The Role of Social Media in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Academic Writing

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Summary:

The present research aims to identify the role of social media in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing and to examine if there is a significant difference among students in social media use based on their academic stage. Additionally, the research aims to identify which academic stage do students use social media in learning academic writing more than the other stages. Thus, One hundred twenty EFL students were selected randomly from the Department of English at the College of Education for Women / University of Baghdad as the sample of this research. A questionnaire of (12) items with 5-alternatives developed by Saleh, S. T. (2019) was administered to the research sample as it is a quantitative in nature. SPSS version (23) was employed to answer the raised questions included: a one-sample t-test was run, One-way ANOVA, and the researcher used post hoc tests to categorize which academic stage uses social media more than the others. The findings of the research revealed that social media has a strong positive role in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing. There is a significant difference among students based on their academic stage in learning academic writing through social media use. Students in the second stage come close to the first stage in employing social media in learning academic writing. As for stage three and stage four, students use social media in learning academic writing less than the students in the second stage.

Chapter 1

1.1. Introduction

Critical developments took place in the technologies intersecting with second language teaching, second language assessment, language analysis, and various factors of language use in the previous 30 years. In numerous contexts, the Internet and other electronic sources lead to high accessibility of English for learners, indicating the significance of English on the global level due to the linguistic and sociocultural distinctions between English and other languages. Bruce and Hogan (1998) highlighted the remarkable developments occurring in the expectations regarding the students' capability of successfully utilizing language users. The skills that English language users need should have direct relevance to English language teachers. Moreover, technology plays a significant role in the development of language. The relation between technology and language use in the modern world should encourage language professionals to consider the changes brought by technology in English language learning. Technology is also significant in student learning and communication. To illustrate, the use of technology among students for personal communication has increased (Bauerlein, 2010). Compared to students of past generations, the current students need to write more frequently. According to Gorney (2012), digital instruments including Facebook, WhatsApp, messages, and YouTube among others have changed the current status of English learning.

Zheng, Yim, and Warshauser (2018) highlighted that social network sites offer more opportunities for second language learners to participate in daily writing activities and for pupils to make better writing progress in the classroom environment. It was also added that social media as a medium of writing may indicate the potential for language learners to communicate with native English speakers in genuine and persuasive schemes while putting the written language into practice. Chepkemoi, Situma, and Murunga (2018) mentioned the popularity of Facebook and other social network sites, which emerged through the formation of knowledge in the use

of information technology among secondary school students and undergraduates. Wood and Joshi (2009) found that the degree of students' text language use was positively related to his or her scores in terms of word reading, vocabulary, phonological awareness measures, and writing.

Notably, writing skills are crucial for students' achievement and success in the workforce. Kay (2011) described these skills as the first within the top five requirements for job seeking. Suparno, Jonah (2006:14) defined writing as a sequence of activities comprising some stages, namely the preparatory stage, the content creation, review, and revisions or enhancement posts, Jonah (2006:29) argued that writing can be applied as an indirect method of communicating to others to present information. However, mastering this skill is considered to be challenging in terms of the development and arrangement of ideas, including the conversion of the ideas into readable text. Furthermore, the skills involved in writing are significantly complicated. To achieve this skill, second language writers are required to focus on their capability of planning, organizing, spelling, and presenting punctuation. Technical knowledge in terms of writing conventions, style guides, and formatting for various situations is an essential writing skill. Given the conditions that require various writing styles and the ability to present a suitable tone for the text, both skills are regarded as crucial and can be applied in any conditions.

Addressing students' writing in descriptive text, several common problems are present. These issues are also present in writing review texts (Bahri & Sugeng, 2009: 15). The first issue is related to grammar, which deters the students from the proper use of tenses. The second issue is associated with the arrangement of ideas, which the students are not capable of. The third issue is present in organizing the paragraphs, which leads to confusion in writing orientation and interpretative recount. The fourth issue lies in vocabulary where unsuitable words are used by students. Provided that writing skills comprise the knowledge and capabilities associated with presenting ideas through the written word, research should be

conducted on whether social network sites are able to support undergraduates to achieve good English writing. It also measures to what extent social media helps students write better in their respective language.

