Impact of Social Media on English Language Learning Among First-Year Students at Qassim University

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Abstract

The diverse aspects and networks of social media have wielded a remarkably profound impact on both individual lives and the broader societal, economic, and political landscape of its users. Language patterns used by conversational partners on social media have been influenced significantly. This study aims to investigate how the English language learning process of non-native Saudis has been impacted by the use of social media. To investigate these effects, a quantitative methodology was employed through the distribution of an online questionnaire to selected groups of first-year students at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. Responses from 47 participants from different genders were analyzed using measures of central tendency and other statistical measures. The findings revealed that first-year Qassim University students consider social media platforms to be beneficial for improving their L2 proficiency and evaluate them to have an overall positive impact on various language learning skills. Based on these findings, it is reasonable to indicate that social media can be a significantly helpful tool in improving English language learning. These results were subjective to variables related to gender and the multimodal nature of specific aspects of social media. The study implies that employing social media networks can illustrate a more student-centered approach to language learning through the facilitation of interactive collaboration and information exchange, resulting in enhanced syntactic and lexical complexity.

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Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms have become integral to daily life. They have had an impact on the way we learn, communicate, and live. Moreover, people may use them as a key to learning and enhancing language skills, including developing English as a second language (SLA). Social media plays a significant role in modern life and broadens our horizons in communication, knowledge exchange, and other important resources. In 1994, the term "social media" was first used in a Tokyo online media environment known as Matisse. It was in these early days of the commercial internet that the first social media platforms were developed (Aichner, Grünfelder, Maurer, Jegeni 2021). Social media is an internet-based technology that consists of websites and applications that allow us to interact with others and

share information and ideas in virtual communities. Nowadays, different types of social media platforms are available. According to Yadav, M.S. (2021), some related and overlapping categories of social media are :

- Instant messengers: WhatsApp and Facebook .
- Media sharing: YouTube and Instagram.
- Microblogging: Twitter and Telegram.

According to the latest data available on Statista (2023), there are 4.59 billion social media users worldwide. In addition, globalmediainsight.com reported that 79.30% of the total population of Saudi Arabia uses social media with an average of 7 hours and 20 minutes spent on the internet daily. In 2023, WhatsApp was the most popular platform countrywide, with 22.33 million users.

The learning of the English language has become more crucial, since English is widely spoken worldwide. A review of studies by Yang and Shadiev (2020) on technology-assisted language learning from 2014 to 2019 found that English is the most common target language. Before the advent of this technology, the most common resources for language learning were analog or in-person, limiting access. However, social media networks allow for a new and interesting way of learning a foreign language (EFL) .

Because of the massive worldwide utilization of social media, researchers have turned their attention to its impact on aspects of the human experience.Many studies have already been conducted to investigate the efficacy of social media when utilized across different disciplines. Particularly in the SLA discipline, users are more likely to have comprehensible input due to daily exposure to these networks. In this sense, due to significant linguistic output on social media, a learner has an opportunity to process language and obtain input (Al Jahromi, 2020).

Research Significance

Saudis, like other people around the world, prioritize learning the English languagebecause of its importance in facilitating access to global communication. In the Qassim region, young people have an opportunity to learn English by specializing in the English language at Qassim University. The Qassim region also has a number of English language institutes for various ages which can contribute to proficiency for many people. However, the temporal and financial investment in these resources limits access for some.

Learning a language via social media seems to be compatible with many modern lifestyles. It is immersive and not cost-prohibitive. It is important to focus on how social media contributes to the accessibility of learning English and how effectively the learning process can be implemented. Can these platforms provide adequate support for users to work towards proficiency in a new language?

Literature Review

Social media platforms are worldwide and research into the use of them in foreign language learning has become massive (Yurdagul& Oz, 2018; Artyushina&Sheypak, 2018; Ayers, 2020). Numerous studies have been conducted to reflect the effect of social media on non-native English speakers. Exposure to the English language plays a significant role in English language acquisition. Such exposure may be taken from the media as well. We understand that the more

exposure to the language, the more effective acquisition and performance of the target language will happen (Al-Zoubi,2018). In a study of undergraduate English Saudi learners at Najran University, M, Muftah (2020) reported that Saudi L2 learners find social media sites effective in enhancing their L2 proficiency and additionally as educational and communicative tools.

