

Analyzing the Emergence of Social Media as a Sustainable Tool for Learning English in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract—The study aims to investigate Saudi ESL learners' attitudes toward utilizing social media as a sustainable tool of learning and their experience of learning and teaching with social media integration in ESL classrooms. In addition, it seeks to understand if the learners differ in their attitudes toward social media due to the differences in their demographic profiles. Using a simple random sampling method, 288 students were selected from the total population comprising different levels of the graduate program at Business College, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. Data were collected through a questionnaire and quantitative analysis was applied. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were employed to address the research questions. The study demonstrated that Saudi ESL learners differ in their perspectives on social media based on their parents' profession but not based on the gender and education of parents. The study suggests that promoting social media and its integration in ESL classrooms can play a vital role in academic empowerment, enhancement of language proficiency, and self-regulated learning of Saudi ESL learners who are eager to enter the ever-expanding job market in the kingdom.

Index Terms—social media integration, a sustainable tool of learning, enhancement of language proficiency, academic empowerment, self-regulated learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Even before the corona pandemic and subsequent lockdown altered the ways and the social realities of human existence, online and social media-assisted learning had become an indispensable tool for sustainable education (Abbas et al., 2019). Social media usage in pre-pandemic times was visible in all aspects of human existence. However, in the post-pandemic socially altered conditions and restricted physical engagement, social networking sites emerged as potential and sustainable learning tools and teaching in Saudi Arabia. Life during the pandemic threw up multiple challenges and social media became a mainstay to overcome these challenges during this prolonged crisis. The university campuses and academic spaces saw unprecedented social media usage for all academic activities. As a result, teachers and students started to communicate, socialize, interact, discuss, and debate their courses and learning activities in almost all educational institutions across the globe. The learners feel free to express themselves and can participate in the discussions by sharing their ideas, comments, images, and opinions (Terzi et al., 2019).

Like everywhere else, Saudi Arabia also witnessed this sudden migration from the physical mode of existence to the online and social media-mediated mode of existence. As 70% of Saudi Arabia's population comprises youth who are tech-savvy, this migration to social media and online interaction and engagement was easy and swift. The university campuses and educational institutions equipped with modern technical devices found this transition easy. The learning and teaching activity saw no problems and continued without encountering any administrative issues throughout the pandemic. Even today, when normalcy is restored, and physical learning is the order of the day; social media has a crucial function in Saudi ESL classrooms and academic spaces. Many studies have been carried out to look at how social media can be used to teach and learn in the Saudi Arabian context. However, this research study seeks to examine the emergence of social media during and post-pandemic times as an alternative sustainable tool unshackling students from restrictions of times and places and offering them freedom and choices to learn at their pace and convenience.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The pandemic-induced conditions accelerated the adoption of social media into already transforming academic spaces and educational campuses. The socially changed realities during the pandemic and its aftermath have exposed the academic world to the immense potential of how to use social media to learn and educate the tech-savvy new generation. For example, Černá and Borkovcová (2020) discuss the viability of social media and allied applications in general, as well as the importance of YouTube as a supportive tool for university education. Using a mixed method, the researchers, with the design of mental knowledge model, carried out an exploratory study analyzing social media sustainability in three different groups. The study concludes by revealing the undeniable advantages of social media in an educational setting and its emergence as an irreplaceable means of learning. Arguing about the increasing use of mobile-related devices, Seraj et al. (2021) carried out an empirical investigation on the utilization of mobile phones in journals indexed by Web of Science and Scopus from 2010 to 2020. The results indicate that effective use of mobile requires feasibility related to facilitation and an effective learning environment. It also points out certain limitations such as issues with charging and a small screen. Cavus et al. (2021) shed light on how, despite the existence of multiple learning management devices, this rapid migration to online learning posed multiple challenges and affected the efficacy and sustainability of academic activities. Reviewing the articles that acknowledged the feasibility of these means of e-learning, the study brings to the fore e-learning challenges and makes an illustration about the efficient use of these social networking sites for institutions, teachers, and students. Sobaih et al. (2020) examine how teachers and students use social networking sites and other forms of social media to support formal academic institutions. Using online questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews with both instructors and students, the study discovered that learners' social media usage has resulted in an effective application of social media for instructional purposes. The findings suggest that social media can facilitate social learning as an alternative platform for promoting online learning. It has ramifications for policymakers and scholars.

