The Role of Literacy Events in Developing Iraqi's EFL Skills: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract:

Literacy events extract meaning from many sources including written ones. EFL learners might not be aware of the several activities, other than learning, that can help improve their language skills. The current quantitative descriptive study investigated the utilization of English sources outside the classroom. A total of (48) participants answered the survey of this study. The results of the study showed few participants use the target language in their daily life while the majority of the sample use literacy events outside the classroom with a variety of impact of developing their language domains. The study is important for Iraqi EFL teachers because it can be helpful in designing extracurricular activities in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: literacy, EFL, events, learners, English sources.

Introduction:

The complex nature of learning and literacy, especially in the fast-developing digital environments of the modern world, requires tools and techniques to absorb educational 'black-boxes' to scrutinize the ways students work whereas learning is done through a rich account of their practical actions which, then, inform pedagogic practice (Al-Asadi & Al-Asadi, 2016).

The current study investigates personal and non-curricular literacy events, their mobilization as resources in curricular work, and the way they act as a conduit of doing so. No other study looked at the importance of literacy events in developing Iraqi EFL students' language skills; therefore. This study aims to be a descriptive investigation of the practices of literacy events outside the classroom of Iraqi EFL students who participated in English courses offered by the Language Center in the Directorate of Scholarships and Cultural Relations/ Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR).

Bhatt's (2012) ethnographic study explored how students' assignments are written in the UK. The study used a phased multi method ethnographic approach with screen recordings in a screen-in-screen format to capture computer writing assignment activities in practice. Data was collected through observations and interviews to analyze students' applications of digital literacy in daily life and how these practices interact with the needs of class work. However; it is necessary to explain the scope of literacy events utilized in the current study.

The general concept of literacies refers to the "socially organized practices that make use of a symbol system and a technology of producing and disseminating it." (Scribner & Cole, 1981: p.236). Barton and Hamilton (2000) elaborated on this definition stating that literacy is the "general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives." (p.7). on the other hand, Gilster (1997) came with the early vision of digital literacy explaining it as simply a set of information management skills and the competancies involved in operating digital media. On the conterary, Lankshear and Knobel (2008) have pluralized the term 'literacy' as 'digital literacies' to encompass 'digital codification' and 'enculturalizations' (p.5-7) which is connected to meaning-making practices in various settings, communities, and identities in digital environments.

Media Literacy

One of the ways to develop English language skills is media literacy. According to Hobbs (2010), media literacy refers to the access and creation of messages using media tools. Potter (2018) supports this definition adding that media literacy enables interpretation of meaning. It is merely the ability to filter the content of messages in printed and electronic media. On the other hand, Bawden (2018) suggests the name 'digital literacy' which is explained as the ability to understand and use information from various resources.

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study is to investigate the perspectives of adult EFL learners about the role of out of class literacy events in developing their language skills. The study answers the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the perspectives of Iraqi EFL learners about the effectiveness of social media on learning English?
2. What are the perspectives of Iraqi EFL learners about life practices and their role in learning English?
3. How often do Iraqi EFL learners listen to the target language?
4. How often do Iraqi EFL learners use the target language?

Methodology

Sample of the Study

EFL teaching needs continuous development to meet the needs of students in all times (Al-Asadi, 2022). One of the ways of achieving this goal is by used is by studying views and beliefs of students, because learners' "cognitions about foreign language learning and teaching have a paramount influence on both teaching practices and curriculum design" (Borg, 2006; Horwitz, 2008). A sample of (48) Iraqi adult learners was used in this study. Participants were from various specialties as explained in (Table 1). They have participated in the English courses offered by the Language Center in the Directorate of Scholarships and Cultural Relations/ Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) in 2020-2022. They agreed to fill out the survey voluntarily. Data was collected via Google Forms. The respondents included (22) males (45%) and (26) females (54%). The age range of the participants was 18-68 years old as shown in (Figure 1). A total of (10) participants were PhD holders (20%). The sample also included (17) MA holders (35%), (19) participants with a BA degree (39%), and (2) participants with a high school diploma (4%). Concerning the specialization of the participants, (56%) of the sample has a degree in a scientific field of study, (35%) has a degree in

humanities, and (8%) of it has a high school diploma as explained in (Figure 2).