Since learning a language in the classroom might not be sufficient to improve language skills, a study conducted by Bin-Hady and Al-Tamimi (2021) that investigated the technology-based-strategies that undergraduate Yemeni students use outside the classroom to develop their English language found that the most frequently used strategy is accessing media like watching movies in English to develop listening and speaking skills. The second most utilized strategy was interaction with others via WhatsApp.

Learning through social media allows for a comprehensive and innovativemethod of self-directed learning. A critical study by Yadav, M.S.(2021) based on descriptive and evaluative research methodology, found that social media could be an effective tool for ESLL. Moreover, it might work as an alternative to tutors and taking extra classes.

Different language skills may be influenced by different social media activities. Some findings are cited from a critical review of thirty-two articles by Ariantini, Suwastini, Adnyani, Dantes & Jayantini (2021) about the positive impact of social media on students' English learning. They found that there are remarkable improvements in different language skills such as reading, listening, speaking, writing, pronunciation, spelling, and creative/critical thinking in students' EFL learning due tothe practice of different online activities through social media.

In the sense that social media can provide an accessible way to increase English vocabulary and fluency, Abbasova (2016), indicated that social media can have a positive effect on literacy skills and increase users' English vocabulary. Similarly, a study conducted in Malaysia by Zainal and Rahmat (2020) found that users of social media obtain new vocabulary and have greater skills in using the words they learn in the right context.

Social media has been controversial, and some scholars have argued that it may have a negative impact on individuals and communities. Studies have indicated that writing skills are the most negatively influenced by social media. A study by Zainal and Rahmat (2020) showed that some participants agreed on the effect of informal contractions (such as gonna, watcha) on their formal writing. Similarly, Al Jahromi (2020) investigated the effect of social media on English language proficiency among Bahraini users, which found that the use of abbreviations and ungrammatical spellings negatively influenced their academic writing.

One of the most significant factors in facilitating fluency in a new language is the learner's motivation. Interaction with native speakers via social media motivates learners to understand and practice the language (Wael, Asnur, & Ibrahim, 2018; Saud, Saleh, & Asnur, 2018) .

Among different social media networks, some have a more significant effect on the learners than others. As indicated in Malik and Asnur's (2019) study, the most popular social media platform used by students is YouTube. It can provide the students with a variety of visual input that might enhance their use of language. This is in line with (Yusri, Rosida, Jufri, & R, 2018) research which also indicated that YouTube is the most used site for learning a language among students and illustrated that it can facilitate their learning process.

Aims and Research Question

There is a gap in the aforementioned pieces of literature needs to be filled in regards toinvestigating how social media is utilized in building English language fluency. The main research question of this study is:

- How social media can be a useful instrument for learning the English language among undergraduate first-year students at Qassim University?

In order to determine its efficacy, several sub-questions will be examined: 1) what is the Qassim University students' perceptions of the effect of using social media on their SLA? 2) What platforms are being utilized, and what is the time spent using them? 3) What is the most influential skill developed through English language usage on social media? 4) What is the impact of communicating with native speakers or following English teachers via social media on English language development? 5) What is the impact of social media use on each skill of language acquisition? 6) What is the impact of social media on students' studies?

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted on Saudi students at the first-year undergraduate level atQassim University, KSA. The study participantsare native speakers of Arabic.The sample comprised 47 students - 24 females and 23 males - who belonged to several public majors: health care, public administration, and others. The students all described themselves as social media users. The following Figure 1 displays data regarding the participants.

Questionnaire

In order to answer the research question, an online questionnaire was administered via *Google Forms* to 47 first-year students at Qassim University. The survey was used to collect the data and conduct a more detailed study of a small area using a closed questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of sixteen multiple-choice questions designed to explore the points of research. After eliciting respondents' demographic information (gender, sex, academic major), participants were asked to answer the questions; all (but one) were opinion questions using a 5 Likert scale. For the purposes of this survey, the Likert scale consisted of the following items: 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (neutral), 2 (disagree), 1 (strongly disagree). (see appendix), Q4 was a checkbox question wherein students were asked to choose the most influenced areas of language learning skill through social media.

Procedure

The study used a quantitative approach and implemented a survey in order to gather data.Accordingly, the online questionnaire is the instrument used in order to collect this information. The data was analyzed statistically through the Excel program. A descriptive analysis and measures of central tendency (means, standard deviations, and percentages) were applied.

