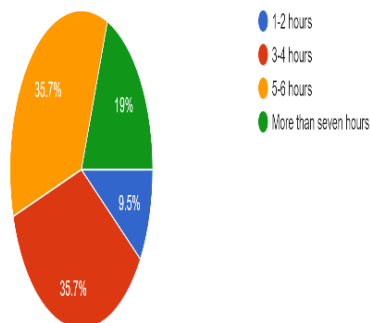
Passed units	0-33	34-66	67-100	Above 100
Num. of participants	3 (7.1%)	4 (9.5%)	11 (26.2%)	24 (57.1%)
GPA	2.00 or less	2.00 to 3.00	3.00 to 3.50	3.50 4.00
Num. of participants	1 (2.4%)	16 (38.1%)	16 (38.1%)	9 (24.1%)

Table 4-2 shows the participants' GPA on the first row and the number of credits passed they have passed on the second row.

Most of the participants in the research appear to be in their senior year since more than half (57.1%) have passed 100 units. Moreover, eleven (26.2%) appeared to be within the third year, four (9.5%) were in the second year, and 3 (7.1%) were within the first based on the credits they had passed. Furthermore, we analyzed that most of the participants (76.2%) had a GPA between 2.00 and 3.50, one participant (2.4%) had a GPA lower than 2.00, and nine participants (21.4%) had a high GPA that varied from 3.51 to 4.00 GPA.

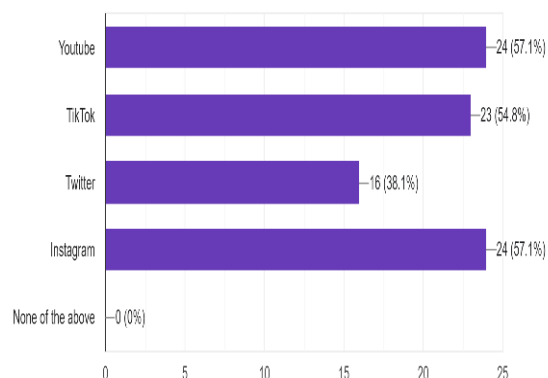
6. On a daily basis, much time do you spend on social media ?

42 responses



7. Which of the following platforms do you use the most ? (you can choose more than one answer)

42 responses



Time spent on social media	1 - 2 hours	3 - 4 hours	5 - 6 hours	7+ hours
----------------------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	----------

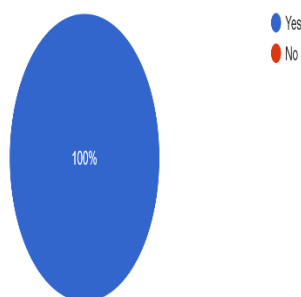
No. of participants	4 (9.5%)	15 (35.75%)	15 (35.75%)	8 (19%)
Most used Platform	YouTube	TikTok	X (Twitter)	Instagram
No. of participants	24 (57.1%)	23 (54.8%)	16 (38.1%)	24 (57.1%)

Table 4-3 shows the average time spent on social media on a daily basis, whereas the bar charts illustrate the most used social media platforms.

Regarding time spent on social media, 4 (9.5%) participants spent 1-2 hours, 15 (35.75%) participants spent 3-4 hours, another 15 spent 5-6 hours, and 8 (19%) spent roughly more than 7 hours on social media every day. Also, we can see from the bar charts that 24 of our participants (24%) have equal use for YouTube and Instagram. In addition, TikTok appeared to be used by 23 (54.8%) participants, and X (formerly known as Twitter) seemed to be the least-used platform, with a number of 16 (38.1%) participants.

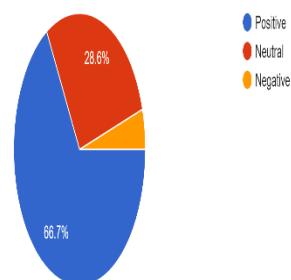
8. Do you believe that social media affects language learning?

42 responses



11. Would you consider the effect positive or negative ?

42 responses



Does social media affect language learning (yes/no)?	Yes	No
Number of participants	42 (100%)	None (0%)

Table 4-4 shows the number of participants who believe that social media affects language learning.