Table 1: Participants' Specialties

Specialty	Frequency	Percent
Accounting	4	8%
Biology	1	2%
Buisness Management	1	2%
Civil Engineering	3	6%
Communication Engineer	1	2%
Computer Engineering	2	4%
Computer Sciences	2	4%
Computers	1	2%
English	6	12%
English Language And Literature	1	2%
English Literature	1	2%
Genetics	1	2%
Geography Education	1	2%
High School	2	4%
History	1	2%
Human Studies	1	2%
Managment Hospital	1	2%
Mathematics	2	4%
Mech Eng	2	4%
Medical Physics	1	2%
Medical Science	1	2%
Microbiology	1	2%
Nursing	3	6%
Pharmacy	1	2%
Political Science	1	2%
Rissian	1	2%
Robotics Engineering	1	2%
Sciences	1	2%
Statistics	1	2%
Translation	2	4%

Al-Adab Journal **Issue. No (152) (March) 2025**
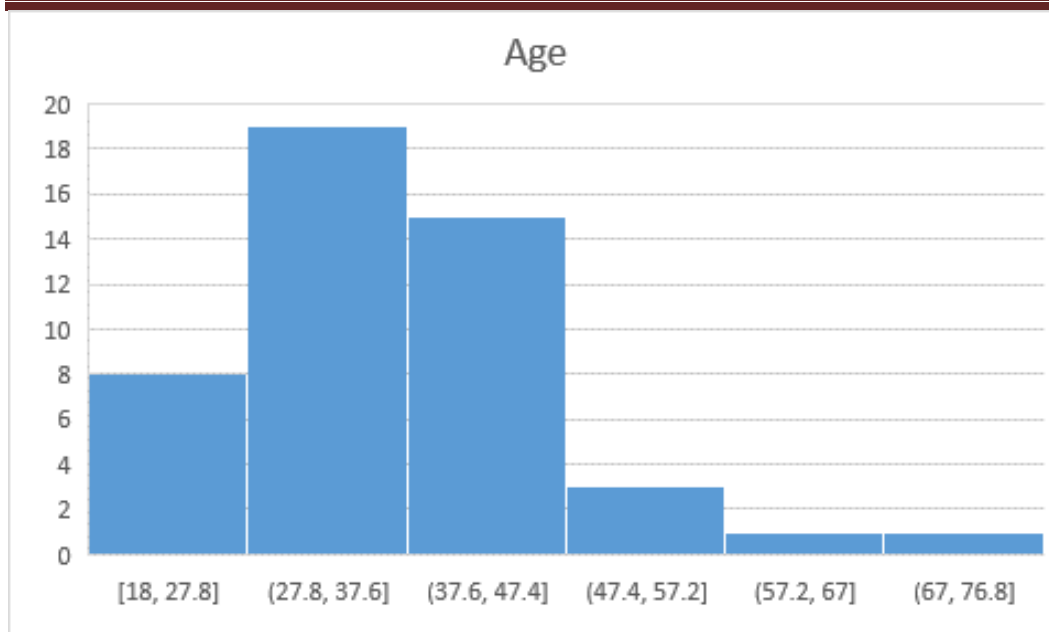
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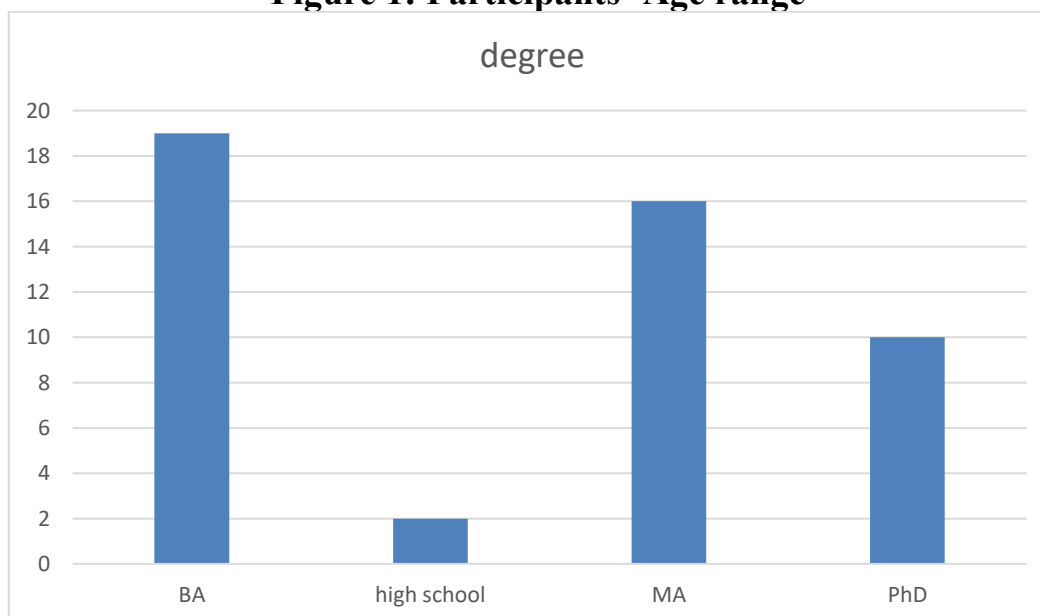
Figure 1: Participants' Age range

