

Analysis of EFL Learners' Language Proficiency Development Across Different Social Media Platforms

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Abstract—The shift of educational activities to the online environment due to the outbreak of Covid-19 has generated contentions regarding the effectiveness of social media in developing language proficiency. Also, determining appropriate social media platforms becomes essential. This study, therefore, aims to examine the differences in EFL learners' development of different language skills across various social media platforms. The study adopted an online descriptive survey in which a self-developed questionnaire was used as a data-collection tool. The respondents comprise a randomly selected sample of 80 students from the first and second levels of the English undergraduate program at a Jordanian university. The data were analyzed using a non-parametric method consisting of Chi-square test and frequency statistics. According to the findings, EFL learners tend to develop reading skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube respectively. Additionally, significant differences exist in language proficiency development across social media platforms. This study is expected to provide useful information to educators in choosing the most appropriate platforms to supplement their instructional efforts based on learners' needs.

Index Terms—educational platforms, language acquisition, social learning theory, social media

I. INTRODUCTION

The educational system currently witnesses tremendous changes due to the proliferation of new media and the recent Covid-19 outbreak, including the shift of teaching and learning to the online environment, particularly on social media platforms (Almaiah et al., 2020). Social media represents a group of new forms of online media (Azmi et al., 2021; Mayfield, 2008). Social media platforms are, precisely, defined by Herring (2013) as connected platforms using websites that bring together user-produced content and instant social interaction, examples of these platforms include WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, as well as microblogging sites such as Twitter and video sharing platforms such as YouTube. In essence, social media platforms enable individuals to create and share content as well as to connect and collaborate (Azmi et al., 2021; Lombard, 2014).

In particular, the use of social media platforms for the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (synchronous or asynchronous) has become an important alternative to the face-to-face approach (Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021; Hassan et al., 2021a). This situation resulted in a sudden change in the field of education without any prior preparation for the technical potentials of teachers and students. The issue has generated contentions regarding the effectiveness of social media in developing language proficiency, particularly among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020). Also, the level of penetration and use of social media varies across countries and generations. It is, therefore, crucial to determine social media platforms that suit students' needs and capabilities at different levels of education across various contexts.

Despite the benefits of social media in developing language skills (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020; Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021), determining appropriate social media platforms becomes necessary. In the Jordanian context, most previous studies focused on specific platforms such as Facebook or Telegram per se (Al Momani, 2020; Al-Tamimi et al., 2018). Therefore, based on a theoretical facet of the Social Learning theory, this study aims to achieve two major objectives. First, to examine the differences in EFL learners' development of different language skills across various social media platforms at a Jordanian university. Second, to determine whether significant differences exist in the EFL learners' development of language skills across social media platforms. The Social Learning theory presumes that

learning tends to be effective through observation and interaction with others (Bandura, 1971). It is hoped that this study could help to ascertain the most appropriate social media platforms that can be used to develop particular language skills based on students' needs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Use of Social Media Platforms in the EFL Context*

According to Xodabande (2017), the field of language learning has transformed significantly with the development of new technologies, which provide language learners and instructors with instruments and prospects that were never imaginable in the past. In this regard, several studies have investigated the effectiveness of social media platforms in the EFL context (e.g. Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020; Al-Jarrah et al., 2019; Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021; Al Momani, 2020; Al-Tamimi et al., 2018; Xodabande, 2017). These studies revealed that social media platforms are highly effective in the EFL teaching and learning process due to their various advantages. For instance, some previous studies found that EFL learners can specifically develop writing skills through social media (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020; Al-Tamimi et al., 2018). Also, some studies proved that the use of social media can help EFL learners to develop reading skills (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020; Al Momani, 2020).

Additionally, the use of social media has been proven to enhance the learners' language skills in terms of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, lexical choices, and motivation as well as creative and critical thinking (Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021; Ariantini et al., 2021) which lead to a meaningful and coherent discourse (Saed et al., 2021). Some of the studies focus on specific social media platforms (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020; Al Momani, 2020; Xodabande, 2017). For example, Xodabande (2017) examined the effectiveness of Telegram in teaching English language pronunciation. According to the findings, the use of social media could be highly effective in language teaching, particularly in the EFL context. Likewise, Al Momani (2020) proved the effectiveness of Telegram in improving EFL learners' reading skills, particularly due to its vital features such as audio-visual capability. Also, Albashtawi and Al Bataineh (2020) investigated the effect of using Google Classroom on EFL learners' reading and writing performance. According to the study, Google Classroom is highly effective in improving EFL learners' reading and writing performance.

