

How Iraqi College Learners Can Make Use of Social Media in Learning English Grammatical Topics Effectively

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Abstract:

This paper aims at determining the role that social media plays nowadays in learning English grammatical topics among Iraqi College undergraduates. Exactly forty students of the First Year in the Department of Translation, Basra University were randomly selected to be the participants of this study. To measure participants' attitudes toward the use of social media as a tool to expedite and enhance the learning of English Grammar, the study participants are given a 10-question questionnaire to tick one out of five boxes that corresponds their attitudes toward social media. Results disclosed that majority of the participants use social media platforms to expedite and upgrade acquisition of English grammatical topics on daily basis. Besides, results stemmed from the questionnaire indicated that participants trust and believe in the power of the social media platforms in enhancing learners' self-confidence, motivation and collaboration in learning English grammatical topics.

Keywords: Technology, College learners, Social media, Technological gadgets, English grammar, E. groups.

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كيف يمكن لطلاب الجامعات العراقية الاستفادة من وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعلم مواضيع تتعلق بقواعد اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل فعال

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المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الدور الذي تلعبه وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في وقتنا الحاضر في تعلم موضوعات ترتبط بقواعد اللغة الإنجليزية بين طلبة الجامعات العراقية. تم اختيار (٤٠) طالبا من طلبة المرحلة الأولى في قسم الترجمة بجامعة البصرة. تم اختيار الطلبة بشكل عشوائي ليكونوا المشاركين في هذه الدراسة. لقياس مواقف المشاركين تجاه استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كأداة لتسريع وتعزيز تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية بالنسبة للطلبة. على الطلبة المشاركين في الدراسة ملء استبيان مكون من (١٠) أسئلة، وذلك بتحديد مربع واحد من بين خمسة مربعات تتوافق مع مواقفهم تجاه وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. أظهرت النتائج أن غالبية المشاركين يستخدمون منصات التواصل الاجتماعي لتسريع عملية اكتساب الموضوعات النحوية باللغة الإنجليزية ورفع مستواها وبشكل يومي. إلى جانب ذلك، أشارت النتائج المستمدة من الاستبيان إلى أن المشاركين يتقنون ويؤكدون بقوة بكفاءة منصات التواصل الاجتماعي في تعزيز ثقة المتعلمين بأنفسهم وتحفيزهم وتعاونهم في تعلم موضوعات نحوية باللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التكنولوجيا، طلاب الجامعات، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الأجهزة التكنولوجية، قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، المجموعة الإلكترونية.

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1. Introduction:

English has become a must for all across the world. It is needed as the world becomes a small village. It is a requirement, for many, to live a smooth life perfectly. Technology has taken space on people's pockets. Technology occupies a considerable part of our life, as people's lifestyle across the world has been shifted, and for learners of different walks, technology is indispensable (Dudeny & Hockly, 2007). Learners nowadays are well equipped with technological confidence. They use technological gadgets on daily basis. Technological means, one of which is social media, have reshuffled the way we approach life, personal or professional. Learners live in this borderless world, a small village accommodating different languages and cultures. They like the current communication channels via technological applications including social media (Thorne, 2010). As an example of social media applications, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and list is endless, have given learners extra spaces to consider their learning approaches. Social media, as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary, are "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)".

Social media innovative technologies are adopted beyond being a means of fun, rather as a means of learning inside and outside classrooms (Jones, 2015). With the rise of media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and others, learning becomes accessible 24/7, and not restricted to Sundays through Thursdays. Learners could study any grammatical topic at any time with no limit, and make use of electronic social media to get feedback from other internet-connected group's members (Dzvpatsva, Mitrovic, & Dietrich, 2014).

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Iraqi College learners face, to some degree, troubles acquiring English language as a foreign language. Learners stumble quite often in order to acquire a foreign language, English. English grammar is one of the critical stones on their path to perfection in English language.