Figure 1: Participants' Degree

As far as number of years participants studied the target language, two responses were neglected because the participants left them empty. Therefore; results showed that (10%) of the sample did not study the target language at all (0 years of study), (60%) studied it for two years, (4%) studied it for three years, (13%) studied it for four years, (8%) for five years, (17%) for six years, (2%) for eight years, (2%) for nine years, (10%) for ten years, (8%) for 12 years, (2%) for 14 years, (6%) for 16 years, (2%) for 17 years, (2%) for 18 years, and (2%) for 33 years (see Figure 3).
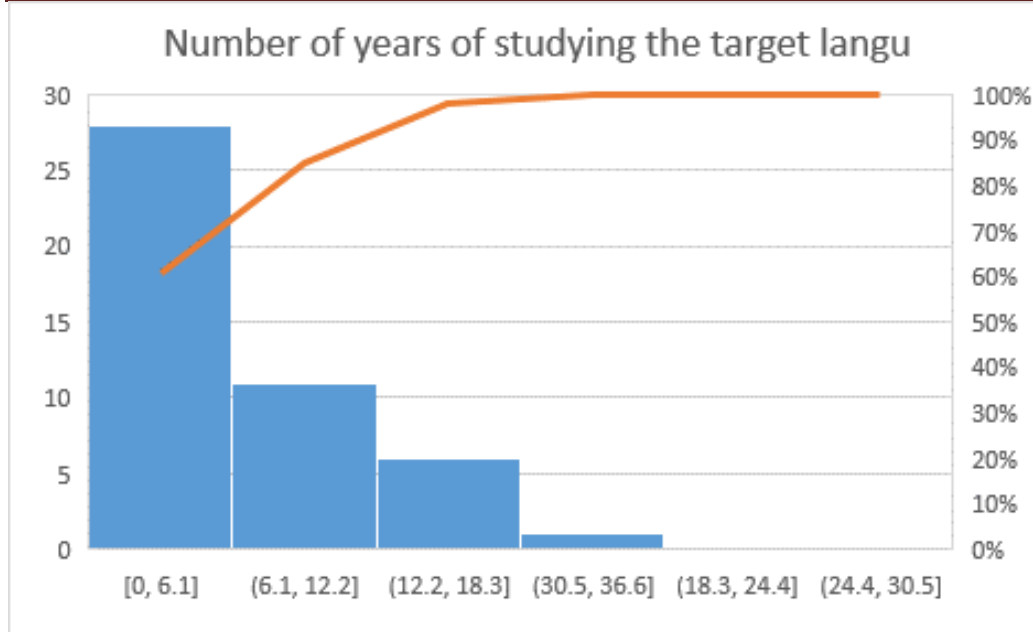
Figure 3: Number of Years Studying the Target Language