1.2. Social Network Sites

Social network sites are described as websites and applications for social networking. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described social network sites as a group of internet-based applications based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. These sites establish and exchange user-generated content. Meanwhile, Sari (2017: 5) defined social network sites as Internet media allowing users to portray themselves, carry out interaction, collaborate, share, carry out communication with other users, and establish a virtual social bond. Social network sites are also defined as a popular communication channel, which is remarkably widespread and rapid, significantly efficacious, and perceived to be trustworthy by billions of individuals for sharing and discovering content related to people, brands, information, entertainment, and know-how (Dearborn, 2014).

1.3. The Objectives of the Study

1- To identify the role of social media in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing.

2- To identify the difference among students in social media use based on their academic stage.

3- To identify the academic stage in which students use social media in learning academic writing more than the other stages.

1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

1- What is the role of social media in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing?

2- Is there a significant difference among students in social media use based on their academic stage?

3- Which academic stage do students use social media in learning academic writing more than the other stages?

1.5. Regarding Hypotheses:

H0: Social media has no positive role in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level of academic writing.

H0: There is no significant difference among students in social media use according to their academic stage.

Chapter Two

2.1. The Importance of Writing

Writing is among the four language skills that need to be focused on. Given its role in proficiency in communication and accurate and effective expression of messages, it is crucial in language production. Notably, writing is the most complex aspect of the acquisition of a second language (Ferris, 2011). To illustrate, university students do not possess adequate knowledge or skills to possess the confidence in carrying an efficient and effective communication using English as a foreign language. Furthermore, language teaching comprises several dimensions, including the creation of oral expression, skills in writing, literature, and innovativeness (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Harmer (2004: 21-22) highlighted the significance of writing, which includes the encouragement it provides for students to be focused on accuracy in language use. Considering that their thought process takes place as they write, they would be able to solve issues in writing, which contributes to positive development. Following that, writing is frequently employed as a method of improving the language that they think of. In this case, the writing skill is employed to ensure that a note is taken regarding what they have gained from the learning process. Notably, this skill is mostly practical as a preparation for other activities. It also can be employed as an essential factor of a more significant activity that is focused on other elements including language practice, acting, or speaking.

2.2. Social Network Sites

The impact of modern technology that is used for personal communication in English is evident. The future of English would be continuously impacted by electronic communication (AbuSa'aleek, 2015). English language is also influenced by the development of modern technologies in all parts of the world. Social network sites have an impact on all individuals' lives, specifically those in the educational community. Online tools including social networks, search engines, blogs, chat rooms, mailing, and websites provide significant possibilities for users to learn about profile creation, form a community that allows connection and communication through online platforms, sharing of thoughts, interaction with other users, and publication of comments on posts among others.

A wide range of experts opinions have identified four primary benefits of the use of social network sites in higher education, which include improvement in relationships and motivations to learn, provision of personalized course material, and development of collaborative capabilities (Wheeler, Yeomans, & Wheeler, 2008; Rifkin, Longnecker, Leach, & Ortia,2009). According to Liccardi et al. (2007), the social connection among students allows the sharing of their daily learning experiences and discussions on diverse topics through social network sites. These platforms also provide a space for students to truly display their skills in oral and written communication, making it a crucial productive invention in successful communication (Kellogg, 2008).