Teachers should keep in mind that this generation, digital natives, would not listen to old teaching and learning approaches, as they look for ones meet their current needs in education (Prensky, 2001). Therefore, academic roles should be altered for the benefit of learners. Educationists and academics alike have to think twice before relying on old-fashioned teaching techniques the ones used to teach us decades ago. We are not them, and as Prensky (2001) stated “they have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, and tools of the digital age” (p.1).

This fact gives educationalists and academics a good ground to build up their objectives for up-to-date learning methods. Today’s learners look for easy going learning materials which could facilitate and upgrade the learning process where they could learn and acquire English grammatical issues precisely via making use of social media applications. As Krashen (1985) brought to light, comprehensible input is fundamental for learning accomplishment. Therefore, teaching and learning authentic materials brought by technology could bring fun and enthusiasm and hold learners motivated to acquire grammatical topics in classes (Dhanya, 2016).

Iraqi learners still face troubles learning English language as an English Foreign Language (EFL) due to some reasons. First, there is no place for communication among learners in classrooms also for some reasons one of which is shyness and unwillingness to take risk of making grammatical errors. Second, traditional methods used in teaching grammatical topics where students have no choice but to

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mimic grammatical rules made on whit(black)boards and to do drills. Third, due to the lack of confidence for the teacher's side and no much funds allocated to upgrade education, no integration of technological innovations has been made to the educational system yet. Hence, reliance on available resources and learners own technological gadgets could bring a tangible change to the old-fashioned teaching and learning system in teaching language four skills and all related topics. Sticking to old ones, in such a rapid changing world, is risky and could lead to harmful consequences.

2. Research Questions

The following questions are raised:

1. Does Social Media have an impact on the learning process inside English classes for the College undergraduates?
2. Does the use of social media expedite and facilitate learning English grammatical topics?

3. Research Hypotheses

1. Social media have an impact on the learning process inside English classes for the College undergraduates.
2. Using social media expedites and facilitates learning English grammatical topics.

4. Literature Review

This section is devoted to discussing other studies conducted previously on the same topic in hand. In this section, learning process in this digital age, social media-based classes, enhancement of grammatical issues and autonomy of learning are going to elaborated on in an academic way.

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4.1 Learning Process in this Digital Age

Undeniably, the advent of digital age has shifted everything surrounding us including education. As education is revolutionized, teachers globally have to rethink about tools used in teaching and learning disciplines. Traditional methods in teaching this digital age will bring adverse outcomes, could be disastrous. So, teachers, mentors and tutors of this age have to build up new teaching and learning tools and methodologies that are up learners expectations. Otherwise, their methods followed in teaching and space given to learners to learn lead to unwanted outputs, as Prensky (2011) made it clear that: “Our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language” (p.13).

Learning is a process advanced to help learners acquire knowledge. Out-dated learning processes are no more productive, as the teaching and learning process is tremendously swept by new flexible and handy technological gadgets. Therefore, teachers across the world have to rethink about their teaching tools and spaces allocated for themselves and their students inside classes. As college instructors, now is the time to find out their own way to bridge the digital divide occurred un(intentionally) between them and learners. Current learners, who are as defined by Dudeney and Hockly (2007) “digital natives” living confident and cozy with technological devices, are different from us when we were learners decades ago.

In the United States of America, Pearson Learning Solutions and Babson Survey Research Group carried out a study in 2013 on the usefulness of social media, where results showed that the tools of social media adopted in teaching have increased 21% from 2012 through 2013 (Li, 2017).

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4.2 Social Media-Based Classes

With the presence of social-media-aided instructions, no more teacher-centered teaching process is needed, and focus now is shifted from a teacher to students. Teachers just could keep in hands a new class job which is a learning process facilitator, and learners are happier to become independent and interactive to learn via social media applications on their own pace (Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland, 2009). In a study carried out by Ismail, Zaim, Mukhaiyur and Gistituati (2019), students considered social media applications as very useful in giving them a hand acquiring English language in a perfect way since social media could be approached smoothly.