Instrument

In the current study, a survey (See Appendix I), which required 10 minutes to answer, was used. The survey was in Arabic because the English level of the participant vary from basic to upper intermediate. The items of the survey were organized into two major sections that address the research questions. The last section of the survey was the demographic section.

The survey involved (15) items organized into sections. Items 1-7 were of 4-likert scale items (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). They aimed at investigating the participants' beliefs about how social media helps them learn English. Items 8-9 were of 4-scale items (zero, 1,2,3 or more) that investigated the sample's view of the number of times they use or listen to the target language. Finally, items 10-15 of the survey asked about the demographics and the background information of the participants. They inquired about the number of years of studying English, gender, degree, age, specialty, and graduation date.

Data Collection

The survey was sent to the telegram groups of the classes of the Language Center and was posted on the LC's Facebook Page in June 2022. The Google Form was closed and data was collected in July 2022. The cover letter explained the study and stated that participation is voluntary and data is confidential.

Descriptive statistics are carries out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) to find out the frequency and percentage

Al-Adab Journal   **Issue. No (152) (March) 2025**

E-ISSN: 2706-9931   P-ISSN: 1994-473X

of agreement disagreement among the participants regarding the various questions of the survey.

Results and Discussions

This section presents the quantitative data of the study. Items 1-3 in the survey (Facebook Helps me learn English, Instagram helps me learn English, and Tik Tok helps me learn English) provided answers to the first research question of the current study which is:

- What are the perspectives of Iraqi EFL learners about the effectiveness of social media on learning English?

A calculation of the frequencies of the first item of the survey (Facebook helps me learn English) showed that (53%) of the participants agreed with this statement, (4%) strongly agreed, (26%) did not agree, and (13%) strongly disagreed (See Table 2). These results proved that Iraqis use Facebook widely and that a big number of them (57%) use it as a tool to improve their EFL language skills. However; the (39%) is not small in terms of using Facebook just for fun. In fact, I cannot have the final say of the latter percentage because my survey had not included an inquiry about other uses of Facebook or other means of social media.

Table 2: Facebook Helps Me Learn English

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
Facebook helps me learn English	Strongly disagree	6	13%
	Disagree	12	26%
	Agree	24	53%
	Strongly agree	2	4%

Two responses were neglected in the second item of the survey (Instagram helps me learn English) because the participants left them empty. The frequencies calculation of this item reported that (10%) of the sample strongly disagree that Instagram helps them learn English, (32%) of them disagree, (36%) agree with the statement, and (17%) strongly agree (See Table 3).

Table 3: Instagram Helps Me Learn English

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
Instagram helps me learn English	Strongly disagree	5	10%
	Disagree	15	32%
	Agree	17	36%
	Strongly agree	8	17%

The results of these two items revealed that Instagram is less likely to help Iraqi EFL learners learn the target language compared to Facebook.

Item three is related to TikTok, which is a new App that started to compete recently with Facebook and Instagram in Iraq. I wanted in this study to investigate the educational benefit of this App in terms of learning English. Therefore; I included the Statement (TikTok helps me learn English) in the survey. Responses to this item showed that (28%) of the sample strongly disagrees with it, 39% disagrees, and 32% agrees (See Table 4). Two responses were neglected because they were left empty.

