# Perceptions of Using Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool among EFL Students in Iraqi Context.

**ادراك الطلبة الجامعيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية لاستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كأداة لتعلم اللغة الانكليزية في السياق العراقي**

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## Abstract

Social media technologies have undeniably become an integral part of people's lives and they have been widely used amongst the new generations, particularly, university students. This widespread of social media technologies has certainly made a huge impact on the way people learn and interact with each other resulting in the emergence of communities of learning that are supported by collective intelligence. This study is an attempt to investigate EFL Students' Perceptions of Using Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool in Iraqi Context. To fulfill the aims of the study, the researcher has adopted two null hypotheses. The researcher used descriptive method which fitted the nature of the present study. To fulfill the aims of this study, a questionnaire with 22 items is adapted to explore perceptions of English major students towards leaning EFL through social media at Al-Mustansiriyah University/ College of Basic Education/ Department of English. The findings came to prove that EFL college students' Perceptions of Using Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool is positive, and there is statistically significant difference due to gender variable in favor of female The study ends up with presenting a number of recommendations and suggestions that might aid improving the environment of language learning in the classroom.

**Keywords**: Perceptions; Social media.

**مستخلص**

أصبحت تكنولوجيات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بشكل لا يمكن إنكاره جزءاً لا يتجزأ من حياة الناس ، وقد استخدمت على نطاق واسع بين الأجيال الجديدة ، ولا سيما طلاب الجامعات. من المؤكد أن هذا الانتشار الواسع لتقنيات وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية كان له تأثير كبير على الطريقة التي يتعلم بها الناس ويتفاعلون مع بعضهم البعض مما يؤدي إلى ظهور مجتمعات التعلم التي يدعمها التواصل الاجتماعي. هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لتقصي إدراك الطلبة الجامعيين لاستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كأداة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في السياق العراقي. لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة ، تبنى الباحث فرضيتين صفريتين. استخدم الباحث المنهج الوصفي الذي يتلائم مع طبيعة الدراسة الحالية. لتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة ، تم تبني استبيان يحتوي على 22 فقرة تم تطبيقها في الجامعة المستنصرية / كلية التربية الأساسية / قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. اظهرت النتائج أن ادراك واتجاه الطلبة حول استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كأداة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ايجابي, بالاضافة الى وجود فروق ذات دلالة احصائية تبعا لمتغير الجنس لصالح الاناث. تنتهي الدراسة بتقديم عدد من التوصيات والاقتراحات التي قد تساعد في تحسين البيئة الصفية لتعلم اللغة الانكليزية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية**: الادراك ; وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.

**1.Introduction**
**1.1. Statement of the Problem**
    The world is witnessing an unprecedented revolution in information and communication technology in human history. This technology is the key factor in the development of the global community and its transfer from a traditional to a technologically advanced society. The constant changes witnessed in the present era are due to the fact that the world has become a small village because of the development of modern means of communication represented by the Internet, a system and means of communication of computer networks linking computers around the world with a unified protocol which is an Internet protocol (Mansour, 2001:45). The Internet connects millions of private and public networks in the academic and government institutions, ranging in scope from local to global, and it carries a great deal of information, data and services. Social media (henceforth SM) sites are a range of services that are offered to the users such as instant chats, private messaging, email, video, file sharing and others. These social networks have brought about a significant change in the way people communicate and share information. One of the most popular social networks currently exist are facebook, Twitter, blogs, Youtube, etc. (Wikipedia, 2013:4).
    These sites have provided an opportunity for users to meet new people around the world with different cultures, ideas and other aspects of their lives. Today, people in our country are able to communicate with others in all fields of scientific, cultural and social life. But the problem in communicating with people outside the country is the lack of English efficiency, as the Iraqi students use English language in the curriculum only and if their academic achievement records in English is checked, it will be found out that the majority of students' grades are poor due to certain considerations, including educational, cultural and social aspects. Hence, the problem of the study is formulated and it attempts to answer the following question: Do students have a tendency to learn English language through SM?.
**1.2. Significance of the Study**
    The significance of the study springs from the fact that SM has been newly introduced to the field of education. For this reason, the study may be significant for:
1- Encouraging and motivating students to use SM to improve their English proficiency.
2- Stimulating specialists and supervisors' interests in conducting training courses for teachers to sustain their skills in using SM in the teaching process.
3- Encouraging syllabus designers to modify organize and enrich English language curricula with various instructions, techniques and activities based on using SM tools.
**1.3. Aims of the Study**
1- Exploring EFL college students' perceptions towards learning English language through SM.
2- Identifying whether gender makes any difference in learning English language through SM.
**1.4. Hypotheses of the Study**
    It is hypothesized that:
1-There are no statistically significant differences at (0.05) between mean scores and theoretical mean of the SM questionnaire.
2- There are no statistically significant differences at level (0.05) between the mean scores of male students and the mean scores of female students for the SM questionnaire.
**1.5. Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited to the students at English Department, College of Basic Education at Mustansiriyah University of for the academic year 2018-2019.