Social media usage, of all types, has changed pedagogy and a student-teacher interaction process (Zourou, 2012). It is dominant in some societies that teachers or/and higher education policy makers are still having technophobia, which is, according to Brosnan and Lee (1998) “the negative attitudes towards computers or information technology” which to some extent deter the use of social media smart devices (p.210). They have no choice but to cope with new era of technology being a crucial part of life; life has unquestionably become digital. Then, college teachers have to adopt a kind of training that could build up self-confidence and help get rid of technophobia. In a study conducted by Soares in 2008 for a period of one semester adopting blogs to teach college students in Brazil English as a foreign language. Then students were guided to fill out an online questionnaire. As to the advantage of blogs as a social media platform, they proudly showed positive attitudes to the use of such electronic tools which enhanced their writing skills effectively.

4.3 Enhancement of Grammatical Issues

Many EFL students consider learning English grammar in a traditional way as boring, where learners just given a time to copy

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from whiteboards and a time to respond to a drill (Summer, 2011). The Cambridge English Dictionary defines grammar as “(the study or use of) the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to make sentences”, and defined by Merriam-Webster as “a system of rules that defines the grammatical structure of a language”.

In 2013, Ilin, Kultlu and Kutluay conducted a pilot study on the usefulness of adopting videos on teaching grammatical topics for English for Special Purposes. Study brought to light the role played by such multimedia-based learning materials in motivating and then creating positive attitude towards learning English grammar in authentic atmospheres. This means learners of today would not feel satisfied anymore with traditional methods of teaching and learning English grammar. For them, as digital natives, surrounded by technological gadgets, old-fashioned teaching process is boring and non-motivating. This notion is in line with what Larsen-Freeman (2014, p.257) stated about grammar as being “not a static system of rules; grammar is a dynamic system.”

4.4 Autonomy of Learning

Internet applications, specifically, social media applications grant English language learners a wide range of autonomy where they could browse themselves and work with other learners to find information they look for. Learners, while they are connected to the internet, are free and independent to find out grammatical issues within a content of a sentence, two sentences, more than this, and as well they have their own discretion to correct or post their comments to other group’s learners and to receive peer feedback (Dhanya, 2016). Students, in such a learning mode, could form electronic groups in which they could communicate grammatical topics and comments where they have a reliable space of independence to learn and

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acquire English in an authentic atmosphere. Vygotsky (1980) brought to light that people acquire English as a foreign language quite faster when they are being a part of interaction or collaboration groups with no worries of shyness and taking risks.

4.5 Mobile Learning

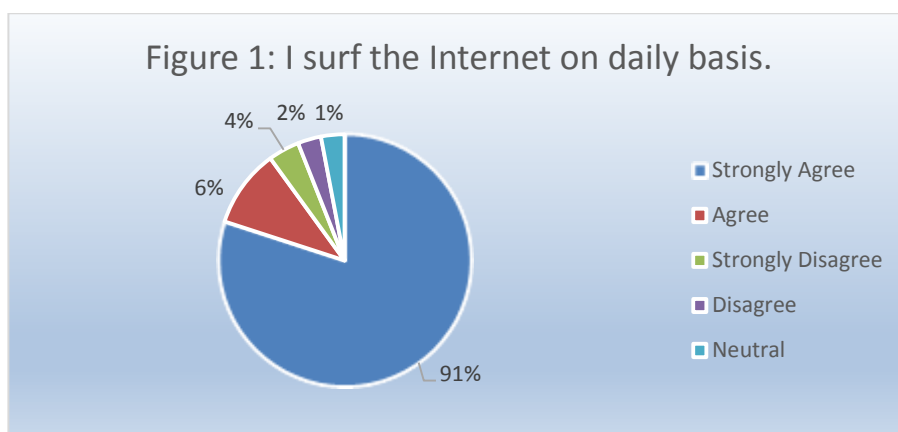
Mobile learning means “learning on the move”, where learning “extends beyond the walls of classroom” using handheld gadgets for pedagogical purposes (Bora & Dhumane, 2012: 150). Portability of such gadgets push learning processes forward. Though, teachers, for many years, have been trying to root out mobile phones from classrooms, on grounds that such phones could bother learning process, it is widely noted that such devices are welcomed and proudly integrated into many educational systems. In 2018, Nabati conducted a study on mobile learning which showed that students were quite interested in such learning devices to obtain grammatical instructions, and for students, it is an opportunity to bring together traditional classrooms and digital ones. In a Web Technology Survey conducted in 2016, it was made clear that social media occupied a considerable space of a student’s time during the day. College students, according to this survey, surf the internet to use such media for learning English language.