2.3. Social Network Sites and Writing

Social network sites are crucial in learning English as they allow English language learners to make improvements in writing, reading, reading text and phrases, and vocabulary. According to educators, software tools effectively fulfil the needs of English Language Learners. Thus, Baker (2009) added that the teacher is no longer the only content provided as the students are capable of applying learning methods that align with their daily life requirements. The continuous exposure to academic business and technical texts allows learners to improve their fluency and

understanding. Galvin & Greenhow (2020) found that social network sites were able to strengthen EFL learners' writing capabilities and influence their focus on the trends of interaction and language information. Generally, social network sites are crucial in encouraging language learning and improving writing skills, considering that students polish these skills in class (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). Most of the students spend long hours online to communicate with their friends. In this case, they may use online platforms and practice their writing on a daily basis. Lakhal (2022) highlighted social network sites as effective methods of offering learners with high prospects of developing skills in vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and written communication. With proper utilization of these skills, students would succeed in the creative area of writing. The online platforms can be used to assist students in carrying out daily writing practice. Subsequently, Putri (2021) reached a conclusion that social network sites offer remarkable advantages to students, particularly in terms of writing skills.

It is indicated from the data that students who spend more time on social network sites often possess stronger writing skills compared to those who do not. According to Al-Ali (2014), learners have more involvement in the English learning assignments distributed to them, in which images from their personal Instagram accounts are utilized as contents. Participants have the willingness to focus on developing the language used in their writing activities more efficaciously compared to those who are not able to use Instagram in their research due to the association of the images with their learning context. Furthermore, Yunus et al. (2012) emphasized the efficacy of Facebook for improvement in writing, allowing students to acquire new vocabulary by reading the comments of other students. In line with this, Vikneswaran and Krish (2014) highlighted that the students showed stronger writing skills in English through Facebook as a result of peer influence and their sharing of ideas. Martínez (2021) highlighted that the use of Facebook in an English subject contributes to the possibility of applying a social network environment that

allows students to learn social topics while practicing their English. In this case, Facebook encourages web-based exchange between students outside the classroom.

2.4. Connectivism: Learning Theory for the Digital Age

Connectivism is a conceptual framework that perceives learning as a network phenomenon impacted by technology and socialization (Siemens, 2006). It is considered to have origins in the principles observed through chaos, network and complexity, and self-organization theories (Siemens, 2006). According to Downes (2012), connectivism is underpinned by connectionism, associations, and graph theory. Furthermore, the starting point for learning in this framework takes place when knowledge is initiated by learners involved in a learning community. Learning communities are described as a combination of similar areas of interest that enables the exchange, distribution, dialogue, and collective thinking (Siemens, 2006).

The involvement in the learning community creates conversations between learners and other members of the community, which comprises individuals with higher knowledge. In the Web 2.0 era, these conversations comprise words and images (e.g., video, multimedia, etc.). With the emergence of Web 2.0, learners are able to develop personal learning environments (PLEs) enabling the establishment and utilization of learning resources. Learning takes place through the formation and traversing of networks. Involvement in network activities contributes to the development, elimination, or modification of the connection strength. Following that, the recognition of the salience of patterns by perceivers in the network involves learning. Overall, these connections appear simultaneously within the brain and outside the brain through exchanges. Connectivism suggests that learning may be present in "non-human appliances", which could be kept and exploited by technology (Siemens, 2006). However, no real concept of transferring, making, or developing knowledge is present in connectivism; rather, it is present through the links developed in network activity. Additionally, the distribution of perception,

sense, meaning establishment, and filtration to networks of human and technological nodes assist in controlling the significant expansion of the existing knowledge (Siemens, 2006).

2.5. Previous Studies

Wil et al (2016) investigated if social media can contribute to writing skills among pupils as a method to learn how to write properly in English. The researcher chose (40) secondary-school students from one of the schools at Bagan Serai in Malaysia who were employed to answer a questionnaire that included structured and open-ended questions to collect the needed data. The questionnaire consisted of six sections with Yes / No questions and Likert-scale questions. They adopted a quantitative research approach. The results showed that roughly half of the sample engaged with the remarkable usage of social media on daily basis. The results figure out a positive agreement among students towards using social media so as to improve writing skills. It revealed that social media can bring a positive influence on promoting satisfaction and facilitates the process of writing through interaction over social media to learn the English language.