Table 4: TikTok Helps Me Learn English

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
TikTok helps me learn English	Strongly disagree	13	28%
	Disagree	18	39%
	Agree	15	32%
	Strongly agree	0	0%

Disagreement of the benefit of this App regarding learning English is bigger than that of Facebook and Instagram, which entails the danger of this program on wasting the time of all categories of people in the Iraqi society not only in relation to English learning; but in all sides of life and all fields of study.

Items (4-9) of the survey answers the second research question of the current study which is:

- What are the perspectives of Iraqi EFL learners about life practices and their role in learning English?

Item (4) enquired about the role of online shopping in helping Iraqis learn the target language. Although online shopping differs in Iraq from other parts of the world, I consider it a gate to learn daily life English. Shopping via e-sites is increasing, however; it is not widely used in all Iraqi cities yet. Entrepreneurs have utilized social media to advertise their products and sell them using phone calls and chat on social media. I did not expect a huge agreement from the participants of this study to item (4) of the survey, but I have got a good percentage of agreement to it though. A total of (17%) of the sample strongly disagreed to the statement, (32%) disagreed, (45%) agreed, and (4%) strongly agreed (see Table 5). Two answers were neglected because they were left empty. Surprisingly, the agreement percentage came next after Facebook. It means that Iraqis live a new era of openness to e-development.

There are many other social media channels but I restricted my statements to include three only because they are the mostly used ones in Iraqi society. Item (5) asked about the role of TV in learning English. The statistical analysis of this item revealed that only 12% of the participants disagreed with this statement; whereas (57%) of them

Al-Adab Journal **Issue. No (152) (March) 2025**

E-ISSN: 2706-9931   **P-ISSN: 1994-473X**

agreed and (29%) strongly agreed. Only one answer was neglected because it was left empty (Table 5).

Table 5: Watching TV Helps Me Learn English

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
Watching TV helps me learn English	Strongly disagree	0	0%
	Disagree	6	12%
	Agree	27	57%
	Strongly agree	14	29%

Item (6) of the survey stated the following: (Spending time with friends helps me learn English). (11%) of the sample expressed that they strongly disagree with this statement, (31%) disagreed to it, (35%) agreed, and (22%) strongly agreed (Table 6).

Table 6: Spending time with friends helps me learn English

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
Spending time with friends helps me learn English	Strongly disagree	5	11%
	Disagree	14	31%
	Agree	16	35%
	Strongly agree	10	22%

Items (7-9) are of four scales too (zero, 1, 2, 3 or more). They aim to reveal the frequency of the number of times participants use or listen to the target language per day. Item (7) asked about the number of English programs participants watch every day. The results showed that (18%) of them do not watch any program in English, (43%) of them watch one program per day, (25%) watch two programs per day, and (12%) of them watch three or more English programs every day (Table 7).

Table 7: Watching TV Helps Me Learn English

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
How many English programs do you watch every day?	Zero	9	18%
	1	21	43%
	2	12	25%
	3 or more	6	12%

Item (8) of the survey was about the number of English songs participants listen to every day. The results showed that (22%) of the sample listen to one song daily, (4%) listen to two songs, (12%) listen to three or more songs, and (60%) do not listen to English songs at all (Table 8).

Table 8: How many English songs do you listen to every day

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
How many English songs do you listen to every day?	Zero	30	60%
	1	10	22%
	2	2	4%
	3 or more	6	12%

Finally, item (9) is concerned with the productivity of English. It asked participants about the number of times they use English daily. The findings showed that (27%) of the sample do not use English, (35%) use it once a day – which is good considering the nature of Iraqi society which is built solely on using the mother tongue for communication, (16%) uses the target language twice a day, and (20%) use it three or more times (Table 9).

Table 9: How Many Times Do You Use English Per Day?