**1.6. Definitions of Basic Terms**

**1.6.1. Social media**

SM is a new technological and informational network that use a form of communication and interaction. Interpersonal relationship can be created and maintained. Typical SM network services could be content to share, web communities, and Internet forums (Suomen, 2012:7).

**2. Theoretical Background**

**2.1. Definition of Social Media**

Dewing (2010:1) defines SM as websites that provide users with the opportunity to dialogue, exchange information, opinions, and ideas through profiles, photo albums, chat rooms, etc. Examples of such networks are facebook, Twitter, blogs, youtube, etc. The phrase "social media" was developed in 1994-1995, when Geocities, the first web-based social networking site, was launched. In truth, there are several different definitions of the SM term because it is such a broad phrase that encompasses a wide spectrum of websites. Aldosary (2014: 68) defines SM as a group of social networking that was created by persons or organizations for the purpose of expanding and activating career relationships and friendships. One of the most prominent networks used by college students in Iraq are Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc. The concept of SM as can be found in (ODLIS) dictionary by (Reitz, 2002: 626) is "an electronic websites service that allow users to create and arrange profiles, communicate, cooperate, and exchange information with others". From the previous definitions, the aim of creating SM networks was to boost communication between individuals, institutions, and those who are available in the internet for the purpose of sharing information, knowledge, scientific and literary achievements. Besides, it allows users to exchange their opinions and points of view through the network services.

**2.2. Social Media Forms**

According to Dewing (2010:5), SM websites became widespread among net users who would like to share their ideas, videos, and different activities online. SM covers several digital tools like Facebook ,blogs, youtube, wiki,  , Twitter ,Linked , MySpace, etc . Even Email and SMS that are regarded SM tools too.

**2.1.1. Facebook**

Facebook is a social website that allows users to free and easy access. It is administered by "Facebook Company" as a private property. Facebook can be joined through services of work and school to communicate with others and exchange friend requests or add friends. Furthermore, users can follow others' sites through "follow" icon, exchange messages through "messenger" icon and enable them to update their profiles and allow self introduction of persons (Ibid).

**2.1.2. Blogs**

Blogs are another form of SM which is taken from the word "web log". It is a website that includes chronological publications from newest to oldest, so that visitors to these sites see the newest publications at the beginning. Blogging sites allow users to interact with each other by posting comments as well as links.. It allows users to publish and participate in many conversation online (Ibid).

**2.1.3. Youtube**

It is one of the widespread social sites, which managed in a short period of time to gain an advanced position within the social networks sites. It is a videos site from Google, which

provides the ability to download or upload a huge number of videos. There are large numbers of subscribers and visitors access these videos daily. The media benefit from some of the video clips, as well as Facebook visitors can benefit from them.

### 2.1.4. Wiki

The term "wiki" is derived from a Hawaiian word that means "quick" or "fast." It's a free online reference work with open content. Ward Cunningham created the original Wiki in 1994. Anyone can edit, delete, or alter content on Wikipedia, and lots of users are continually enhancing Wikipedia by making many changes per hour (ibid).

### 2.1.5. Electronic mail

Electronic mail, commonly shortened as Email, was invented by "Ray Tomlinson," according to Pranjal, et al. (2012:420). It is a method of sending and receiving electronic messages between people.

### 2.1.6. Twitter

Twitter is an internet social networking service that allows users to send and browse short 140-character messages referred to "Tweet". Users cannot read and post unless they register in the application. They access through website interface or mobile device application.

It is one of the social networks that have spread in recent years and played an important role in the political events in many countries, especially in the Middle East. Twitter took its name from the term "Twitter" and took the sparrow as its symbol. It is a mini service that allows users to send short text messages not more than (140) characters at most. In this form on SM users can search for people, addresses and different topics and friends all over the world who can exchange short stories among themselves (Daiz, 2011:123).