Moreover, a review suggests that the most frequently used social media networks in the EFL context include "YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter" due to their various benefits (Ariantini et al., 2021, p. 91). According to the review, these benefits "reflect a robust change in social media treatment as a positive aspect of the students' English learning" (Ariantini et al., 2021, p. 105). According to Al-Khalidi and Khouni (2021), the use of social media as learning platforms tend to expose EFL students to the real authentic language. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2021b) found that social media platforms can help learners of English to achieve "collaborative learning, independent learning, flexible learning, as well as competence in using technology for learning purposes" (p. 296). As mentioned by Ariantini et al. (2021), EFL learners use social media to share and search for language-related information or material, post assignments, and videos as well as perform group activities, including online discussions to practice language skills.

Furthermore, the use of social media is proven to be a "promising, creative, and feasible innovative approach for both students and instructors by providing a pleasant learning experience as well as an attractive teaching environment" (p. 385). Besides, Albashtawi and Al Bataineh (2020) found that EFL learners have positive attitudes toward using social media for language learning. Also, research shows that through social media platforms, learners can easily access learning materials and achieve reciprocal interaction with both their fellow students and instructors (Abdul Rahman et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2021a). In this regard, Al-Khalidi and Khouni (2021) argued that social media technologies have become an integral part of education. As stated by Hassan et al. (2021b), "there has been an increased reliance on Web-based learning, particularly in higher learning institutions, due to the outbreak of Covid-19" (p. 296).

Although social media platforms offer tremendous benefits, some educators are still hesitant to fully integrate the platforms into the EFL environment. Al-Khalidi and Khouni (2021) argued that although social media platforms "have the potential of improving EFL students' skills and competencies, teachers in some EFL contexts are still more conservative in embedding social media in the classroom" (p. 47). A study conducted by Saed et al. (2021) showed that the deterring factors include the lack of proper training for teachers who cannot cope with the modern advances in digital education and assessment technologies. Additionally, Hassan et al. (2021b) found that English language learners "face challenges related to technical problems and lack of prior technological competence" (p. 303).

Furthermore, the previous studies used an experimental approach (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020; Al Momani, 2020; Al-Tamimi et al., 2018; Xodabande, 2017), a survey approach (Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021), and interviews (Hassan et al., 2021b). The studies also focus on certain geographical locations, including Malaysia (Hassan et al., 2021a), Iran (Xodabande, 2017), and Oman (Al-Khalidi & Khouni, 2021). Also, studies that focused particularly on the Jordanian FEL context examined specific social media platforms (e.g. Facebook or Telegram per se) using the experimental approach (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020; Al Momani, 2020; Al-Tamimi et al., 2018). Additionally, there is limited or lack of research on the distribution of language skills across different social media platforms, particularly in the Jordanian context. This study, therefore, focuses on EFL learners' development of language proficiency across various social media platforms.

B. Theoretical Viewpoint

This study adopts the Social Learning theory developed by Bandura in 1971. The theory has recently gained adhesion from the widespread usage of social media (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016). The advent of social media has provided a unique opportunity for researchers to apply certain theoretical facets of Bandura's Social Learning theory to examine learners' engagement in the social media context (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016; Deaton, 2015). The theory postulates that learning is highly effective when students are allowed to observe and interact with others (Bandura, 1971). According to Brooks (2009), learners must strive to develop skills in both the traditional learning environment and through new technology. While discussing the application of Social Learning theory in the technology-assisted learning context, Deaton (2015) pointed out that by surveying students' educational needs, instructors can decide which social media platforms can best serve the learning purpose of a particular educational context. Against this supposition, we argue that determining the most appropriate social media platforms to develop particular language skills based on students' needs can help achieve positive learning outcomes in the EFL context.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey approach to examine EFL learners' development of language proficiency across various social media platforms at Mu'tah University, Jordan. A descriptive survey applies to large population samples and takes place in realistic contexts as well as enables researchers to make general inferences (Allen et al., 2009). According to Wimmer and Diminick (2003), the survey approach allows researchers to efficiently categorize variables and can be used to measure people's usage of media.

A. Data Collection

The respondents comprise a randomly selected sample of 80 students from the first and second levels of the English undergraduate program at Mu'tah University. An online survey was conducted in which a self-developed questionnaire was administered to the respondents electronically. The questionnaire consists of items related to the respondents' demographic information and language proficiency entailing such skills as reading, listening, and writing as well as speaking in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency with options for social media platforms consisting of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Others. To ensure validity, the questionnaire items were verified by experts in technology education at Mu'tah University. The respondents were asked to provide a self-assessment of their language proficiency development through social media by choosing the platform they commonly use against each language skill.