Manu et al. (2021) explain how most of the studies talked about social media usage in classrooms and the way they overlooked learners' views about its use for enhancing their skills. The study asked the respondents, pursuing banking and finance courses, about their social media usage, perceptions, and preferences. The findings reveal learners' openness to social media usage for education and provide much pedagogical and theoretical significance. The study implies that strategic use of social media in an ESL classroom can influence students' views of the university and teachers. Hosen et al. (2021) discuss how social media has become a useful instrument for learning and teaching due to the knowledge exchange, creation of new knowledge, exchange of documents, and virtual communication that it facilitates. The researchers, with the help of connectivism and social cognitive theory, developed a model that theorizes the impact of social media and individual motivation on learning performance and the exchange of knowledge among students pursuing education. The results imply that social media functions for individual reputations can be leveraged to promote learning improvement and knowledge sharing. John and Yunus (2021) examine social media integration in the learning and instruction of language skills and elaborate on how the all-pervasive nature of social media has made it an important tool during the pandemic and its aftermath in the wake of the world-changing perspectives toward learning and teaching of English language. To ensure an analysis of the selected articles, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 was adopted, 36 peer-reviewed articles were retrieved from the ERIC and Google Scholar databases, and the findings revealed gains in speaking ability, an increase in confidence when speaking, and a significant decrease in anxiety. The study implies that educators and teachers can utilize social media platform to enable learners.

Ng and Lo (2023) throw light on how the pandemic outbreak in 2020 pushed traditional teaching and learning into online learning mode and elaborate on how the adoption of technology-based pedagogies because of progress in electronic communication made these drastic changes a possible practice. Seventy-six students, three assistants, and three teachers were taken and a mixed method approach with dual cycle action research was used. The second cycle's gamified flipped classroom strategy had a considerable impact on students' engagement and academic performance. Barrot (2021) investigates the literature on the use of social media as a place to learn and teach a language from the years 2008 to 2019. 396 documents from over 1600 Scopus database journals were analyzed through bibliometric analysis. The findings revealed a remarkable surge in social media usage over 12 years and predicted even increased reliance on online platforms in the years to come. A qualitative analysis of these findings showed social media's benefits and positive impact as a setting for language learning. It also revealed that public online forums like Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, and Twitter, draw more attention from language learners. The study has ramifications for how social media adoption can act as an effective language-learning instrument. Pikhart and Botezat (2021) talk about social media's effects on language learning from a psycholinguistic perspective. Using the papers from the Scopus database in the years 2010-2020, the study describes the present research findings, analyzes their importance, and compares the data to develop the psycholinguistics of second language learning. In contrast to the positive findings of the previous studies, it necessitates a further examination and asserts that social media usage will get streamlined owing to the pandemic's outbreak.

III. METHOD

A. Research Problem

Almost 70% of Saudi Arabia's population comprises youth below thirty years of age. That is why social media occupies a central place in their lives for communication and idea sharing. Even before the pandemic changed the social realities of human existence, social media usage was on a larger scale in the kingdom. Many pre-pandemic studies have dealt with the utilization of social media for educational and academic purposes. However, this study specifically deals with how post-pandemic social media usage is transforming learning ways and empowering Saudi ESL learners, particularly at a time when normalcy has restored physical and face-to-face modes of learning. It shows how social media-assisted learning has emerged as an alternative to traditional ways of learning and academic engagement in peer groups, classrooms, and university campuses in the Saudi Arabian system of higher education.

B. Research Statement

The study aims to investigate Saudi ESL learners' attitudes toward social media, their opinion and experience with its usage for learning and teaching English, and to understand if the learners differ in their attitudes toward social media usage due to variances in their demographic profile.

C. Research Design

The study chose to employ a quantitative approach as it is based on collecting and analyzing data. Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommend a quantitative approach for a study that is based on numerical data and uses statistics for results and outcomes. A questionnaire, comprising partially designed and partially adopted items, was used to gather data from the respondents who were advised to show their opinion on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree).