Results

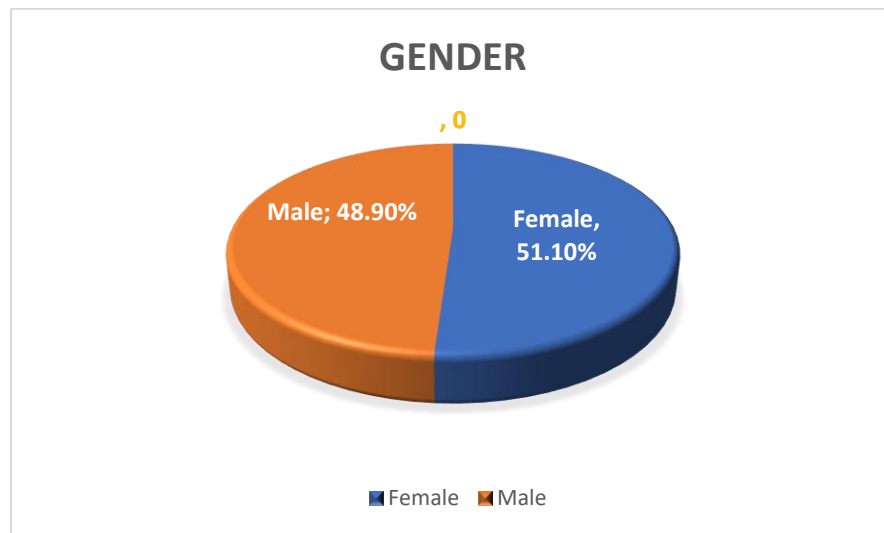The respondents were 24 females (51.1%) and 23 males (48.9%) as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Gender of the participants

Following the data analysis gained from the aforementioned data collection method, a number of key findings were obtained.

Results related to the first sub-question

The first findings are related to the first sub-question about the students' perceptions of the effect of social media on their SLA. 83% of the respondents reported that social media has had a positive impact on their English language acquisition. (*see* Table 1)

Table 1. Students' perception of the effect of using social media platforms

What is the effect of using social media platforms on your English language?	Frequency	Percent
Positive	39	83%
No effect	6	12.8%
Negative	2	4.3%
Total	47	100%

Furthermore, 34% strongly agree and 46.8% agree that exposure to the English language through social media improves their English as illustrated in Figure 2.
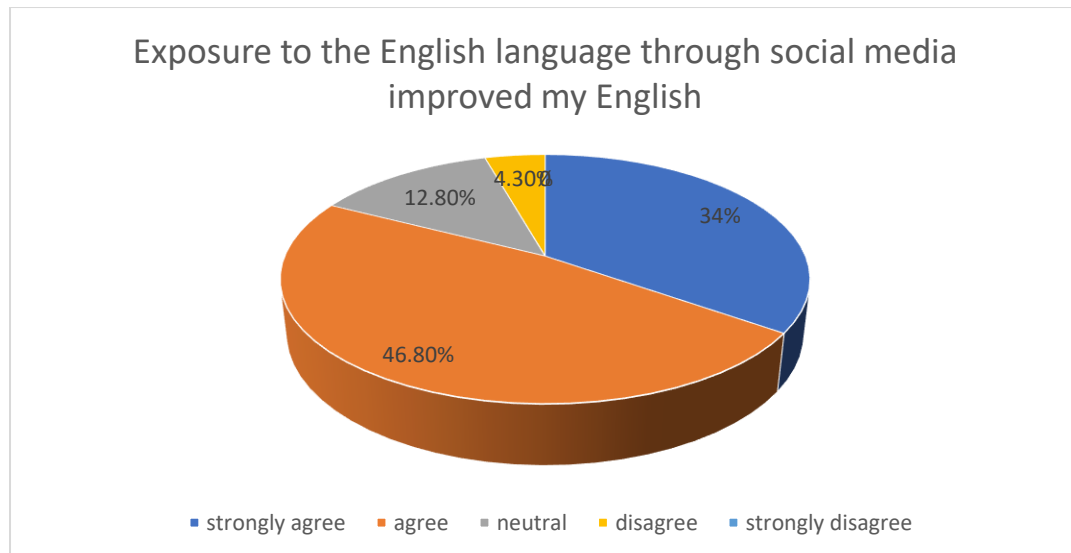
Figure 2. Exposure to the English language through social media