B. Data Analysis

Chi-square test and frequency statistics were used in this study to examine the differences in EFL learners' development of language skills and social media platforms. In effect, the analysis was applied to investigate language proficiency development with regard to language skills vs social media usage. The Chi-square analysis is employed in the present investigation due to its robustness in examining categorical data. It should be noted that the chi-square analysis is a non-parametric test that works with classified and counted datasets. Accordingly, the analysis does not involve parametric or continuous data, and therefore, the dataset used in this investigation is in the form of frequency.

IV. FINDINGS

A total of 80 questionnaires were analyzed in this study. The purpose was to determine the development of language proficiency amongst Jordanian EFL learners across different social media platforms. The demographic information shows that 55.8% of the respondents were first-level students, whereas 44.2% were second-level students. As mentioned earlier, the study considers such language skills as reading, listening, and writing as well as speaking in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency. Whereas, the social media platforms consist of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Others. The findings are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 as follows.

TABLE 1
LANGUAGE SKILLS TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Language Proficiency	Social Media Platforms						Total F(%)
	Facebook F(%)	Twitter F(%)	Instagram F(%)	WhatsApp F(%)	YouTube F(%)	Others F(%)	
Improve reading skills	18(22.5)	2(2.50)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	20(25.0)
Improve listening skills	2(2.50)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(1.30)	5(6.30)	0(0.00)	8(10.0)
Improve writing skills	1(1.30)	8(10.0)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	9(11.3)
Improve vocabulary	0(0.00)	14(17.5)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	14(17.5)
Improve pronunciation	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(2.50)	1(1.30)	12(15.0)	0(0.00)	15(18.8)
Improve Grammar	5(6.30)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(2.50)	7(8.80)
Improve Fluency	2(2.50)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	5(6.30)	0(0.00)	7(8.80)
Total F(%)	28(34.8)	24(30.0)	2(2.50)	2(2.50)	22(27.6)	2(2.50)	80(100.0)

$$[\chi^2(30) = 183.763; p = 0.000]$$

The first objective of this study was to examine the differences in EFL learners' development of different language skills across various social media platforms. Table 1 projects the distribution of language skills with regard to the types of social media. It could be observed that the respondents are more likely to acquire reading skills (25.0%), pronunciation (18.8%), and vocabulary (17.5%) through social media platforms as compared with writing skills (11.3%), listening skills (10.0%), grammar (8.80%), and fluency (8.80%). Conversely, the respondents are more likely to use Facebook (34.8%), YouTube (27.6%), and Twitter (30.0%) to develop language proficiency compared with Instagram, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. Additionally, the respondents mostly use Facebook (22.5%) and Twitter (2.50%) to develop reading skills. Whereas, YouTube is mostly used by the respondents to improve their pronunciation ability. The second objective of this study was to determine whether significant differences exist in EFL learners' development of language skills across social media platforms. As shown in Table 1, there are significant differences in the types of social media used by the respondents as demonstrated by the Chi-square analysis ($p < 0.001$).

