

Impact of social media on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic

Learning
English
language

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Abstract

Purpose – This research shows how social media has affected learning at present during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has become the largest and most convenient area of communication. In the current scenario, it seems that social networking sites not only had a profound impact on our social structure and intra-social interaction, but also affected education in general and learning English language in particular. It has been proven that these various social media platforms have created a realm of digital environment in today's new-age learning. Social media platforms are social networking sites through which people interact and communicate with each other easily and conveniently. Undoubtedly and unquestionably, social networking has been proven to be a global phenomenon that has caused a vast paradigm shift in the world of Learning and education during the current pandemic. Therefore, the present study aims to reach the extent of the impact of the various social media platforms on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic from the students' point of view.

Design/methodology/approach – The study was conducted at the undergraduate level for English language learners. The sample comprised 166 undergraduate students at Najran University. A survey questionnaire was administered to find out the impact of various social media platforms and social networking sites on learning English language in the academic year of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to highlight possible suggestions for improving future virtual language learning.

Findings – The findings of the study contributed to the area of online learning of English language during the COVID-19 pandemic. Final results confirmed that the utilization of social media has been significantly perceived to have positively impacted learning English language in terms of writing style, reading skills, listening and lexical variation, communication skills and grammar usage.

Practical implications – The findings of the study can serve as fundamental indicators to implement prompt pedagogical reformations, for which a number of pedagogical implications can be proposed. Another equally important pedagogical implication is to design and provide professional development and training sessions to both students and educators on the ultimate utilization of social media as instructional technologies in the context of English language teaching and learning.

Originality/value – This research provides insights in developing policies to assist with the integration and utilization of social media platforms as instructional technologies in the context of English language teaching and learning and how institutions can respond to the advent of advancing technology, especially during and after the COVID-19 era. A model to improve online English language learning process is recommended as a guideline for all educators offering online learning.

Keywords Social media in education, English language learning, L2 learning style, COVID-19 pandemic

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Social media is constantly changing the way people live in different aspects. Nowadays, various social media platforms are affecting communication, information delivery,



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knowledge exchange, commerce, education and all different aspects of life (Rieger and Christoph, 2018; Bhatti *et al.*, 2019; Amin *et al.*, 2020). With the vast spread of various social networking sites on the Internet, researchers from different fields have started to direct their attention and shed more light on the importance and impact of social media on different aspects of life including social as well as educational aspects.

To pursue their constant efforts and to look at those aspects as an area of concentration that needs to be investigated further, Language learning professionals and instructors specifically have attempted to investigate the effect of social media and social networking sites in second language acquisition and second/foreign language learning. In one of the researches, it was found out that the group who got learning, commitment and inspiration through social media sites has indicated higher results in an English proficiency test compared to the other one that got training on an eye-to-eye premise (Wamba and Carter, 2016).

Up-to-date data available on Statista (2020) have indicated that there are about 3.96 billion social media users across the world. Social media networking sites range from microblogs such as Twitter and sites and applications such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and Snapchat. Yet, these different platforms have influenced the individuals' social, educational and personal aspects of life.

In the area of education, a significant number of research studies have been conducted to estimate their effectiveness in different disciplines. Linguistically speaking, the influx of linguistic output on social media represents numerous opportunities for language learners to process language and obtain input, as young users of social media networks spend more than half of their days using and interacting on these networking sites using their language and communication skills (Al Jahromi, 2020).

Consequently, online chats and discussions, whether oral or written, have replaced conventional face-to-face dialogues, leading to substantial changes in the users' daily language and language skills. The extensive use of smartphones, laptops, and tablets along with prosperous social media applications has perhaps availed rich linguistic input at the fingertips of their users and has contributed in the production of comprehensible L2 output (Al Jahromi, 2020; Pikhart and Botezat, 2021).

Regardless of the inevitable impact of social media in individuals' lives everywhere, and taking into account that the students of today are insubordinate to old-fashioned instructing methods and learning techniques, there are not many studies that explore their effects in learning and education particularly in the English language context. Therefore, the present study aims to identify the impact of social media on learning English during the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this aim, the present work specifically seeks to address the following research questions.

In what way did social media platforms impact the learning of English Language during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In order to answer this question, the following sub-question was developed to direct the scope of the study: How do Saudi university students perceive the impacts of using social media platforms on their learning of English language during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to (1) Positive and negative effect? (2) Number of social media platforms used? (3) Motives for using Social Media platforms? (4) Frequency and time spent in using Social Media? (5) Educational or communicative tools? (6) The Rate of using social media on Learning English Language? (7) Aspects of language Skills improved via social media? and (8) Social media effects on students' studies?