In addition, Figure 3 shows that 40.4% of respondents agree that social media platforms could be an effective alternative to English private classes and international institutions.
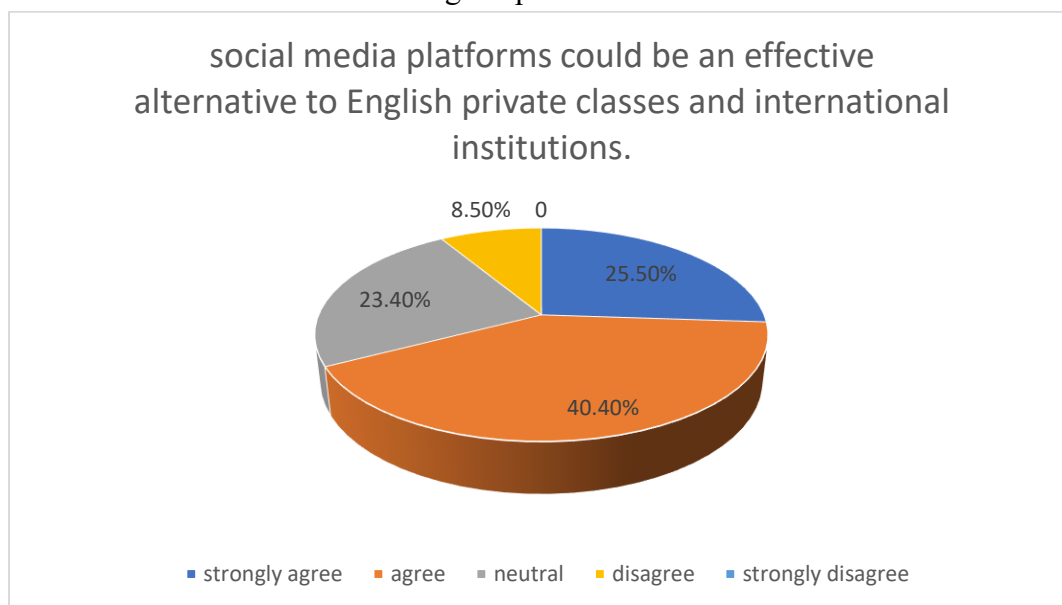

Figure 3.social media platforms as an effective alternative to private classes and institutions.

Results related to the second sub-question

The second sub-question is in regards to the amount of time students dedicate to social media platforms. 61.7% of the respondents admitted to utilizing these platforms for 3 to 6 hours daily. 19.1% of respondents stated that they used social media for less than 3 hours daily and an equivalent number reported using social media for more than 6 hours daily. (*see* Figure 4).