D. Participants' Description

The participants are students studying at different levels in the graduate program of Business College, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, KSA. They have been studying English as one of the subjects for the last 8 to 10 years. They are in their early twenties and native speakers of Arabic. They study English as a second language. Out of the population, 288 participants were chosen using a method of random sampling. Of those selected, 202 were male; 80 were female, and 6 students chose not to disclose their gender.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Description	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	202	70.10%
	Female	80	27.80%
	Other	6	2.10%
The profession of learners' parents	Government Job	216	75%
	Private Job	25	8.7%
	Self-Employment	19	6.6%
	No employment	28	9.7%
Education of learners' parents	Postgraduate & Above	75	26%
	Pre-University to Graduation	147	51%
	Middle School+	43	14.9%
	No Education	23	8%

E. Data Collection Instrument

After a thorough review of the relevant available literature, a questionnaire was designed with the adoption of items from other studies (Noori et al., 2022). The questionnaire contains two parts. The first part deals with the demographic profile of the participants. The second part contains 24 items. The first 9 items deal with students' attitudes toward social media; the next 11 items deal with Saudi ESL learners' experience of learning with social media and the last 4 items deal with Saudi learners' experience of using social media for teaching in ESL classrooms.

F. Data Collection Procedure

A questionnaire was used to collect the responses from the participants. A link to the Google form containing the items/questions was sent to the group of teachers and students. The teachers were requested to assist the students in filling out the form and help them express their responses. A set of separate instructions was provided in all relevant sections of the questionnaire. The participants were assured of strict confidentiality and no usage of the collected data other than academic ones. Thus, the participants of the study felt free to give their responses to the items in the questionnaire.

G. Validity

As the students were poor in English, an Arabic translation of the questions in English was provided. A translation-back-translation method was used. Then the language experts of both languages verified both translation versions. To conduct a pilot study, the questionnaire was circulated and shared among the experts. The received comments and suggestions were incorporated.

H. Reliability

To examine the reliability of the items, a test was conducted, and the collected data was analyzed using SPSS. The result showed that each category of the questionnaire had an acceptable value since $\alpha = .70$ or above are acceptable levels of reliability for the items (George & Mallery, 2003).

TABLE 2
RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Saudi ESL learners' attitudes toward social media usage as a sustainable learning tool	9	.870
Saudi ESL learners' experience of learning with social media	11	.906
Saudi ESL learners' experience of teaching with social media in ESL classrooms	4	.792
Total	24	.943

I. Data Analysis and Interpretation

When the required responses were collected, the questionnaire was downloaded onto an Excel sheet. Numeric codes (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree) were assigned and the data was transported to SPSS. The data were tabulated and analyzed quantitatively. Version 25 of SPSS was used to obtain statistical analysis, descriptive statistics, and one-way ANOVA was used to get the means, frequency, and standard deviation of the collected data.

IV. RESULT AND FINDINGS

A. Saudi ESL Learners' Attitudes Toward Social Media as a Sustainable English Learning Tool

The first 9 items numbered 7 to 15 deal with students' attitudes toward social media usage as a sustainable learning tool. An overwhelming majority of the students responded positively and agreed that they considered social media as important for learning English. Table 3 shows that students agreed with the statements that sought to present social media as a sustainable and effective language-learning tool. The means of individual items as well as all items considered together (cumulative) is high. The cumulative mean is 4.11 which is considered high. However, items no. 9 and 13 present a bit different picture wherein 62.5% and 65.2% of the participants agree respectively with the statement. Viewed collectively, the mean of both individual items as well as cumulative means are high. This shows that Saudi ESL learners have a high degree of positivity toward social media as a sustainable language learning tool.

TABLE 3
TABULATING SAUDI ESL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SUSTAINABLE LANGUAGE LEARNING TOOL

Questions/Items	SA/S%	Mean
7. I see an improvement in my English proficiency since I have been using social media.	82.7%	4.2
8. I learn new English words and phrases because of my use of social media.	92%	4.39
9. Social media helps me learn English without being dependent on teachers and the formal setup of education.	62.5%	3.76
10. In today's busy world, social media gives learners the freedom to learn English at their own pace and choice.	84%	4.25
11. Learning English through social media is a pleasant experience.	83.3%	4.22
12. Social media has become an important tool for learning English in the post-pandemic world/the post-pandemic world, social media has become an essential tool for learning English.	85.1%	4.29
13. My parents are now more positive about social media and social networking sites as tools for learning English. My parents are currently more optimistic about social media and social networking sites as learning aids for English.	65.2%	3.82
14. The post-pandemic world witnesses frequent social media usage in ESL classrooms.	81.6%	4.15
15. Social media exposes learners to a variety of content and modes of learning the English language.	73.7%	3.97
Overall Mean		4.11