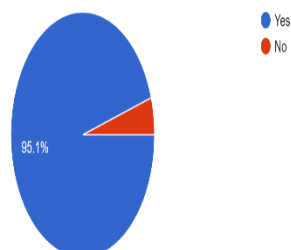
Opinion on the effect (positive/negative/neutral)	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Number of Participants	28 (66.7%)	2 (4.8%)	12 (28.5%)

Table 4-5: Positive, negative, or neutral effect?

We have found that all our participants, 42 (100%), agreed that social media affects language learning; the only variable is whether they find the effect positive, negative, or neutral. 28 (66.7%) participants believed the effect to be positive, 2 participants (4.8%) found the effect to be negative, and 12 (28.5%) saw it as neutral.

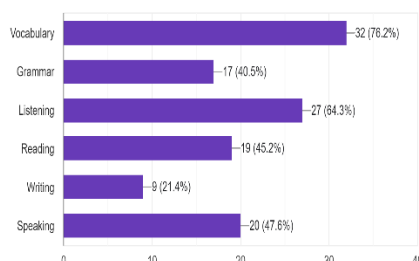
12. Do you feel more confident in your language skills after using social media for learning purposes?

41 responses



10. Which of your language skills have improved the most due to social media? (You can choose more than one answer)

42 responses



Confident after social media	Yes	No
No. of participants	40 (95.1%)	2 (4.9%)

Table 4-6 Shows whether there is confidence in language skills gained from social media exposure.

In the collected data, 40 people (95.1%) have felt more confident in their language skills because of social media. In contrast, only two people (4.9%) did not feel a boost in their confidence from the use of social media. This shows that most of our participants gained a sense of confidence in their language abilities through their experience on social media.

Improved language skill	Vocabulary	Grammar	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking
No. of participants	32 (76.2%)	17 (40.53%)	27 (64.3%)	19 (45.2%)	9 (21.4%)	20 (47.6%)

Table 4-7 shows the most improved language skills from the use of social media.

We asked our participants to select which language skill has improved the most due to the exposure to social media. With the option of selecting multiple skills, vocabulary saw the biggest improvement, with 32 participants (76.2%) agreeing. The listening skills also improved for 27 people (64.3%). On the other hand, grammar (40.53%), reading (45.2%), writing (21.4%), and speaking (47.6%) showed the least improvements.

5. Discussion:

Seeing how social media tackles language learning in our research shows a number of interesting notes. All individuals have been using social media and spend a high amount of time on it; YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram are the most used platforms for them. Each of these platforms has certain features that help language learning in a different way. For example, YouTube is famous for its large number of videos, which can play a part in improving listening and lexical competence. Moreover, TikTok's brief and short videos can help in developing comprehension. Instagram mainly presents pictures that contain animate or inanimate objects and their names, which can enrich vocabulary for learners. Exploring how different types of social media platforms affect language learning can help us know which platform is most useful for improving a certain skill.

The year of study, as well as the GPA calculation within the table in the results section, were necessary to inspect and include in our research. That is to show that not only the younger generation finds that their language learning journey is being modified by social media platforms, but also the older generation. As for their GPA calculation, it was to see whether the effect of social media was positive or negative, being that a higher GPA may indicate a positive effect and vice versa.

When it comes to learning languages, we can see all the participants agree that social media has a significant effect on language learning. Still, most believe that social media helps them to become better learners; a few numbers of our participants believe that it has a negative impact, and some feel that social media has a neutral impact. The views of our participants may come from different experiences. Those who see social media as a good tool may connect to helpful content, whereas negative views may relate to their prolonged exposure to social media, which may lead to a decline in their GPAs, which could be due to their confusion with the use of informal and formal words in their academic writing. Lastly, neutral views may link to both positive and negative.