### 2.2. **Applications of Social Media in the Educational Process**

According to Rami (2003:15), social networking sites have become one of the most prominent technical phenomena in recent years, with a large number of users. The widespread computers and smart phones contributed to a rise in user participation in these social media platforms. Due to the fascination with social real-life, everyone exchanges messages and discussions, as well as posts images and videos. A storage process of information to the human mind is determined by the nature of the recipient's psychological state, according to psychologists. This truth was backed up by Greek philosophy. In his claim of epistemology, Aristotle highlighted the importance of keeping the entertainment aspect in mind when presenting lectures. So, if used in accordance with the requirements of knowledge and scientific discourse, these can bring about a revolution in the field of education. Students will be more enthused, particularly when using internet in their classes. variety of techniques can be employed by teachers.   The following are some of them:

1-Before preparing to teach the curriculum, teachers can create a page on any of the social media sites in which students can engage and provide feedback, which will help them identify material and formulate goals Prescribed.

2- Teachers can use suitable SM form and make groups for the students work to group tasks and graduation projects.

3- When necessary, use your profile to send messages to a specific or group of students.

4- Some social networking technologies, such as the Facebook icon, can be utilized to get students' feedback on course components by pressing "like," commenting, or participating.

5- Take advantage of opinion surveys, where the teacher uses them as an educational tool in communication with students and interactive discussions on important topics.

6- Teachers can upload lectures to be watched by a large number of students using youtube site.

7- Teachers can set up a time for learners to contact with him via SM, ask questions, and receive responses.

### 2.3. **Advantages of Social Media in EFL Classroom**

There's no denying that using social media in the classroom provides a number of advantages, including:

1- It helps to enhance students' talents, ability, and motivation to think creatively in diverse ways by allowing them to communicate and engage with intellectuals in different surroundings.

2- It allows sharing, communicating, interacting with others, and learning effective communication methods, as they make a positive learner that has a role in dialogue and a view he shares with others.

3- It facilitates sending and receiving of assignments, tasks, and other academic activities.

4-It helps to achieve a type of entertainment for students; this will be for a specific educational goal which is supervised by the teacher.

5-It gives the opportunity for some students who feel shy when facing the teacher to express their views in writing form (Alshamrani, 2014:73).

**2.4. Disadvantages of Social Media in EFL Classroom**

Yaseen (2012:49) states that since everything has its advantages and disadvantages, SM sites also have their disadvantages, including:

1-**Waste of time:** social networking sites with enticing entertainment services may encourage students to lose time and forget about their responsibilities.

2- **Lack of social networking sites use for education**: The widespread use of social networking for entertainment and connection with friends and family has led to a misunderstanding about the benefits of social media in a variety of disciplines, particularly education.

3**- Privacy violation**: Many students have profiles that contain personal information about them and they may be misused if disclosed to persons not trusted.

**2.5. Related Previous Studies**

**2.5.1. Jarrah Study (2009).**

This study entitled "Teachers' attitudes towards using computers as an educational tool in Iraqi schools" was aimed to identify the attitudes of teachers towards using computers as an educational tool in primary schools, and to know the impact of field, experience, age and gender on their attitudes .Besides, it intended to identify the problems that hinder this experience and find out the solutions. The study consisted of a questionnaire of attitude and a random sample of 74 male and female teachers in Basra Governorate for the academic year 2005-2006. The results showed that there are statistically significant differences at level (0.05) between the attitudes of primary school teachers and the variables of experience, field and age. On the other hand, there are no statistically significant differences according to gender variable. The study also showed that the attitudes of teachers towards the use of computer as teaching tool is positive.

**2.5.2. Tutku Basoz Study (2016).**

The purpose of this study was to find out how pre-service EFL teachers attitudes towards language learning using social media. Furthermore, the study tried to investigate the role of social media in their language learning experiences. A total of 120 pre-service EFL teachers took part in the study. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. According to the data, pre-service EFL teachers consider SM to be an important part of their foreign language learning experiences. In light of the findings, it was suggested that teacher education programs include certain components on how to use SM to enhance engagement and communication among students.

**3. Methodology**

**3.1. Participants**

The participants of this study were 100 female and male second year EFL college students at English Department, College of Basic Education, Mustansiriyah University in the city of Baghdad in Iraq. Fifty female and fifty male second year students were selected randomly. Both male and female students participated in administering the questionnaire of the study.