B. Saudi ESL Learners' Experience of Learning and Teaching With Social Media

The next 11 items numbered 16 to 26 deal with students' experience of language learning with social media. The means of the individual items as well as all items taken together (cumulative) (Table 4) show that an overwhelming majority of the students agree with the statements which present social media as an important language-learning

instrument. They agree that they massively use social media and social networking sites for learning English, improving their skills, and enhancing their proficiency. The next 4 items numbered 27 to 30 deal with students' opinions and perceptions about the use of social media for ESL teaching. The means of the individual items and cumulative means (Table 5) show that almost all students react positively to the statements that sought their responses to their experience of social media usage for ESL teaching. The mean comparison of Table 4 (demonstrating the students' social media experience for language learning) with that of Table 5 (demonstrating the students' social media experience for language teaching in ESL classrooms) shows that social media is used massively for both language learning and teaching. It indicates that both instructors and students use social media extensively for language teaching and learning as individual learners and as part of a team in an ESL classroom.

TABLE 4
TABULATING SAUDI ESL LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Questions/Items	SA/S%	Mean
16. Social media helps me know more about my syllabus and course program.	79.8%	4.07
17. Social media facilitates my access to the information I need.	90.6%	4.45
18. I learn many new language skills because of social media usage.	87.2%	4.32
19. Social media helps me stay updated regarding changes in time and lectures.	86.1%	4.32
20. I develop my writing skills due to the use of social media.	70.1%	3.95
21. As I always use social media, it helps me improve my reading skills.	83.7%	4.26
22. I have easy access to many learning resources due to the use of social media. Social media makes it easy for me to get a lot of learning tools.	80.1%	4.31
23. Social media learning gives me the freedom to learn at the time and place of my choice.	89.3%	4.45
24. While using social media, I am often engaged in my learning.	72.5%	3.99
25. Frequent use of social media improves my thinking skills.	76.3%	4.09
26. For learning and knowledge, social media is an important tool.	82.3%	4.2
Overall Mean		4.21

TABLE 5
TABULATING SAUDI ESL LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ESL TEACHING

Questions/Items	SA/S%	Mean
27. Using social media makes communicating with my course teachers easier.	85.4	4.23
28. My teachers know how to make effective use of social media in their teaching. My instructors can utilize social media effectively in the classroom.	77.8	4.08
29. Social media is an effective and important tool for higher education in colleges/universities. Social media is a useful and important tool for college and university education.	82	4.23
30. Using social media helps us save time and make the best use of it.	76.1	4.11
Overall Mean		4.16

C. ESL Learners' Gender and Attitudes Toward the Social Media

Table 6 given below demonstrates the one-way ANOVA results regarding the differences in the learners' views about social media. It shows that there is no difference of any significance in learners' attitudes toward social media usage based on their gender as the calculated F value (0.635032) is lower than the critical F value (5.192168). Hence, HO1 is accepted.

TABLE 6
ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	563.4	4	140.85	0.635032	0.659654	5.192168
Within Groups	1109	5	221.8			
Total	1672.4	9				

D. Educational Level of ESL Students' Parents and Attitudes Toward Social Media

Table 7 shows the one-way ANOVA results for ESL learners' attitudes toward social media. The results make it clear that the difference in the educational level of learners' parents does not result in students' differences toward social media as the calculated F value (2.101430811) is lower than the critical F value (3.47805). Hence, HO2 is accepted.

TABLE 7
ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	2859.067	4	714.7667	2.101430811	0.1554413	3.47805
Within Groups	3401.333	10	340.1333			
Total	6260.4	14				

E. Parents' Profession and Attitudes Toward Social Media

Table 8 given below represents the one-way ANOVA results for learners' attitudes toward social media. However, the one-way ANOVA result for this variable presents a different story. While in the earlier two variables (learners' gender and education level of their parents), no statistically significant difference was observed in the attitude of learners toward social media based on gender and parents' education level. However, the result for this variable shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of ESL learners toward social media based on the profession of learners' parents as the calculated F value (13.6296) is higher than the critical F value (3.47805). Hence, H_03 is rejected.