Lakhal (2022) conducted a study to explore whether social media has an effect on developing university students' English writing skills, as well as to examine the correlation between social media and writing skills. A sample of (153) university students who were studying the English language as a foreign language at the University of Moulay Ismail had been chosen as the participants of this quantitative research. The researcher adopted a non-probability sampling technique. A 5 Likert questionnaire consisting of (10) items was administered to the targeted sample as reliable tool to collect the required data. Version (20) of SPSS employed for processing data. The findings of the research revealed that social media has a significant role in developing students writing skills. In addition, the findings showed that there is a positive correlation between social media and writing development.

In (2020) Awadeh carried out research looking for the contribution of social media in improving students' skills of academic writing and determining the social media use of Arab university students. To achieve these objectives, exploratory descriptive research was executed by adopting a qualitative approach as a suitable method. The researcher utilized a descriptive bibliography survey. To analyze the theme of published, online, and printed studies for the last five years, the researcher applied article analysis to the collected data. The results of the research disclosed that there is a change in perceiving the English language among Arab university students, particularly in the way of using hypertext, as well as the utilization of social media came to be a critical proponent in developing the skills of academic writing.

Harwati (2018) attempted to identify how social media could affect students' writing skills. To do this, a questionnaire of (21) items was administered to a group of (80) secondary school students at one academy located in Malaysia. The research is quantitative in nature. The frequencies and percentages were used as tools to analyze the collected data. The findings of the research revealed that social media offers an opportunity for students to write better, improve their skills of communication, read articles that are available on the internet, generate new ideas for their writing, overcome anxiety, and improve writing punctuation and other linguistics features.

Kamila et al. (2019) investigated the influence of social media on the written production of Algerian EFL university students. The researcher designed a case study that deals with the production of students' academic writing. To collect the required data, two questionnaires were administered to the study sample, who were (31) third-year EFL students at the Department of English Language at the University of Tlemcan and twenty-two English teachers in the same department. The first questionnaire aimed to assess the effect of social media on EFL learners' written productions. The second questionnaire was designed to investigate the views of teachers about the effect of social media on EFL learners and the causes behind their

errors. The findings of the study showed that there is a relationship between the use of social media and writing production. The overuse use of social media reflected positively on their writing.

Chapter Three

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

EFL university students from the Department of English at the College of Education for Women / University of Baghdad were the participants of this research. One hundred twenty EFL students were selected randomly who were females in total. The sample of the research comprised all four stages of the Department for the academic year (2021-2022). Based on the convenient accessibility and proximity of the college, the researchers chose this population, and none of the researchers, to the best of their knowledge, has touched upon the role of social media in developing writing skills in the targeted context.

3.2 Instrument

For collecting the needed data, a questionnaire of (12) items with 5-alternatives was administered to the research sample as it is a quantitative in nature, which is an appropriate tool (kerlinger, 1986). it was developed by saleh, s. t. (2019) to measure the effectiveness of using whatsapp as a pedagogical tool to enhance EFL learners' reading and writing skills. To measure the internal consistency of the used questionnaire, alpha cronbach test was run. It indicated (.742), which is a good reliable value.

3.3 Data Analysis

The researchers employed the statistical package of social sciences (SPSS, 23) to answer the raised questions. The test of normality was run to test the study sample distribution, which supports the researcher in choosing the appropriate tests for processing data. In order to examine the internal consistency of the scale's items, Reliability Statistic was used. To answer question one, a one-sample t-test was run.

As for question two, One-way ANOVA was utilized to examine whether there is a significant difference in the use of social media between students based on their academic stage, it showed a significant difference between students, then the researcher used post hoc tests to categorize which academic stage uses social media more than the others.

1. Tests of Normality

In order to choose the appropriate tests to analyze the collected data and find out answers to the raised questions, the researchers tested the normal distribution of the study sample. The result was as shown in table (1). Normal distribution was achieved.