### 3.2. Description of the Instrument

To achieve the aims of the study, the researcher has prepared a questionnaire to cover the areas of the research. The questionnaire consisted of 22 items with five alternative answers (totally disagree-disagree-undecided-agree-totally agree). It was administered to 100 EFL students enrolled in the English Department of Mustansiriyah University in Iraq during the academic year 2018-2019.

### 3.3. Validity

Validity is defined by Bergman (1981:150) as a "reflection of how well it measures what it is designed to measure". The researcher used Pearson Correlation coefficient to find out the value of Correlation coefficient to each item as shown in table (3.1).

*Table (3.1).*
*Pearson Correlation coefficient to find out the validity of the instrument*

| Item n. | Correlation coefficients | Item n. | Correlation coefficients |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.84 | 12 | 0.71 |
| 2 | 0.73 | 13 | 0.51 |
| 3 | 0.62 | 14 | 0.54 |
| 4 | 0.43 | 15 | 0.64 |
| 5 | 0.55 | 16 | 0.70 |
| 6 | 0.53 | 17 | 0.63 |
| 7 | 0.81 | 18 | 0.44 |
| 8 | 0.64 | 19 | 0.54 |
| 9 | 0.70 | 20 | 0.66 |
| 10 | 0.79 | 21 | 0.83 |
| 11 | 0.68 | 22 | 0.74 |

Table (3.1) demonstrates that the values of all Correlation coefficients of the questionnaire are acceptable due to the point that the lower value of the calculated Correlation coefficient is a higher than the value of the tabulated Correlation coefficient which is (0.165) with DF of (98).

### 3.4. Pilot Study

On the 26th of April, 2019, a pilot administration of the instrument was administered. It was practically tried out on a sample of (22) students chosen equally from the second stage .It was found that the time required to complete the questionnaire was 18 minutes, and the directions were clear.

### 3.5. Discrimination Power (DP)

According to Collins and O'Brien (2011: 251), item discrimination power is the ability of an item to differentiate high performing and lower performing participants on an entire test or a scale. The research used two extremist groups with upper group of 27% and lower group of 27%. The formula of t-test for two independent samples has been applied in order to determine the discrimination power of the items as shown in table (3.2).

*Table (3.2)*
*Discriminating Power of the Social Media Questionnaire Items*

| Items n. | Lower Group | | Upper Group | | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | S. Deviation | Mean Scores | S. Deviation | Mean Scores | |
| 1 | 0.89 | 2.04 | 1.2 | 4.19 | 8.19 |

| 2 | 0.98 | 2.13 | 1.3 | 4.34 | 6.08 |
| 3 | 1.04 | 2.34 | 1.8 | 4.9 | 6.67 |
| 4 | 1.01 | 2.09 | 1.32 | 4.15 | 9.14 |
| 5 | 1.22 | 2.44 | 0.98 | 3.99 | 4.66 |
| 6 | 1.05 | 2.11 | 0.99 | 3.96 | 11.02 |
| 7 | 0.84 | 2.43 | 1.54 | 4.08 | 10.32 |
| 8 | 0.89 | 2.54 | 1.07 | 4.11 | 8.44 |
| 9 | 0.99 | 2.09 | 1.13 | 4.33 | 6.17 |
| 10 | 0.88 | 2.12 | 1.44 | 4.20 | 5.43 |
| 11 | 1.11 | 2.14 | 0.98 | 3.93 | 5.66 |

Table (3.2) demonstrates that all questions of the study questionnaire are discriminated due to the point that the minimum t-value is higher than the tabulated value (1.98) with level of significance (0.05) and degree of freedom (52).

### 3.6. Reliability

Reliability is a very important step for examining the research instrument. Mousavi (1999:323) states that "reliability is the quality of test scores that refer to the consistency of standards across different times, forms of testing, rates, and other characteristics of the context of the measurement".The researcher used the test-retest method and  (so the applied the questionnaire to (40) EFL college students. The reliability coefficient using Pearson Correlation Coefficient has been found to be (0.85). The researcher also used alpha Cronbach method for reliability. As a result, reliability coefficient of alpha Cronbach formula were (0.91).Besides, the Joint coefficient of variation was (0.82) which is higher than (0.50) .Due to Ebel Standard, the reliability coefficient is acceptable.

### 3.7. Final Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to the selected sample after its validity and reliability were determined. On Sunday, May 19th, 2019, the instrument was administered. The purpose of the instrument was explained to the participants by the researcher. The instrument had an allotted time of 18 minutes. The researcher then gathered the participants' answer papers, which were subsequently scored and collated to determine the final results.