5. Analysis & Discussion

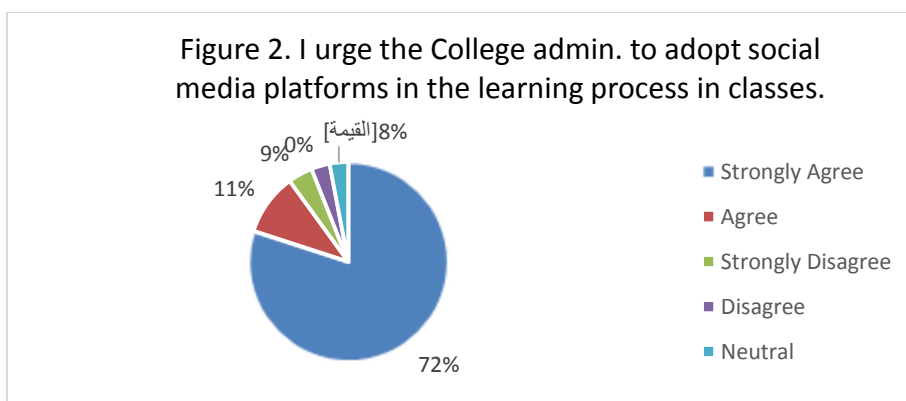
As mentioned above, a questionnaire was adopted, as the sole instrument, to measure the participants’ opinion concerning the impact of social media platforms on the learning of English grammar. Randomly (50) participants of the first year students in the Translation Department, College of Arts, Basra University were given (5) minutes to tick their favorite answers. The results were as follows:

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Participants answered the statement (1) [I surf the Internet on daily basis], disclosing that 91% of them strongly agree with this statement, 6% of them agree with this statement, 2% of them disagree, and 1% was neutral in his/her opinion.

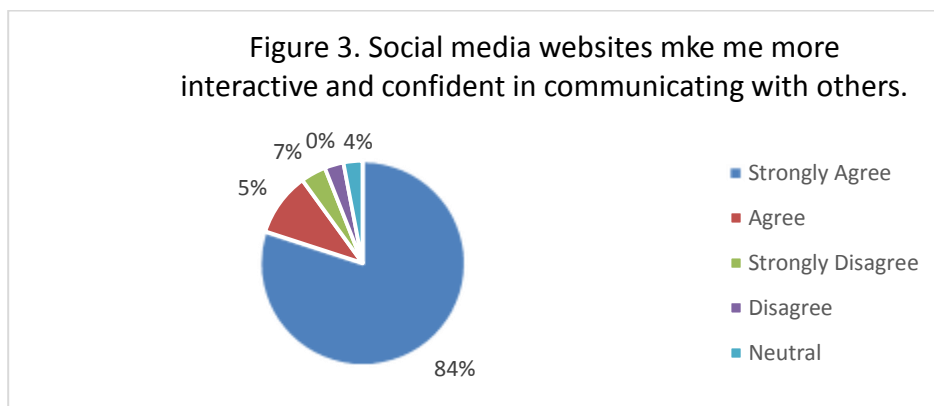


As to the statement (2) [I urge the College admin. to adopt social media platforms in the learning process in classes.], 72% of them strongly agree with this statement, 11% of them agree with this statement, 9% of them strongly disagree, and 8% were neutral in their opinion.