2. Literature review

The COVID-19 pandemic led to shocking and unpredicted experiences for Saudi university students. The precautionary measures followed during the pandemic have had a wide impact

on the students' social and educational life aspects (Alghamdi, 2021). Recently, we have seen a radical change in favor of distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemics, therefore, it could be worthwhile to investigate the impact of social media in the foreign language context as they have been used much more now (Pikhart and Botezat, 2021). The current COVID-19 situation makes us aware that the impact of social media will increase due to social distancing.

Social media platforms are omnipresent and the research into the use of them in foreign language learning has become immense (Yurdagül and Öz, 2018; Artyushina and Sheypak, 2018; Ayers, 2020). Today, with 2.95 billion social network users worldwide, social media usage is increasingly attractive and accessible, especially among the younger generation (Pikhart and Botezat, 2021). Social network sites have become the main means of communicating and a way to maintain a social life (Li and Croucher, 2020).

Social Media refers to websites, blogs, chats, computer programs, i.e. any content-based form of e-communication that enables users to share information and expose ideas. While social networking sites for language learning represent the corpus of those social media channels and service, mainly designed for specific purposes, devoted to foreign language learning. Furthermore, it is also proposed that English might now be the first truly global language, being the dominant or official language in over 60 countries. The English language as stated is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world (Akinwamide, 2012).

Roelofse (2013) argues that exposure to new literacies found in new technologies definitely impacts the way in which second/foreign language learners perceive the world. Likewise, the amount of contact with these social utilities certainly influences literacy practices by learners. New technologies do not merely alter the way people live, but it influences the way they think. Moreover, Davies (2012, p. 21) in Roelofse (2013) argues that "texts of the new technologies have mutated into complex hybrid systems that have made new demands on reading and writing, viewing, social exchange, and communication".

Facebook is no exception in that the use of this social network site requires a multimodal approach of embedding and combining words and written texts from many sites. In the same sense, WhatsApp is perceived by the researchers as having the same contaminating effect on learners' writing skills. In this regard, social media is a "dialogue" and "means [of] engaging with people" (Coons, 2012, p. 44).

The body of literature reveals a significant number of studies in the area of the impact of social media on the linguistic output of non-native speakers of English. Chomsky (2014) has stated that our language is constantly, inevitably, and naturally changing, transforming and becoming more adaptive to its users due to the changes in our contemporaries. More particularly, the initiation and rapid development of social media networking sites as eminent activity has created a distinguishing language system necessary for practical communication (Attila, 2017).

Baldwin (2012) suggests that social media can be both a friend and a foe for natural language processing. While he considers social media a cause for "spelling inconsistencies, the free-form adoption of new terms, and regular violations of English grammar norms," he refers to the advantage of "lexical normalization" in the same linguistic setting. In this regard, Thurairaj *et al.* (2015) examined whether social media networks were "making or marring academic English" and whether infrequent online code-switching and inconsistent spelling affect non-native learners' language learning process. Their findings revealed that the discourse used on social media had not influenced the learners' English language proficiency due to their higher awareness of the deviations between their online informal meta-language and their formal academic language.

Furthermore, simplified online interactions help speakers produce meaningful exchanges whilst using the target language in useful manners (Mutum and Wang, 2010). Another advantage of social media is the reduced communication anxiety. People often exchange and

share information and construct new personal and linguistic identities on social media because of being at ease with revealing their preferred identities behind monitors as a result of the anonymity expedited in such situations (Blattner and Fiori, 2011). Lowered anxiety in online settings coined with heightened motivation and self-confidence have been shown to provide L2 learners with anxiety-free zones that enable them to produce language spontaneously and creatively (Al Jahrami, 2019).

Studies conducted by Slim and Hafedh (2019), Thuraiaraj *et al.* (2015) have revealed that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter enhance students' overall language learning process. In connection with particular language skills, a significant number of studies have found that the use of social media enhances learners' grammatical complexity and vocabulary acquisition and learning (Al Jahrami, 2019; Attila, 2017; Mills, 2011; Stevenson and Liu, 2010). Mason and Rennie (2008) notice that vocabulary acquisition on social media has become a phenomenon due to the employment of techniques such as coining and compounding to produce words such as Face + book, Snap + chat and Blog + sphere.

Another employed technique is sound imitation resulting in words such as Twitter which comes from the verb tweet, and Boo which reflects the sound of contempt. Similarly, social media have affected the forms of different words. For instance, the proper names of social media applications and websites have become verbs and adjectives (e.g. Google it, I'll Instagram this). Another technique is the change in the negative form of the verb like and the noun friend to become unlike and unfriend. Additionally, the semantic connotations of many words have undergone change on social media (e.g. wall on Facebook, spam, steam, etc.).