Time spent using social media networks daily

MORE THAN 6 HOURS   19.10%

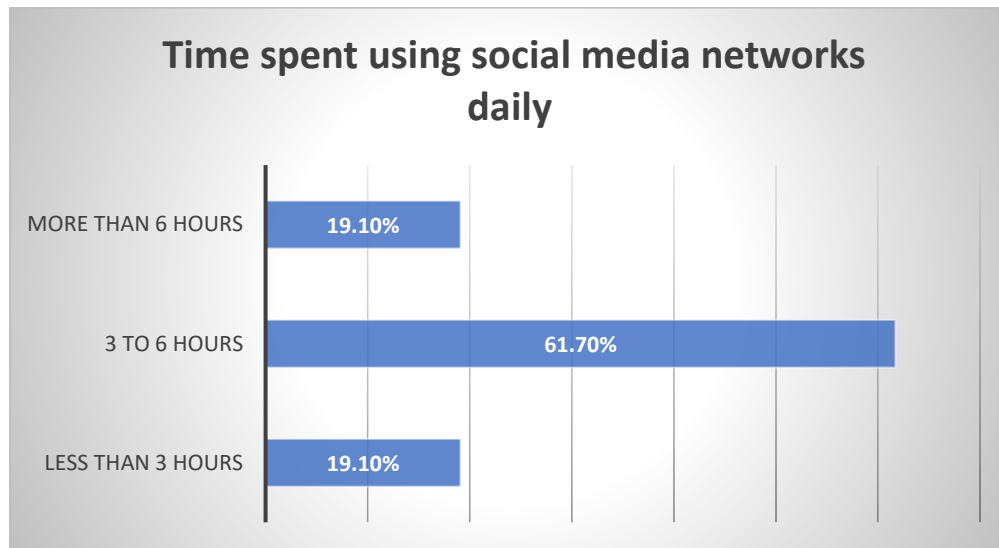3 TO 6 HOURS   61.70%

LESS THAN 3 HOURS   19.10%

Figure 4. Number of hours spent on social media networks

As illustrated in Figure 5, *Instagram* was found to be the most frequently used social media network among respondents (27.7%), followed by *Twitter* which was used by 23.4% of the respondents.
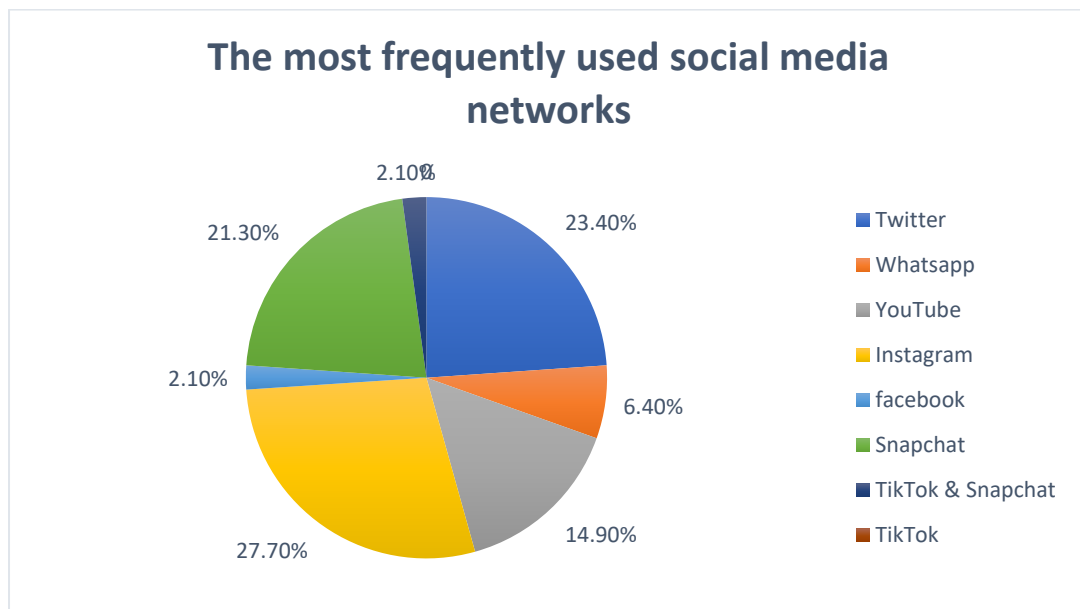
The most frequently used social media networks

2.10%
21.30%
23.40%
2.10%
6.40%
27.70%
14.90%

- Twitter
- Whatsapp
- YouTube
- Instagram
- facebook
- Snapchat
- TikTok & Snapchat
- TikTok

Figure 5. The most frequently used social media networks

Results related to the third sub-question

As shown in Figure 6, the findings related to the third sub-question identified that vocabulary acquisition is the skill most developed via social media usage (66%), followed by listening skills (51.1%).
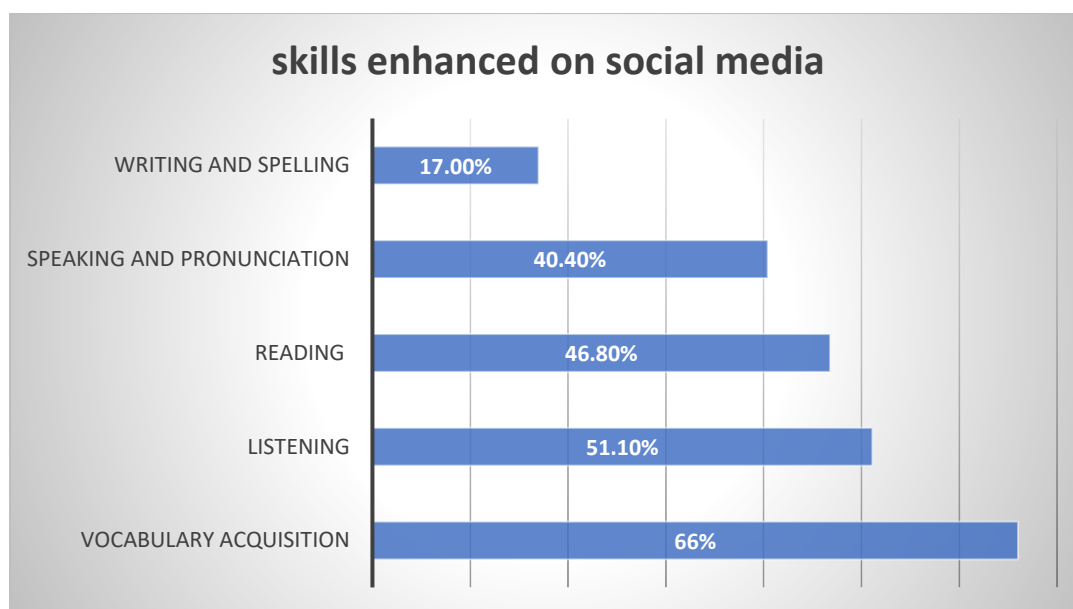
Figure 6. English language skills enhanced on social media
(note: participants were able to choose more than one skill)