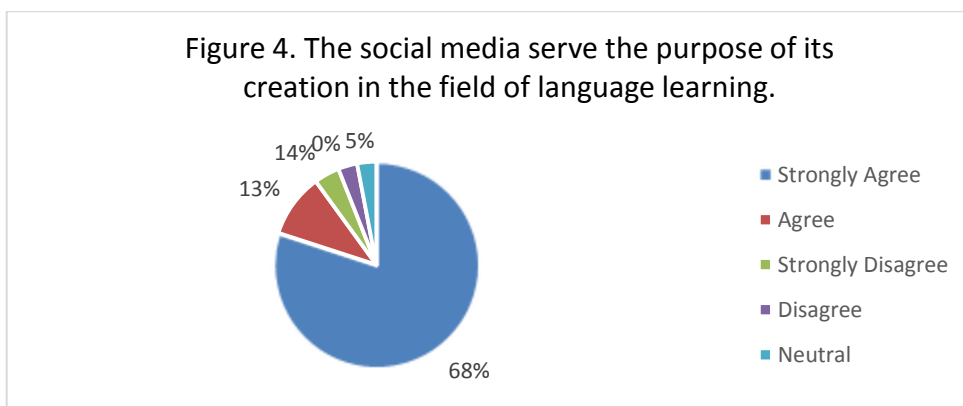


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Statement (3) [Social media websites make me more interactive and confident in communicating with others in English.] brought to light that 84% of them strongly agree with this statement, 5% of them agree with this statement, 7% of them strongly disagree, and 4% were neutral in their opinion.

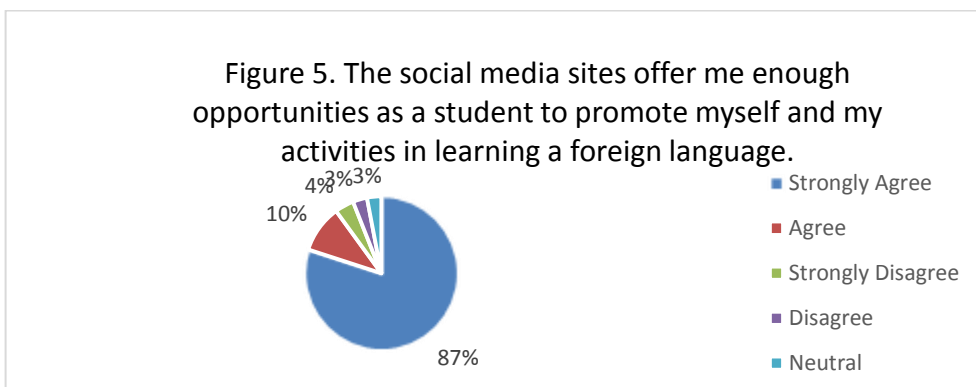


Moreover, Statement (4) [The social media serve the purpose of its creation in the field of language learning.] reflected that 68% of them strongly agree with this statement, 13% of them agree with this statement, 14% of them strongly disagree, and 5% disagree.