As to the writing skill, the fact that social media exchanges are more written than spoken in what is referred to as "text speak". Attila (2017) argues that the use of logograms, abbreviations, acronyms and paralinguistic features (e.g. b4 = before, Gr8 = great) has made writing easier, faster and more liberated from the normal constraints of traditional writing. However, spelling can accordingly be negatively affected when frequently using logograms and abbreviations (e.g. 2 day = today).

Longitudinal studies have also indicated a significant improvement of oral proficiency with particular reference to speaking and listening (Chen, 2013; Lin *et al.*, 2016). Lin *et al.*, however, have asserted caution that learners would need carefully planned instructional guidance and tailored activities in order to be able to use social media efficiently to enhance their language learning process.

Despite the positive effects of social media on language proficiency and language learning, many researchers are more concerned with the harmful effects these networking sites might have on L2 learners' interlanguage with particular reference to inconsistent spelling and violated grammatical rules (Baldwin, 2012). Lin *et al.* (2016, p. 143) claim that "language use on the Internet is often criticized as being less correct and less coherent than other forms of language use, and as having disrupted adjacency." Effects of social media on Pakistani students' L2 learning process have also been reported in a study conducted by Tariq *et al.* (2012). Similarly, Akram and Albalawi (2016) found Facebook to be a negative learning distraction for their Saudi students.

Amidst these incompatible claims, the present study aims to confirm the possible impact of social media platforms on learning English language during the Covid-19 Pandemic from the perspectives of undergraduate students in the Saudi context. The precautionary measures followed during the pandemic have led the Saudi government to abundantly utilize the World Wide Web and all its facets for different socioeconomic and educational purposes. It is not surprising, then, that social media platforms and social networking sites are heavily used by L2 learners. Consequently, the purpose of the current study is to evaluate the possible gains of the broad use of social media platforms on the learning of the English language during the pandemic and to view the perceptions of the learners in regard to these possible gains, which is a gap in the literature that the current study aims to fill.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the current study is to find out the impact of various social media platforms and social networking sites on learning English language in the academic year of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to highlight possible suggestions for improving future virtual language learning.

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted at the undergraduate level for English language learners in the College of Languages and Translation–Najran University, KSA. It was performed after completing a full year of online education and teaching classes and during the final examinations in the second semester of 2020. The sample comprised 166 students: 66 male and 100 female students in all bachelor's degrees with English language majors. Students in the English department form the highest number of students with their ages ranging from below 20 years–23 years old. The participants are native speakers of Arabic. Their interaction outside the classroom is low. That's to say, most of them had very little interaction with native English speakers outside the classroom and in most cases no contact at all.

Most of the students do not have any prior experience with online learning. Requirement courses including Arabic, Religious Culture and other general courses were conducted online on the main campus before the recent crisis, and it was optional. However, the examinations were conducted on campus. The following [Figure 1](#) displays the percentage of the participants.

3.2 Research instrument

The method chosen for this study is quantitative; a more in-depth method was designed to estimate the impact of various social media platforms on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quantitative method was used to conduct more detailed studies of a smaller area using closed-questionnaires. This survey-based questionnaire consists of 10 multiple choice questions, which covered the study objectives. The questionnaire was administered to 166 English language learners. It consists of different parts; the first part is looking at students' demographic information, the second part includes a set of multiple-choice questions about learners' experiences with social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, . . . etc.), and their effect on learning English during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Social Media platforms they use and have access to, the motives for using social media during the pandemic, the Frequently used Social Media platforms, the extent to which social media is used for educational and communication purposes, The rate of social media use on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic, time spent on social media platforms, language skills improved via social media

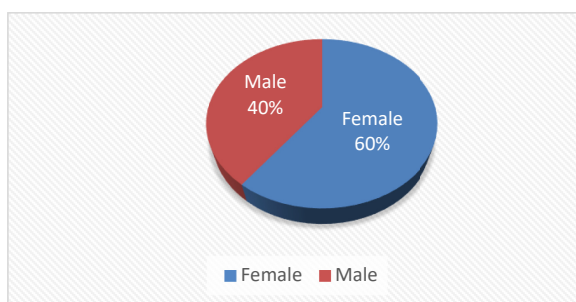


Figure 1.
Participants
distribution

use and finally the effect of social networking sites Students' Studies. The questionnaire was checked for validity and reliability fulfillment.

3.3 Data analysis procedures

In this study, a quantitative approach to data collection has been employed. A descriptive analysis method was applied to analyze the research by counting the answers for every question to get the percentages. A questionnaire was the tool that was used in order to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of ten questions. Thick description and reflective thinking are the two most important elements that have been used while analyzing and interpreting the data. The data were carefully read for possible categories relevant to the purpose of the study. Then, these reported statements were categorized based on the purpose to be achieved.