### 4. Results, conclusion, recommendations, and further suggestions

This chapter tackles the results of the study and summarizes the conclusion arrived in the light of these results. It also presents some recommendations for curriculum designers, educators, teachers, learners, and researchers who want to improve the teaching-learning process. Finally, recommendations for additional research are presented.

### 4.1. Results Related to the First Aim and Verification of the First Hypothesis

In order to identify EFL college students' perceptions towards using SM as a tool to learn English language, , a social media questionnaire  has been prepared and administered to the sample of the study as mentioned in chapter three.

The mean scores and the standard deviations of the instrument are calculated and compared to the theoretical mean. Then, by using one sample t- test, the results are found out as shown in table 4.1.

*Table 4.1*
***Statistics of the One Sample t-test to Find out EFL Students' responses towards the Instrument of the Study.***

| Sample | Mean | S.D. | Theoretical mean | Variance | t-value | | DF | Level of significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Computed | Tabulated | | |
| 100 | 79.90 | 4.85 | 66 | 23.52 | 28.95 | 1.96 | 99 | 0.05 |

Table 4.1 demonstrates that the mean score of the participants' responses to the study instruments is 79.90 with a standard deviation of 4.85 and a theoretical mean of 66. The computed t- value is 28.95 and the tabulated t- value is 1.96 at level of significance of 0.05. Since the tabulated t- value is lower than the computed t- value, the difference between the two means is significant. This rejects the first null hypothesis and proves that the students' perceptions towards learning English language through SM are positive.

**4.2. Results Related to the Second Aim and Verification of the Second Hypothesis**

In order to clarify whether there are significant differences at level of significance 0.05 between mean scores due to the gender variable, t-test of two independent sample has been applied and calculated as it is shown in table 4.2.

*Table 4.2*
***Statistics of two Independent Sample t-test to Find out the Differences According to the Gender Variable***

| Sample type | Sample | Mean | S.D. | Variance | t-value | | DF | Level of significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Computed | Tabulated | | |
| Male | 50 | 77.55 | 4.13 | 17.05 | 7.36 | 1.96 | 98 | 0.05 |
| Female | 50 | 82.14 | 5.36 | 28.72 | | | | |

Table (4.2.) demonstrates that the mean score of male students is (77.55) and the standard deviation is (4.13) whereas the mean score of the female students is (82.14) with a standard deviation of (5.36) and degree of freedom (98) . After having applied the statistical tools, the researcher concludes that there are a statistically significant differences between the mean scores in favour of the female students which is higher than the mean score of male students . This rejects the second hypothesis which states that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores due to gender variable and proves that there are significant differences in favour of female students. This explains that female students have much interest in learning English through SM.

**4.3. Conclusion**

To conclude, the main aim of this study is to perceive students' perceptions and attitudes toward using social networking sites for learning English and to verify if there's a distinction between male and female students in terms of learning English through these sites. The results

illustrates that female students have much interest and positive perceptions and attitudes towards using SM sites more than male students who show less interest. They believe that SM can assist them in expanding their vocabulary. They also believe that SM provides much comfortable and stress-free language learning atmosphere, as well as more real language use for language learners. They also agree that SM can help learning languages more easily. When it comes to language skills, the majority of EFL students agree that SM may assist them in improving their reading, communicating, listening, writing, speaking, and pronunciation abilities. Furthermore, they believe that SM assists in the improvement of their studies and the development of language confidence. They agree that SM can help individuals learn a language more effectively. Finally, they believe that language learning through SM is more collaborative than traditional learning, and that using it to learn languages can help them better integrate into the environment they live in.

### 4.4. Recommendations

On the basis of the results and conclusions put forward, some recommendations have been drawn. It is hoped that they will be valuable to the students and instructors in the field of TEFL. These recommendations are as follows:

1- Educators must recognize the drastic need for SM and the need to cultivate and develop it at colleges as well as at the earlier levels of education.

2- The Ministry of Higher Education should provide teachers of English regularly with printed training materials which display SM techniques and strategies used in teaching English as foreign language.

### 4.5. Suggestions for Further Research

In the light of the findings, the following topics are suggested for further research:

1- An experimental study can be conducted to find out the effect of applying SM strategies on developing EFL students' English language.

2- A similar study could be conducted in other universities, and at other academic levels.

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