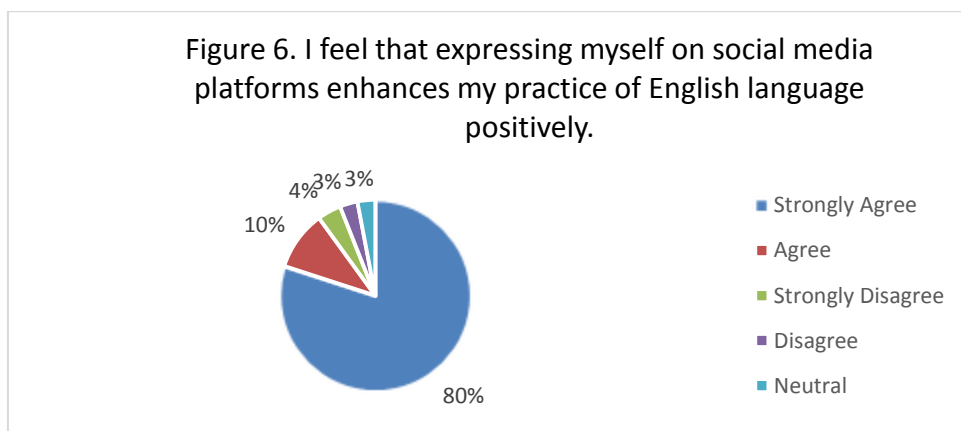


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Also, statement (5) [The social media sites offer me enough opportunities as a student to promote myself and my activities in learning a second language.] made clear that 87% of them strongly agree with this statement, 10% of them agree with this statement, 3% of them disagree.

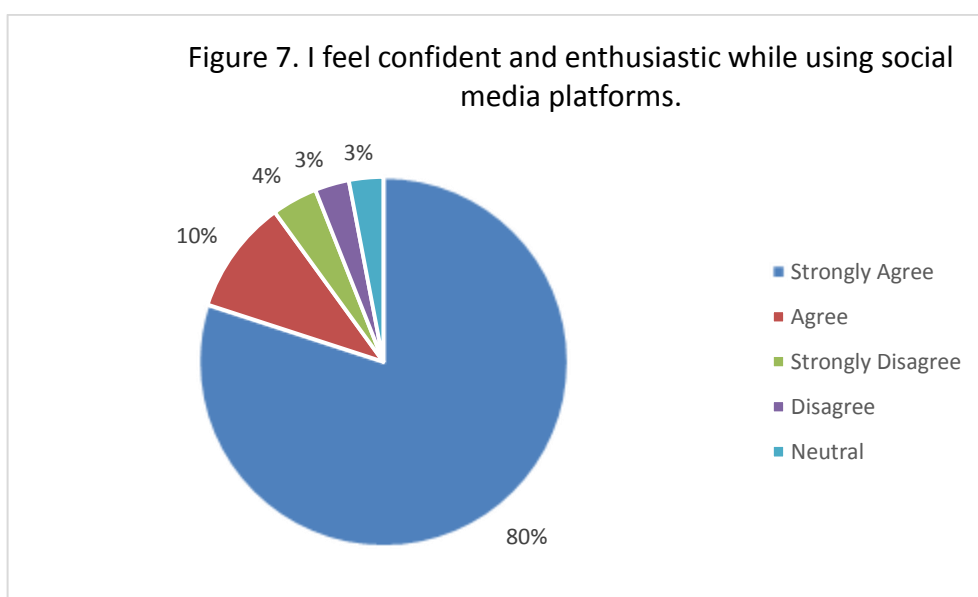


Statement (6) [I feel that expressing myself on social media platforms enhances my practice of English language positively.] stated that 82% of the participants strongly agree with this statement, 11% of them agree with this statement, 4% of them strongly disagree, 2% disagree, and 1% of them was neutral.