4. Results and interpretation

The results of the present study were structured based on the varying types and length of questions applied in the close-ended questionnaire. In the scheduled questionnaire, the researchers set certain questions to gain a wide range of answers and opinions regarding the impact of social media platforms on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2 displays the results of the students who think that social media can affect learning English positively during the pandemic. The results indicate that the majority of the participants use social media as a language learning tool. Almost 86.75% of the students believe that social media can affect learning English positively, while 13.25% of them think that it has a negative effect on the language learning process.

As to the number of social media platforms that students have access to and can straightforwardly use, Figure 3 indicates that 25.91% of the total respondents use only one social networking site, 22.29% use two sites and 37.35% of them use three social networking sites. Yet, only 14.45% of the students use more than three social media platforms.

Concerning the reasons and the motives for using social media during the pandemic, Figure 4 below shows that 60.84% of the participants use social networking sites for the purpose of studying. Likewise, the results indicate that 19.27% of them use social networking sites for playing games, while the students who use these sites for making friends and chatting with friends are 28.31 and 31.74% respectively. The remaining 24.09% reported that they use social networking sites for other purposes.

Figure 5 below shows the most frequently used social media platforms. The data indicate that the most popular online networking site was WhatsApp, with the highest percentage of

1-Do you think that social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Google+,...etc :can affect learning English positively during the COVID-19 pandemic?

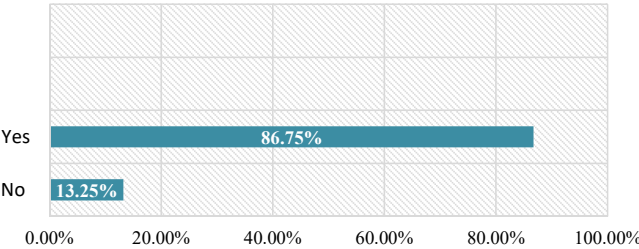


Figure 2.
The effect of social media platforms on learning English

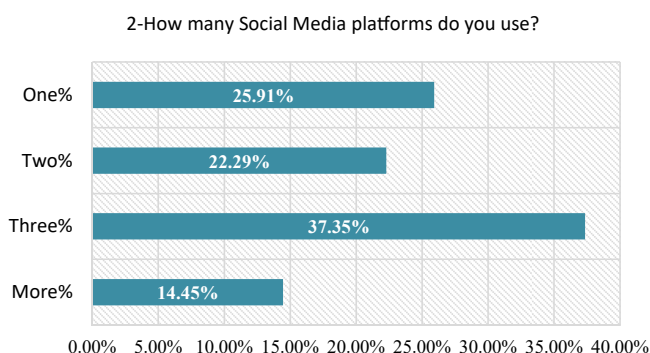


Figure 3.
The use of social media

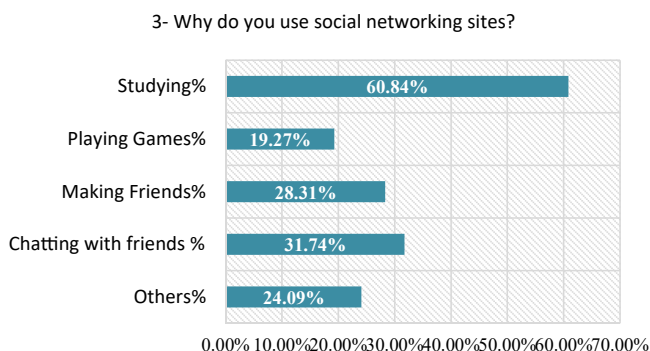


Figure 4.
Motives for using
social media platforms

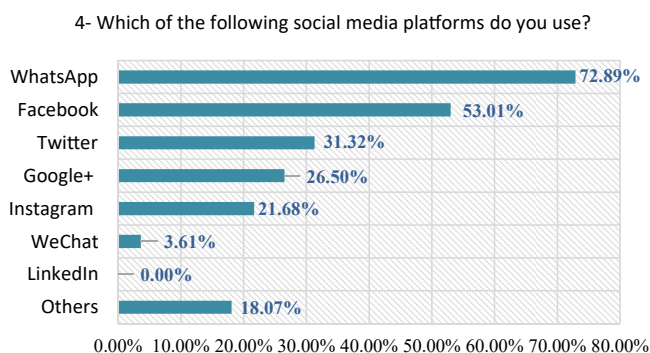


Figure 5.
Frequently used social
media platforms

72.89% of all university students stating that they use it on a typical day. Facebook is the second mostly-used platform, with 53.01% of the students using it daily. It is also reported that only 31.32% use Twitter, another 26.50 and 21.68% use Google+ and Instagram respectively. The least used social media platform was WeChat, with 3.61% of students using it daily. Moreover, 18.07% of the students prefer to use different other social media platforms and no one of them uses LinkedIn.