Item	Scale	Frequency	%
How many times do you use English per day?	Zero	13	27%
	1	16	35%
	2	7	16%
	3 or more	12	20%

Conclusion

The current study is an investigation of the perspectives of Iraqi EFL adult learners of the importance of literacy events in developing their language domains. It looked at literacy events outside the classroom. The sample included a total of (28) Iraqi EFL students who participated in English courses offered by the Language Center in the Directorate of Scholarships and Cultural Relations/ Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR). The results of the study showed that less than 30% of the participants use the target language in their daily life unlike the percentage of listening to the target language which is 60%, indicating that literacy events outside the classroom vary in their impact of developing the language domains of Iraqi EFL learners. The results also showed that TV is an effective way of developing the skills of the target language because more than (40%) of the participants indicated that they watch 1-3 movies per day. The surprising finding was that a good percentage of the sample reported that mixing with friends help improve their language skills. However, I expected that online shopping would have an effect on the improvement of the participants' EFL skills but the results showed the opposite.

The current study is important for Iraqi EFL teachers because it gives a description of the interest of Iraqi EFL learners of the social media platforms that can be helpful in designing extracurricular activities in the EFL classroom. It is also an initiative for graduate students who could conduct a thorough study starting from the current results to search the issue of social media and its impact on different groups of EFL learners in Iraqi education institutes or any other entities.

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Al-Adab Journal   **Issue. No (152) (March) 2025**

E-ISSN: 2706-9931   P-ISSN: 1994-473X

Appendix I

مصادر تعلم اللغة الأنكليزية

تم اختيارك لملء هذا الاستبيان لأنك أحد المشاركين في دورات اللغة الانكليزية التي أقامها مركز اللغة في دائرة البعثات والعلاقات الثقافية في وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي. يهمنا معرفة وجهة نظرك بشأن مصادر تعلم اللغة الانكليزية خارج الصف. يستغرق ملء الاستبيان اقل من عشرة دقائق. ستستعمل هذه المعلومات لاغراض الدراسة الحالية. المشاركة بالاستبيان اختيارية ويمكنك التوقف عن الاجابة إذا شعرت بعدم الرغبة بملء الاستبيان.

شكراً لاهتمامكم بهذه الدراسة. إذا كان لديك أي استفسار عن هذا المشروع البحثي أرجو أن لا تتردد بالتواصل مع الباحثة على بريدها الالكتروني alassadyf@yahoo.com

1.   اختر الاجابة التي تعبر عن رأيك

Mark only one oval per row.

	لا اوافق بشدة	لا اوافق	اوافق	اوافق بشدة
يساعدني تطبيق الفيسبوك على تعلم اللغة الانكليزية	◯	◯	◯	◯
يساعدني تطبيق الانستغرام على تعلم اللغة الانكليزية	◯	◯	◯	◯
يساعدني تطبيق التك توك على تعلم اللغة الانكليزية	◯	◯	◯	◯
يساعدني التسوق الالكتروني على تعلم اللغة الانكليزية	◯	◯	◯	◯
تساعدني مشاهدة التلفاز على تعلم اللغة الانكليزية	◯	◯	◯	◯
قضاء الوقت مع الاصدقاء يساعدني على تعلم اللغة الانكليزية	◯	◯	◯	◯

Al-Adab Journal   **Issue. No (152) (March) 2025**

E-ISSN: 2706-9931   P-ISSN: 1994-473X

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مصادر تعلم اللغة الانكليزية

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الانكليزية

2.   اختر الاجابة التي تعبر عن رأيك

Mark only one oval per row

	او اكثر 3	2	1	صفر
كم برنامجاً تشاهد يومياً باللغة الانكليزية؟	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
كم اغنية تستمع لها يومياً باللغة الانكليزية؟	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
كم مرة في اليوم تتكلم باللغة الانكليزية؟	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

3.   عدد سنوات دراستك للغة الانكليزية

4.   الجنس

Mark only one oval.

⬭ male

⬭ female