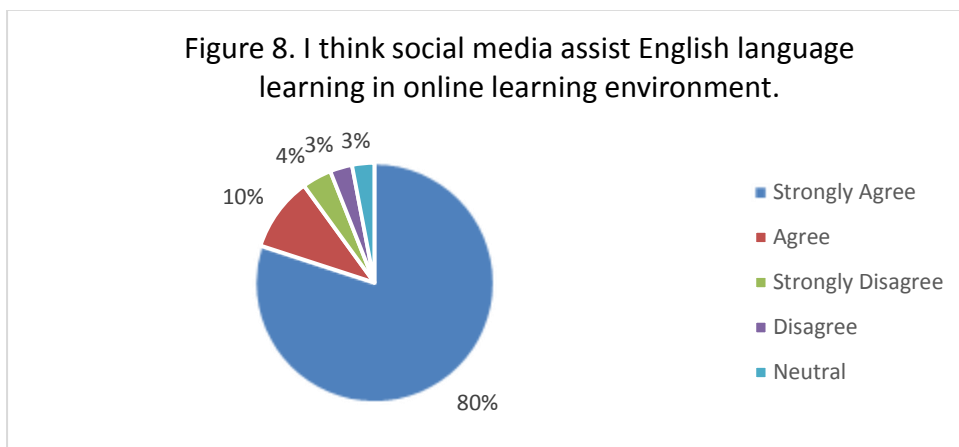
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Shedding light on the statement (7) [I feel confident and enthusiastic while using social media platforms.], it was found that 78% of the participants strongly agree with this statement, 9% of them agree with this statement, 6% of them strongly disagree, 4% disagree, and 3% of them was neutral.

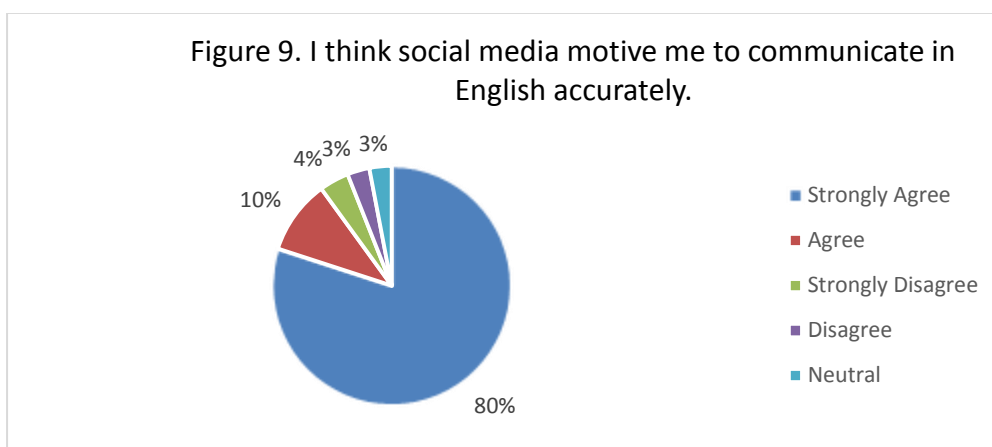


Statement (8) [I think social media assist English language learning in online learning environment] demonstrated that 75% of the participants strongly agree with this statement, 14% of them agree with this statement, 5% of them disagree, and 6% of them were neutral.

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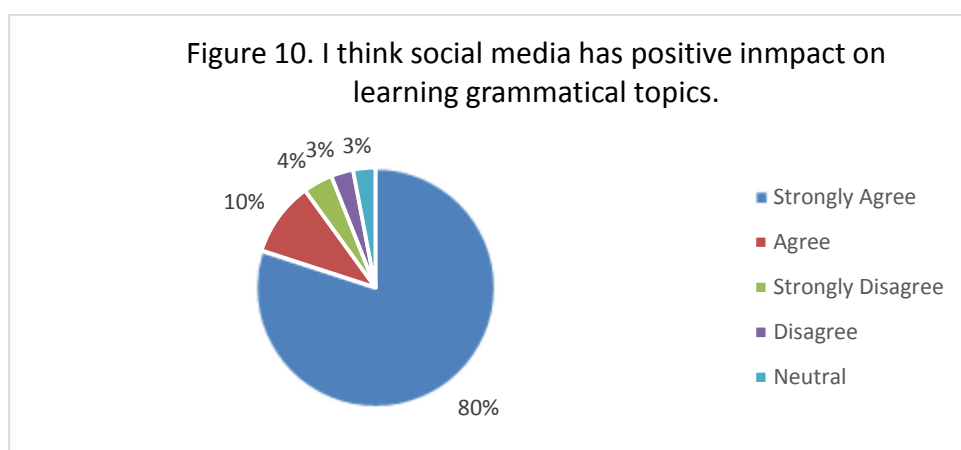


As to statement (9) [I think social media motivate me to communicate in English accurately.], it revealed that 92% of the participants strongly agree with this statement, 4% of them agree with this statement, 1% of them disagree, and 3% of them were neutral.