Similarly, [Figure 6](#) below presents results related to the use of social media as a communication tool during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The results point out that 81.92% of the students prefer to use social media platforms for learning purposes. They believe that social media provide the facility to communicate among the students during the pandemic, i.e. to communicate with their teachers and classmates. On the other hand, 18.07% did not use social media for educational purposes, as they believe that social networking platforms did not support their studies. They believe that these platforms are supposed to make them feel more connected.

[Figure 7](#) reflects the students’ perception towards using social media as an educational tool and as a support for their studies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results point out that the majority of the students 84.94% are interested in using social media as an educational tool as it helps them to get more useful information and to interact with learning groups and other educational systems that make the learning process more convenient. However, only a few students, 15.06% mention that social media platforms did not support their own studies.

Results reported prove that the majority of the students are interested in using social media as an educational tool and that almost 51.20 and 18.08% of the students use social media to learn English language at higher rates “good” and “excellent” respectively. Moreover, it is also reported that only 21.09% of the students rate the use of social media on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic as “average”, another 7.23% rate it as “poor” and only 2.40% rate using social media in learning English as “very poor” (see [Figure 8](#)).

Figure 6.
Use of social media
platforms as a
communication tool

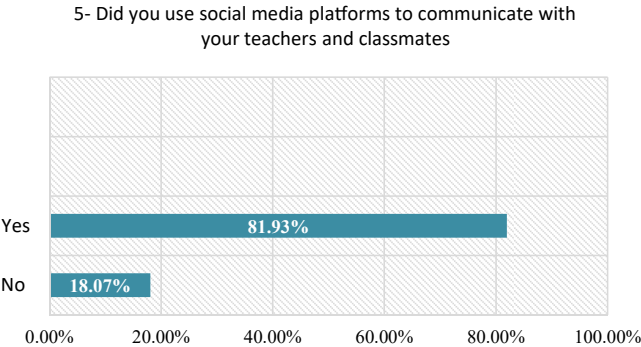
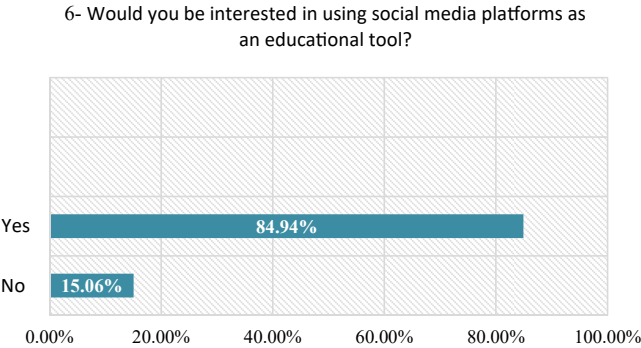


Figure 7.
Using social media
platforms as an
educational tool



Concerning how much time do students actively spend on social networking sites, Figure 9 shows that 6.02% of the students do not spend a moment on social networking sites during a typical day, almost 21.08% of them spend 10–30 min a day. Most of the students 31.93% spend about one to two hours on social networking sites during their typical day, while 27.71% spend from 2 to 3 h of their time. It is also reported that 4.22% of the participants spend between 4 and 5 h on social networking sites, and only 9.04% of the participants spend more than 5 h on social networking sites daily.

Interactive social media channels to language learning enable students to develop communication and language skills. Regarding the different aspects of language skills the students improve via social media platforms, the results presented in Figure 10 below showed that 40.96% of the students improved their writing skill, 39.15% improved their reading skill, the third skill is listening and vocabulary with a ratio of 31.92%. In addition, their speaking skill was improved with a percentage of 31.32% and only 22.28% of learners improved their grammar.

The last question discusses the effect of social networking sites on students' studies. The results specified that social networking sites have seriously affected students' studies at a ratio of 24.09%, whereas 31.93% of the participants believe that social networking sites have slightly affected their performance and their language achievement.

On the other hand, 18.07% of the learners agreed that social networking sites have no impact on their studies. Moreover, 14.46% of them believed that such sites are seriously helping, while only 11.45% of the total number of students admitted that social networking sites can slightly help them on their studies. The extent to which social networking sites are affecting the learners' studies is presented in Figure 11 above.