Results related to the fourth sub-question

According to sub-question 4, 40.4% of the participants try to improve their English language ability by communicating with native speakers via social media networks. Additionally, 34% of the respondents follow English language teachers through social media to develop their English language skills. (*see* Table 2).

Table 2. Effects of communication via social media on L2 learning

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
- I try to improve my English language ability by communicating with native speakers via social media networks.	4	.955
- I follow English language teachers through social media networks to develop my English language.	3.34	1.108

Results related to the fifth sub-question

Sub-question 5 seeks to identify the impact of social media on individual skills in language learning. Accordingly, Table 3 shows the effect of social media on the vocabulary acquisition skill.

Table 3. Effects of social media on vocabulary learning

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation

- By using social media platforms, I obtain new English words and I know how to use them in the correct context.	4.14	0.859 0.949 0.883
- I gain most of the terms I use in English from social media	3.57	
- Social media enhances my knowledge of new words in English	4.04	

Three questions were administered to measure the effect of social media on writing development. (*see* Table 4)

Table 4. Effects of social media on writing skills

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
- Using abbreviations and slang words on social media applications negatively influenced my academic English writing.	3.23	0.913 0.992 0.872
- Social media helps me write better in English	3.40	
- The translation apps help me write posts on social media	4.02	

44.7% of the respondents agree that watching YouTube videos in English has improved both their English language skills overall and their listening skills in particular. (*see* Table 5)

Table 5.Effects of social media on listening skills

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
- Watching YouTube videos in English improved my English language and my listening skills	4.02	0.966

Results related to the sixth sub-question

Considering the sixth sub-question, 42.6% of the respondents agree that practicing English through social media enhanced their academic studies. (*see* Figure 7)
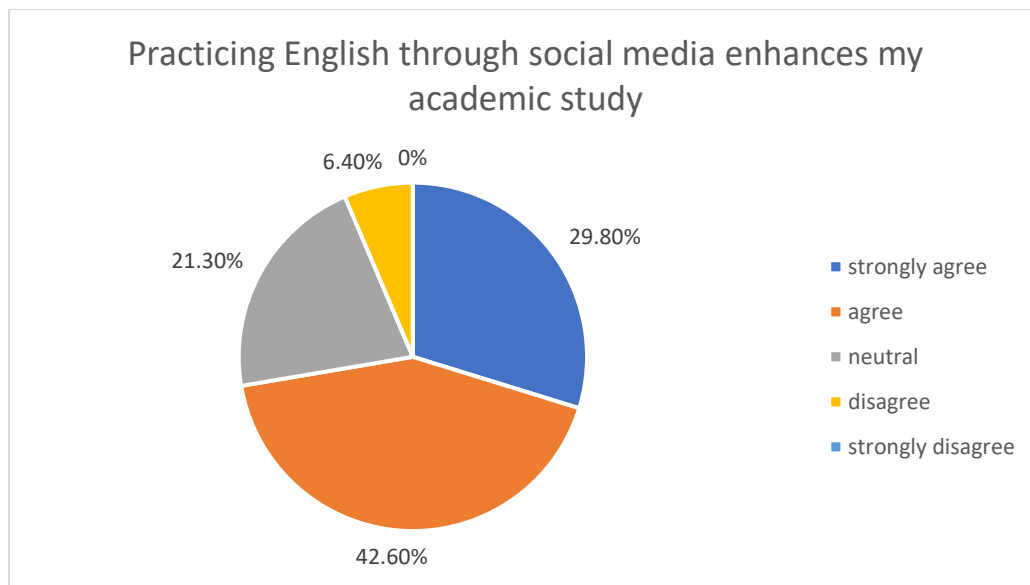
Figure 7. effects of social media on the students' studies