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Finally, as to the statement (10) [I think social media has positive impact on learning grammatical topics.], it confirmed that 80% of the participants strongly agree with this statement, 12% of them agree with this statement, 7% of them disagree, and 1% of them was neutral.



In sum, and as a response to the 10-statement questionnaire, the forty participants expressed their positive attitude toward the adoption and infusion of social media platforms in the learning process. Majority of the study participants disclosed their delight to use different social media applications in acquiring English grammatical topics. They feel confident and enthusiastic while using social media applications. Social media platforms enhanced their motivation to learn English grammatical topics.

6. Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations & Further Research

To sum up, as it could be inferred from the ten-question-questionnaire, learners feel confident with the advent of a new era of learning and teaching. Unlike us, today's learners are surrounded with

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blessings of new learning gadgets that make learning English grammatical topics easier than before.

As social media has the power to bridge the gap between what is in and what is out of classes, this is a good chance for this generation of learners to make use of all means of social media to enhance quality of the input received through watching and listening to authentic materials made available to them by the platforms of social media. Social media has the magic to facilitate an e-group learning where learners have a wide space of freedom to communicate and collaborate with each other confidently. Learners, through social media platforms, learn new grammatical topics with a zero taking risk phobia. They look at their instructors as learning process facilitators. Hence, disagreeing with today learners' point of views could bring about reverse results and would widen a gap between today's learners and learning and teaching processes.

So, learning and teaching in higher education domes shall encourage the use of social media tools rapidly. Lecturing is not a wise and fruitful access to learners' mentality. They browse internet very often and know well that learning and teaching process across the world is shifted, and portable gadgets could be applied in learning grammatical materials. Therefore, teachers of this digital world should change their teaching techniques to cope with the digital learners' needs and abandon outdated methods which are no more welcomed by them.

For further research, it is suggested to generalize this study to other educational levels including secondary schools where learners could make use of social media platforms in learning on their own pace with no burdens such as shyness, reluctance and demotivation affecting the process. Learners across Iraq shall touch the fruit of technology-

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based learning materials through application of social media platforms.

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Appendix: 1

A Student Questionnaire

I would very much appreciate if you could spare about 5 minutes of your valuable time to fill out this 10-question questionnaire on *the Use of Social Media in Learning English Grammatical Topics Effectively*. The data collected will be used for academic purposes only.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Name of student (Optional): -----

Age: -----

Date: -----

Please TICK the number that corresponds with your level of agreement:

Strongly Agree 1 **Agree 2** **Strongly Disagree 3** **Disagree 4** **neutral 5**

1. I surf the Internet on daily basis.

1	2	3	4	5
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2. I urge the College admin. to adopt social media platforms in the learning process in classes.

1	2	3	4	5
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3. Social media websites make me more interactive and confident in communicating with others in English.

1	2	3	4	5
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4. The social media serve the purpose of its creation in the field of language learning.

1	2	3	4	5
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5. The social media sites offer me enough opportunities as a student to promote myself and my activities in learning a foreign language.

1	2	3	4	5
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6. I feel that expressing myself on social media platforms enhances my practice of English language positively.

1	2	3	4	5
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7. I feel confident and enthusiastic while using social media platforms.

1	2		3	4	5
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8. I think social media assist English language learning in online learning environment.

1	2	3	4	5
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9. I think social media motivate me to communicate in English accurately.

1	2	3	4	5
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10. I think social media has positive impact on learning grammatical topics.

1	2	3	4	5
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