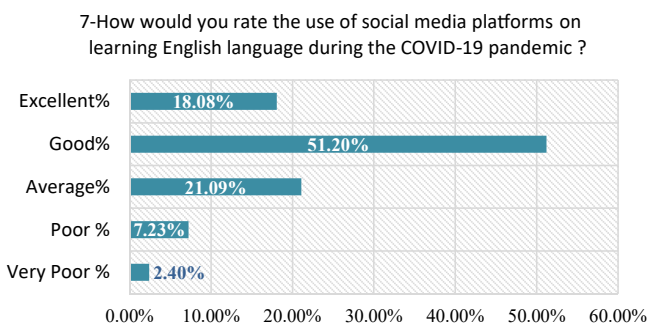
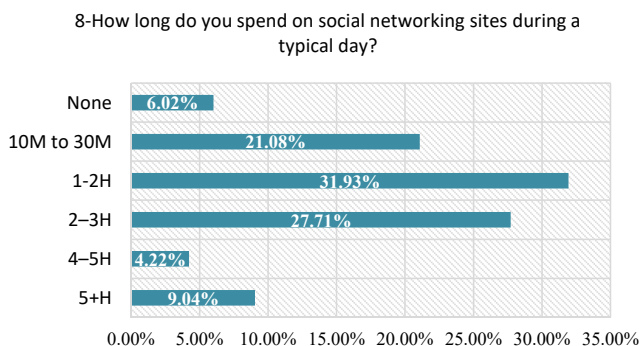


Figure 8.
The rate of social media use on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic



Note(s): H = Hour, M = Minute

Figure 9.
Time spent on social media platforms

Figure 10.
Language skills
improved via social
media use

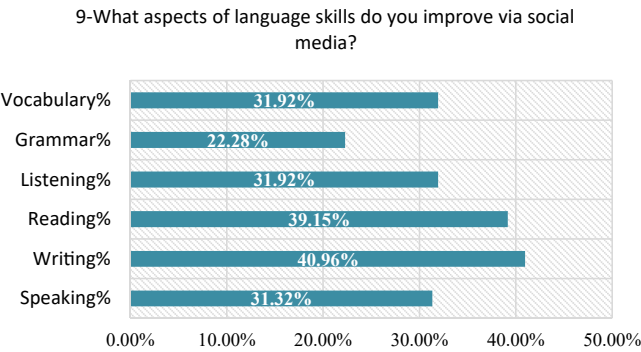
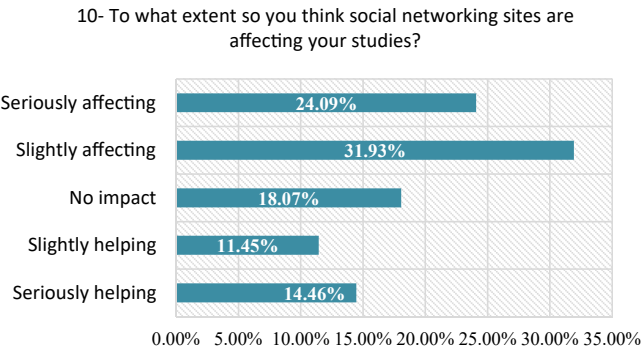


Figure 11.
Social networking sites
effects on
students' studies



5. Discussion and conclusion

The present work attempts to investigate the most important impacts of using social media for learning English language during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The challenges of the digital world are omnipresent, and different options have to be considered so that educators are able to use them to assist the learners.

Social media is no exception, as it can provide many opportunities in the foreign language learning process. The technological revolution today, like never before, can be obviously reflected in the L2 learners' wide experience, the independence in exploring digital resources and documents that represent powerful support in enhancing oral, written, listening and reading competence. In this sense, L2 learners do no longer depend directly and entirely on the teacher to improve their skills but on other resources such as Internet and technology (Al Jahromi, 2020; Pikhart and Botezat, 2021; Slim and Hafedh, 2019; Thurairaj *et al.*, 2015).

In other words, social media along with social networking sites have become part of the learners' as well as educators' daily routines, in terms of communication, language experience, practice and exercise, news feed and knowledge sharing. The digital world has seemingly become their way of life inside and outside class settings and that is the reason behind examining their impact on L2 learners.

With the help of social media platforms, L2 learners can learn, read, write, advertise or communicate in a more efficient way. The main questions addressed referred to the impact of social media on learning English language during the Covid-19 pandemic and usage and the degree of facilitation and assistance of foreign language learning by social media, and the findings revealed that students were very positive and felt motivated by social media.

L2 learners do not have to rely on classes or handbooks to get their daily amount of knowledge. It can all be achieved from the social networking sites as indicated in question 2. At least, the learners can use three different types of social media platforms and formats to reach their educational goals and in some cases four types. The learners can follow or get information about their students from any part of the world. For instance, Twitter allows a user to get information which is more interactive in nature with the help of embed photo and video. Smartphones are an example of a handheld device through which learners can communicate and exchange information by using any social media platform which is allowed.