TABLE 8
ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	294.4	4	73.6	13.6296	0.000467	3.47805
Within Groups	54	10	5.4			
Total	348.4	14				

V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The study is primarily concerned with examining how social media became a sustainable alternative tool for the traditional system of learning during the pandemic and its aftermath. It investigated how this development empowered the students and unshackled them from the traditional barriers embedded in the traditional system of learning. It mainly investigated Saudi ESL students' perceptions of social media as a learning tool and their experiences using it to teach language in ESL classes. In addition, it also examined if the variance in the demographic profile of the language learners shapes their attitude differently toward social media as sustainable for language learning. As is clear from both the cumulative mean and all items means considered separately, ESL students in Saudi Arabia have a highly positive attitude toward using social media to study languages. This result is in line with several previous studies, including (Haque & Al Salem, 2019; Sharma, 2019; Noori et al., 2022). There is one study carried out by Hamadeh et al. (2020) which raises certain relevant pedagogical issues not about social media utility as a language learning tool but about implementation and students' engagement in language learning. However, the results of the present investigation do not support Yilmazsoy et al. (2020) whose research outcomes found that using social media particularly WhatsApp adversely affects students' learning skills, academic achievement, comprehension, and productive activity. Moreover, there are a few studies (VURAL, 2015; Hidayati, 2022; Sarkar et al., 2015) whose findings both corroborate and contrast with the findings of this current study as they throw light on the advantages as well as the disadvantages of using social media. These studies call for a controlled and guided use of social media as unguided usage ends up with little and negligible improvement in English. This analysis answers the first research question. As far as the issue of Saudi ESL learners' experience and opinion about social media usage for language learning and teaching in ESL classrooms is concerned, the means of the individual items seeking students' responses regarding social media usage for language learning is high. The cumulative mean is 4.21. Likewise, the mean of the individual items regarding students' opinions of social media usage in ESL classrooms is high. The cumulative mean is 4.16. This demonstrates that students not only utilize social media as a tool for language acquisition but also appreciate its application in ESL settings. The result of this study aligns with (Noori et al., 2022; Salih & Elsaidm, 2018; Kutubkhanah, 2017; Alshehri & Lally, 2019). All these previous studies corroborate the findings of the current study. This analysis answers the second research question.

To address the third research question (If the students differ in their attitude toward social media usage based on demographic profile), one-way ANOVA was used. The results indicated that there is no difference of any significance among the means of learners based on gender and the educational level of participants' parents as the calculated F value of both (0.635032 & 2.101430811 respectively) is smaller/lower than the F critical value (5.192168 & 3.47805 respectively). Speaking differently, since the p-value is higher than 0.05 in both cases (gender and parents' education), it implies that there is no significant difference. And it provides significant support for the null hypothesis and leads to the acceptance of the H_01 and H_02 . However, the ANOVA analysis of the third independent variable (the profession of learners' parents) demonstrated that there is a difference that may be considered statistically significant in the means of the participants based on the occupations of their parents as the calculated F value (13.6296) is higher than the critical F value (3.47805). Since the p-value (0.000467) is lower than 0.05, it shows a difference of significance in the means of the learners' responses and leads to the conclusion that the null hypothesis cannot be accepted. This analysis answers the third research question.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate how social media emerged as an empowering and sustainable tool in post-pandemic Saudi ESL classrooms. This period of restricted human movement and interaction saw an increasing social media usage for language learning in both private and academic spaces and educational institutions. The study investigated Saudi ESL learners' attitudes toward social media usage and their experience of it in ESL classrooms. In addition to that, it investigated whether the differences in the demographic profile of Saudi ESL learners affected their perspectives on the

usefulness of social media as a learning and teaching tool. The results demonstrated that Saudi ESL learners have a high degree of positivity toward English, and an overwhelming majority of ESL learners speak of good experience of learning and teaching English using social media in ESL classrooms. The study also found that there is no difference of any significance in the attitude of Saudi ESL learners toward social media based on the gender and education level of their parents. However, it was found that learners have different perspectives on social media as a sustainable learning tool based on the profession of their parents. The study suggests that educators, teachers, and policymakers should integrate social media into language teaching and encourage students to use it for language learning because it empowers learners and removes traditional learning constraints like time, place, and pace.

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