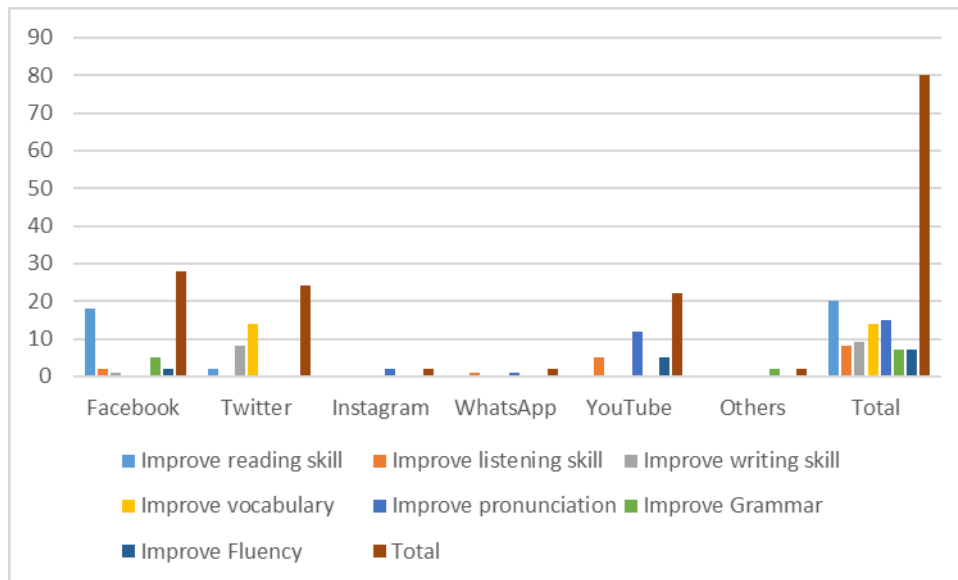


Figure 1: Language Skills and Social Media Platforms

Figure 1 displays the graphical illustration of the language skills and types of social media used by the respondents. It can be observed from the figure that specific language skills such as reading, pronunciation, vocabulary, writing, and listening are most frequently developed by the respondents through the use of social media platforms. Listening, grammar, and fluency are the least developed language skills. On the other hand, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are mostly used by the respondents to develop language skills. Whereas, Instagram and WhatsApp are the least used social media platforms. Nevertheless, Facebook represents the most widely used social media platform by Jordanian EFL learners to develop reading skills, grammar, and listening skills. Also, apparent differences can be observed in language skills and different types of social media.

V. DISCUSSION

Through a descriptive survey, this study has obtained significant outcomes regarding EFL learners' development of language proficiency across social media platforms. First, the findings reported in this study demonstrated that Jordanian EFL learners tend to develop reading skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary through social media platforms. This outcome concurs with some previous studies with a particular focus on the development of specific language skills using Facebook (Al-Tamimi et al., 2018) and Telegram (Al Momani, 2020). Second, the findings showed that Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter represent the most commonly used platforms by EFL learners. Likewise, the review conducted by Ariantini et al. (2021) reported similar outcomes. Also, the current study has demonstrated the learners' ability to use social media platforms independently. This point suggests that, as learning tools, social media networks complement teachers' efforts as learners tend to develop skills in both the traditional learning environment and through new technology (Brooks, 2009).

Additionally, the students' use of social media to develop language skills stems from the teachers' instructional ability to provide students with the preparatory knowledge to acquire language skills. According to Deaton (2015), "true learning requires external stimuli and bits of information to be encoded into the student's memory, able to be retrieved and applied to external life situations" (p. 2). The usage of social media platforms to learn English indicates the level of students' ability to utilize technology for academic purposes. The current findings also indicate the seriousness of Mu'tah University toward ensuring the continuity of education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Jordan. Similarly, the findings concur with the presumption of Bandura's Social Learning theory that learning becomes more effective when

students are allowed to observe and interact with others (Bandura, 1971). Al-Jarrah et al. (2019) also revealed that EFL learners “tended to read and observe discussions in English” (p. 30).

Moreover, this study revealed significant differences in language proficiency development across social media platforms. This outcome offers an opportunity for educators to choose the most appropriate platforms that can supplement their instructional efforts, which supports Deaton’s (2015) inference from the Social Learning theory that surveying students’ educational needs can help teachers decide which social media platforms can best serve the purpose of a particular learning context. Thus, instructors and administrators need to be flexible with their student’s needs in regard to social media informal learning. This flexibility requires teachers to have the capability to motivate students to achieve the designed learning objectives. Also, determining the differences in learners’ development of various language skills might be useful to educators’ seeking ways to develop learners’ language competence.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined EFL learners’ development of language proficiency across various social media platforms, particularly in the Jordanian context. According to the findings, EFL learners tend to develop reading skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary through social media platforms. Whereas, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter represent the most commonly used platforms by EFL learners to develop language skills. Additionally, significant differences exist in language proficiency development across social media platforms, which can help educators to choose the most appropriate platforms to supplement their instructional efforts. These findings also demonstrate the learners’ ability to develop language skills independently through social media platforms. This outcome agrees with the assumption of Social Learning theory that learning tends to be effective when students observe and interact with others.

Learning through social media represents one of the most prominent modern trends in education. In particular, this form of learning witnesses an increased use of social media as a means of language acquisition. This is because social media platforms constitute a conducive environment to display any educational content and form an interactive forum for learners. Also, there is a need for the combined efforts of students, instructors, and institutions to fully exploit the benefits of social media in enhancing language skills. This study could help the management of higher learning institutions and instructors to ascertain the most appropriate social media platforms for particular language skills based on students’ needs. However, this descriptive study is limited to EFL learners at a particular higher institution. Thus, further research may adopt a mixed-method approach and consider a larger sample from different institutions.

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