The world is getting closer every day and everyone, including L2 learners, needs to be connected. It is moving strongly and more towards “social media”. The information comes to users rather than users have to make effort to get the information. In terms of personal relationships too, social networking is connecting people. Social networking can also be very crucial in educational help. Education support groups can be created from which learners can get information as indicated in question 3 where 60.84% of L2 learners indicated that they use social media platforms for studying and for educational purposes while the rest of them use them for other purposes including chatting with friends, making friends, playing games and for other different purposes.

The kind of interaction a user wants from these social networks depends on the type of information the user is interested in. With reference to question 4, using different platforms depends on users' purposes, for the participants in the study aiming at enhancing proficiency in English language, WhatsApp can be used for chatting or sending many kinds of text-information, assignments or even creating groups for different courses. Facebook was not appealing due to its informal style, while the participants aiming at improving communicating skills found it useful for social and L2 identity construction. Google + can be used for academic purposes, it can greatly enhance the way people learn. Twitter and Instagram have also become popular and integral part of everyday communication. Other platforms such as YouTube, learners can watch videos to understand a topic better or look at photos which might help them to visualize a concept, after all, “a picture speaks a thousand words”. [Brick \(2011\)](#) reported it as the main positive aspect of using social networking sites, adding to it the real-time feedback. The immediate response and real-time conversation are also achieved through live sessions on Instagram or Facebook dedicated pages for L2 learners, such as the Instagram stories that offer quizzes focusing on idioms, phrasal verbs or other lexical related items or lives where learners are invited to write down words that they would like to learn the pronunciation.

The fact that technology including social media and the different networking sites should be part of the educational process is not questionable anymore, the way it finds its scope within it and how and to which extent should educators, as well as learners, use it, had better be delivered by a multidisciplinary methodological framework. Among the numerous potential advantages to using social media, L2 learners have perceived that it can be used as a good communication and educational tool (See Question 5 and 6). The opportunities provided by this medium are immense and many L2 learners are making use of this medium to better their practices. Social networks, unlike the common media, do not have a pattern as to how much information has to be conveyed and where to draw the line. Therefore, learners can obtain much information and better performance. Similar findings were found by [Sithirak \(2012\)](#), who acknowledged the attitudinal impact of social media on language from an educational perspective. Similarly, [Mutum and Wang \(2010\)](#) and [Blattner and Fiori \(2011\)](#) have declared that social media provides a smoother, more direct communication tool.

In other words, by maximizing the benefits of social networks, whether it be their role in delivering educational outcomes, or facilitating supportive relationships, identity formation, or a sense of belonging and resiliency, the direct contacts that occur in discussion groups, exercises, conversations, videos and other widgets on linguistic social networks cover

various language registers. With the expanding demand of various social media platforms, the growing numbers of users in different parts of the world, it is fair to assume that it impacts second language acquisition, at least by the permanent flow of visuals and text that we access on a daily basis. In the broad context of globalization, all visuals improve not only linguistic skills, but they also build an international culture (Pikhart and Botezat, 2021).

The current Covid-19 pandemic has posed some challenges, and like any emergency event, it has some inherent risks. Through increased social media literacy as an educational tool—ensuring all students can utilize these media to develop the skills and to critically understand, analyze and create content – these challenges can be overcome and risks mitigated in a way that ensures the many benefits for both learners and educators. The findings shown in questions 7 and 8 corresponded with the aforementioned ones related to L2 learners' views on the particular effects of social media on the enhancement of these language learning skills. Results have asserted that approximately 69.28% of the frequent users of social media platforms for learning purposes have rated them as excellent and good mediums to enhance language skills, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is in line with Li (2017) study. Li argued that students' comfort with online class design, structure, level of interaction between students and faculty, the quality and amount of class content and overall experience with online class delivery impact the overall learning experience and determine the ultimate success or failure of online mode of education. Haque and Al-Salem (2019) have also found that social media is a good platform for students as it provides opportunities for learners to study foreign languages.

The intensity of using English-language social media content is positively and significantly related to students' perceptions of their ability to speak English including reading, writing, listening and speaking aspects. Hence, social media is needed to be learning media for learning English language as a Foreign Language (Anwas *et al.*, 2020). Online socialization according to Slim and Hafedh (2019) seems to have positively affected the production of an acknowledged linguistic repertoire independent of age or gender.

With reference to the last question, results show positive perceptions of the respondents of the effects of using social media on their L2 writing (see Figure 11). In addition to improved English language learning, these effects included enhanced writing style, quality and quantity. Al Jahromi (2019) and Li (2017) have similarly found that online interactions on social media networks and online facets significantly develop L2 learners' writing accuracy and complexity. These findings could also be related in this regard to the influence of the projection of authorial and social presence and identity practices facilitated on social media due to the increased linguistic input and output on these platforms in comparison to the less-advantageous classroom settings (Chen, 2013).