Discussion

Social media, like other tools, offers numerous opportunities to advance skills when learning a foreign language. The current technological revolution is distinctly evident in the extensive exposure of second language learners and can foster independence in users who explore digital resources. These resources serve as robust support in improving skills in oral communication, writing, listening, and reading. In addition, social media has integrated into the everyday routines of many – if not most – individuals, influencing communication, language experience, practice, exercise, and knowledge sharing. The digital realm has become an integral part of many lifestyles, prompting an investigation into its influence on the process of English language learning.

In the case of the current study, to evaluate the hypothesis and to extract a direct response to the research question, a number of sub-questions have been delineated. Regarding the first sub-question, the findings showed that social media has a positive overall effect on participants' English language skills. Hence, it can be inferred that participants have a positive attitude towards the impact of social media on their language skills. This is in line with Ariantini, Suwastini, Adnyani, Dantes & Jayantini (2021), which emphasizes the positive effect of social media on students' English learning and the improvement of different language learning skills on these platforms. Our findings also showed that daily exposure to the English language via social media platforms improves the participants' language skills. Similar findings have been identified by Al-Zoubi (2018), who reported the significance of exposure in the learning process and indicated that increased exposure to the language enhances the efficiency of acquiring and utilizing the target language.

Though we are coming to understand that social media has a positive impact on the enhancement of English language learning skills, there are still questions about whether these methods can supersede the education provided by private classes, tutors, and international institutions. A study by Yadav, M.S.(2021) found that social media might be an effective and accessible alternative to tutors and extra courses. Similarly, the findings of the current study

indicate that more than half of the participants (40.4% agree, 25.5% strongly agree) agree that social media platforms could be an effective alternative to English private classes and international institutions.

To measure the effect of social media on individuals' linguistic repertoire the average daily use of these platforms by these individuals needs to be identified. Al Jahromi's (2020) study on the number of hours Bahraini users spend on social media networks reported that 70% of the respondents acknowledged using them for at least 3 hours daily. A similar finding in this study indicates that 61.7% of participants use social media for about 3 to 6 hours per day. *Instagram* was found to be the most frequently used social media network among respondents (27.7%), followed by *Twitter* which was used by 23.4% of respondents. This indicates that the particular social media platforms with which nearly half of the participants are engaging are asynchronous and text-oriented, in contrast to the synchronous, oral interactions more supported on platforms like *Snapchat* or *YouTube*. This aligns with Al Jahromi's (2020) study, which reported that *Twitter* is the most frequently used social media network, followed by *Instagram*. Despite differences in the ranking of the networks, the similarities in both *Instagram* and *Twitte*r are asynchronous and text-oriented platforms and they ranked the highest in the current study as well as in Al Jahromi's (2020) study.

The participants who recognized the beneficial impacts of social media on their English learning noted varying degrees of improvement in their language skills as a result of their social media use. As shown in Figure 6, participants perceived their vocabulary acquisition skills to be the most impacted by social media, followed by listening and reading skills. Similarly, findings by Abbasova (2016), and Zainal and Rahmat (2020) studies, indicated that social media could positively contribute to the expansion of users' English vocabulary. In contrast, Al Jahromi's (2020) study found that Bahraini users of social media saw the most improvement in their reading skills through social media use, followed by communication and listening skills. Considering that most respondents utilized text-oriented social media platforms like *Instagram* and *Twitter(see*Figure 5), speaking and pronunciation skills were found to show less improvement. (*see* figure 6)

Half of the participants agree on the positive impact of communicating with native speakers as well as following English language teachers via social media. Corresponding results by Wael, Asnur, & Ibrahim, 2018 and Saud, Saleh, & Asnur (2018) similarly uncovered a positive impact on language skills via communication with native speakers on social media. They elaborated that this communication motivates learners to continue to build their understanding of the language. The study puts forth the idea that second language learners may be able to turn to social media rather than classes or textbooks to fulfill daily engagement with language learning that can expand understanding and proficiency. M, Muftah (2020) emphasized this idea in her study of Saudi L2 learners who believed thatsocial media sites effectively enhance their L2 proficiency and can work as educational and communicative tools.