What is interesting is that the vast majority of the participants feel quite confident since their language skills have improved because of the effect of social media. Also, among the language skills, most participants see that vocabulary and listening skills have improved the most; some of them believe they have improved in their reading and speaking skills, but only a few have seen an improvement in their writing and grammar. After noticing the skill improvements, it would be worthwhile to know why both writing skills and grammar are at the lowest progress. The identification of their slow progress enables us to discover alternative solutions which match the effectiveness of listening and vocabulary development.

To sum up, social media functions as an effective tool for language learning because it enables students to enhance their lexical competence and listening abilities. The approach lacks effectiveness for specific language components including writing and grammar so learners should choose alternative methods to enhance these skills.

6. Conclusion:

Ultimately, we hope that these findings will help better emphasize the fact that social media platforms do indeed affect language learning. To further sum up the literature review's key findings, we mentioned EFL teachers' behavior towards language learning through social media, the concept of digitalizing the language learning experience, the impacts of weblogs on language learning, verified accounts' reliability, the shift that the learning experience underwent during a pandemic, and the variety of language learning platforms suggested by the website listed. We believe that the significance of our research is to offer concrete evidence regarding the issue of whether or not language learners should count social media platforms as decent learning destinations. Upon reading through our research paper, the reader should have the answer to our research question based on our discussions and key findings. Unlike other research papers that have focused on social media in general, our research has concentrated specifically on social media and language learning. It was conducted on Kuwait University's students, and thereby, this study cannot be generalized to all students.

References:

- Basoz T. (2016). Pre-service EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards Language Learning through Social Media. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 430–438.
- Carrier, M., & Damerow, R. & Bailey, K. (2017). *Digital Language Learning and Teaching*. Routledge.
- Kreisa, M. (2023, September 15th). Language Learning on Social Media: 5 Platforms Built Just For Learning. Fluentu. [Language Learning on Social Media: 5 Platforms Built Just for Learners | FluentU Language Learning](https://www.fluentu.com/blog/language-learning-on-social-media/)
- Muftah, M. (2022). Impact of social media on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Emerald Insight*, Vol. ahead-of-print(Issue No. ahead-of-print).
- Reinhardt, J. (2018). Social Media in Second and foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Blogs, wikis, and social networking. *Language Teaching*, 52, 1, 1–39.
- Sitorous, N. & Azir, I. (2021). Enhancing students' Reading and Listening Skills by Using Social Media Language Learning (SMLL) Approach through Feature on Instagram Verified Accounts. *Ethical Lingua*. 8(2).

"أثر منصات الوسائط الاجتماعية على تعلم اللغة: دراسة حالة لطلاب تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة الكويت"

إعداد الباحثين:

أ. خالد جامع العازمي

مدرس لغة إنجليزية – باحث في علم اللغة

بكالوريوس في علم اللغة – جامعة الكويت

أ. خالد طالب العبيد

مدرس لغة إنجليزية – باحث في علم اللغة

بكالوريوس في علم اللغة – جامعة الكويت

ملخص:

أصبحت منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أساسية في هاتف كل شخص. تعمل هذه المنصات على تزويدنا بأحدث الأخبار بينما تسلينا وتعلمنا معلومات جديدة لم نكن على دراية بها. ومع ذلك، تأتي هذه المنصات بتكلفة كبيرة؛ حيث تؤثر على اللغات في جميع أنحاء العالم. في هذه الورقة، قمنا بدراسة هذه الظاهرة في اللغة الإنجليزية بين طلبة تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية من كلية التربية وكلية الآداب. تم جمع البيانات من 42 مشاركاً، من طلاب ذكور وإناث. تم جمع البيانات عبر استبانة مصمم على الإنترنت. شمل الاستبانة أسئلة مثل: كم من الوقت يقضونه على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، وما إذا كانت وسائل الإعلام تؤثر على اللغة، وما إذا كان التأثير مفيداً. أظهرت النتائج أن جميع المشاركين اتفقوا على وجود تأثير يؤثر على اللغات. علاوة على ذلك، اعتقد المشاركون أن مفرداتهم تأثرت بشدة بوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. كما أظهرت نتائجنا أن يوتيوب كانت المنصة الأكثر تأثيراً والتي كان لها أكبر تأثير على مفردات المشاركين.