In addition, L2 learners who acknowledged the positive impact of social media on their English learning reported that their L2 Reading skills are also enhanced. This is due to the improvement of the L2 learners' vocabulary as well as listening skills. This is similar to the findings obtained by Mutum and Wang (2010), Thurairaj *et al.* (2015) and Slim and Hafedh (2019). However, online communication of students raises another important issue discussed by the great majority of authors, that of the nonacademic purposes of social media usage of students. Given that the majority of the students were using written-based social media networks such as WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram, speaking, grammar and pronunciation skills were perceived as the least enhanced. However, Al Jahrami (2019) has claimed that language accuracy is concerned, extensive reading and writing online can enhance L2 learners' grammatical competence (see also Attila, 2017; Mills, 2011; Stevenson and Liu, 2010).

In sum, the research study investigated the impact of social media platforms on learning English language during the Covid-19 pandemic from undergraduate Saudi users' perspectives. The aforementioned findings suggest that Saudi L2 learners find social media platforms effective in enhancing their L2 proficiency, with particular reference to how

positively they influence L2 writing, vocabulary learning and communication skills. They also reported that they use various social media platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, Google+, Twitter, etc., and that they find social media as both educational and communicative tools. Based on these findings, it is safe to conclude that social media can be appreciably helpful in enhancing English language learning.

6. Research implications and recommendations

The findings of the study can serve as fundamental indicators to implement prompt pedagogical reformations, for which a number of pedagogical implications can be proposed. Social media can be implemented to make teaching more student-centered through the facilitation of interactive collaboration and exchange of information, resulting in an enhancement of syntactic and lexical complexity.

L2 teachers in particular need to use social media to aid their teaching strategies and amplify their material with interactive and innovative activities on social media such as online debates and group discussions. Another equally important pedagogical implication is to design and provide professional development and training sessions, workshops, seminars to both students and educators on the ultimate utilization of social media as instructional technologies in the context of English language teaching and learning.

Social media networks can be employed in this regard to provide authentic extensive reading tasks that can facilitate intentional and incidental vocabulary learning and writing complexity. Furthermore, awareness campaigns can be conducted by e-learning educationists to recognize the benefits of online learning and teaching and validate the acceptability of social media learning, mobile learning and mixed teaching via learning management systems.

For implementing the positive findings of different studies and for educational technology to be used effectively, educators must be ready for a paradigm shift: from traditional

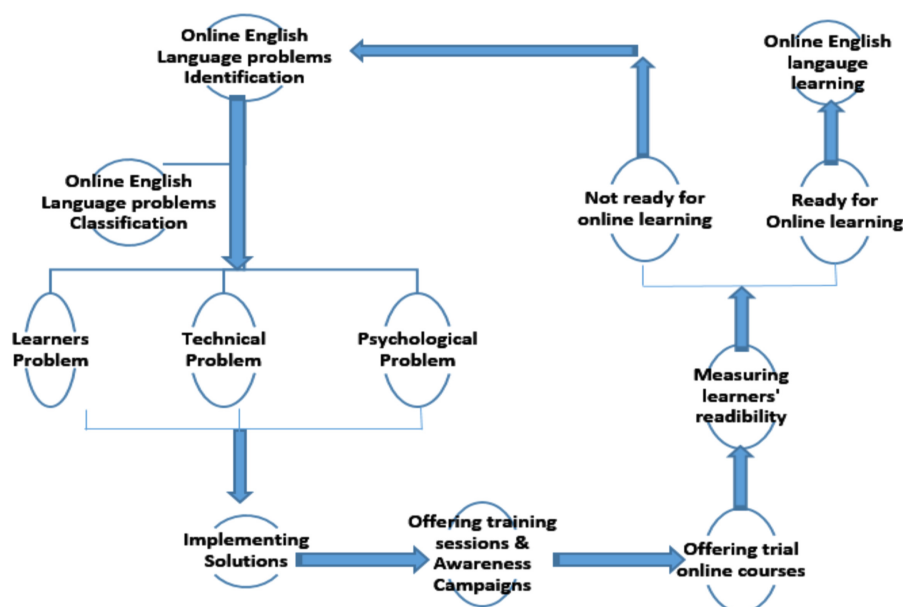


Figure 12.
Procedure to improve
online English
language learning
process

education to pedagogy enhanced by the new technology. Further research is needed into the current realism and prospects of the utilization of digital media in connection with the wellbeing of the learners, increased levels of depression and anxiety, and some other negative psychological, social and economic aspects of the use of social media. This paper is the starting point and should be an impetus for further research into the topic of utilization of social media, especially during and after the COVID-19 era.

To offer online learning, English language undergraduate students require assistance. The following model is recommended as a guideline for all educators offering online learning. The proposed model is demonstrated in [Figure 12](#).

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