The positive findings of the impact of social media on vocabulary skills are shown in Table 3 and correspond to the findings in Figure 6, which illustrate that vocabulary acquisition is the most positively influenced skill through social media. Table 3 indicates that social media provides an opportunity to obtain new English words and to enhance participants' knowledge of English words.

Previous studies have unanimously agreed on the positive impact of social media on various language learning skills - except for writing skills, where different findings conflict on whether its impact is positive or negative. A study by Zainal and Rahmat (2020) indicated the negative effect of social media on users' writing skills stems from the effect of using informal contractions such as "gonna". Similarly, Al Jahromi (2020) found that the use of abbreviations and ungrammatical spellings negatively influenced participants' academic writing. The current study measures the effect of social media on writing skills with three questions (*see* appendix, Q8,Q10,Q13). In Q8, results revealed that 38.3% of the respondents don't believe there is either a positive or negative effect of using abbreviations and slang words via social media on their overall writing skills. 2.1% strongly disagree, and 19.1% disagree that there is a negative effect on their writing skills from using abbreviations and slang online. However, 6.4% strongly agree and 34% agree that using such words may have a negative impact. We found that, at least in self-assessment, participants do find that social media can have a negative impact on their writing skills. These findings might also account for the findings in Figure 6, which illustrates that writing and spelling skills are the least enhanced language skills via social media. However, in Q10, which asks about the role of social media in enhancing participants' writing skills, 31.9% of the participants had a neutral opinion, 2.1% strongly disagreed, 17% disagreed, 36.2% agreed, and 12.8% strongly agreed. This indicates that the overall perspective of participants is that social media plays a role in developing their writing skills, even if it is the skill least influenced by social media use as indicated in Figure 6. The majority of the participants agreed on the positive influence of translation apps, which enhance writing by helping participants write posts and engage with others on social media (*see* Table 4). After discussing the results of the previously mentioned questions about writing skills, we can conclude that social media has a positive impact on writing skills despite some negative effects associated with abbreviations and slang words, contrary to what was found in previous studies that indicated a comprehensive negative effect.

Malik and Asnur (2019) and Yusri, Rosida, Jufri, & R (2018) reported the influence of YouTube on the enhancement of users' English language. This is in line with the findings of the current study about the impact of watching YouTube videos on language acquisition. As shown in Table 5, the majority of the participants agreed on the positive effect of YouTube on their language acquisition and listening skills.

The role of social media and its impact is not limited to the acquisition and practice of the English language. As illustrated, it also plays a role in assisting with the improvement of the educational level of the user. Enhancing linguistic proficiency contributes to an improvement in academic performance in English language-related skills and requirements; these means can serve as helpful tools in achieving a broader understanding of and proficiency with the language. According to Figure 7, the participants of the current study believe that practicing English through social media enhances their academic study. This is in line with M, Muftah's (2020) study, which indicates that social networking sites have an impact on students' studies.

Conclusion

The main question of this study was an examination of how social media can be a useful instrument for learning the English language. The findings revealed that social media can

provide degrees of facilitation and assistance in foreign language learning. Social media users have daily exposure to the English language, which affects their language skills on various levels. They aren't required to depend on classes or textbooks to acquire the language. Instead, they can learn, read, write, listen, or communicate more efficiently with the help of social media platforms. First-year Qassim University students consider social media platforms as beneficial for improving their L2 proficiency. Based on these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that social media can be significantly helpful in improving English language learning.

Limitations, Implications, and Suggestions for Future Research

The study's results can serve as crucial indicators to initiate immediate pedagogical reforms. Employing social media networks can transform teaching with a more student-centered approach through the facilitation of interactive collaboration and information exchange, resulting in enhanced syntactic and lexical complexity. Moreover, second language instructors, specifically, can and should incorporate social media networks to reinforce their teaching strategies and enhance their content with interactive and inventive activities on platforms. Online debates and threaded discussions could be effective ways of incorporating these platforms. Another significant pedagogical possibility involves creating and conducting professional development and training sessions for teachers on the optimal utilization of social media as instructional technology. Due to time constraints, the study has some limitations. First, the number of participants is small; future studies could concentrate on obtaining the perceptions of a substantially larger number of respondents. Second, the findings of the current study can't be conclusive as they only relied on the questionnaire responses. In further research on the subject, incorporating qualitative data collection methods alongside a quantitative approach could improve the internal validity and reliability of the findings.

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