Table (1) Tests of Normality

	gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
social media	female	.071	120	.200*	.985	120	.224

Normal Q-Q Plot of الكلي
for gender= female
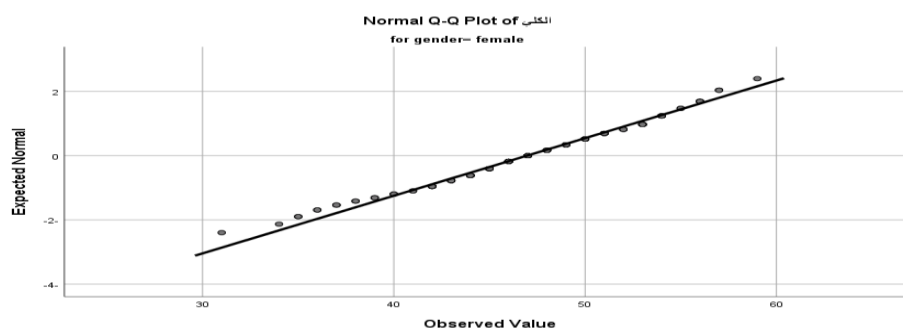
2. Reliability Statistics

To test the reliability of the multi-question Likert scale by examining the internal consistency of the items, the Alpha Cronbach test was run. It came out to be (o.742), which is an acceptable value. (Bland & Altman, 1997)

Table (2) Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.742	12

Chapter Four

4.1. Results

 This chapter reveals the outputs of the raised questions.

4.1.1 What is the role of social media in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing?

T-Test

Table (3) One-Sample Test

					Test Value = 36				
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference			
	Mean	Std. Deviation					Lower	Upper
social media	46.9583	5.57213	21.543	119	.000	10.95833	9.9511	11.9655

The results as displayed in the above table (3) show that the mean score of social media use is (M=46.9583, SD= 5.57213), which is higher than the test value = 36, and the calculated (t) = 21.543 is higher than the tabulated (t) (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. The p-value is (0.000) less than (0.05), which means there is a significant difference between social media use mean score and test value approving that social media have a strong positive role in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in academic writing. As a result, the null hypothesis proposed by the researcher "social media has no a positive role in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing" is rejected.

4.1.2 Is there a significant difference among students in social media use based on their academic stage?

One-way ANOVA

Table (4) One-way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	337.292	3	112.431	3.884	.011
Within Groups	3357.500	116	28.944		
Total	3694.792	119			

To examine the possibility of the significant difference in using social media among the study sample based on their academic stage, one-way ANOVA at the level of significance (0.05) was used as a type of statistical test that compares the variance in the group means within a sample. The outputs as shown in table (4) indicate (F=3.884, P=0.011<0.05, which means since the calculated F (3.884) is greater than the tabulated F (2.68) upon the degree of freedom (116) at the level of significance (0.05). This implies there is a significant difference among students in social media use based on their academic stage. Thus, it leads to rejecting the null hypothesis.

4.1.3 Which academic stage do students use social media in learning academic writing more than the other stages?

Post Hoc Tests

Table (5) Post Hoc Tests

(I) Academic Level	(J) Academic Level	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Stage One	Stage Two	-2.66667-	1.38910	.225
	Stage Three	1.66667	1.38910	.628
	Stage Four	1.16667	1.38910	.835
Stage Two	Stage One	2.66667	1.38910	.225
	Stage Three	4.33333*	1.38910	.012
	Stage Four	3.83333*	1.38910	.034
Stage Three	Stage One	-1.66667-	1.38910	.628

	Stage Two	-4.33333-*	1.38910	.012
	Stage Four	-.50000-	1.38910	.984
	Stage One	-1.16667-	1.38910	.835
Stage Four	Stage Two	-3.83333-*	1.38910	.034
	Stage Three	.50000	1.38910	.984
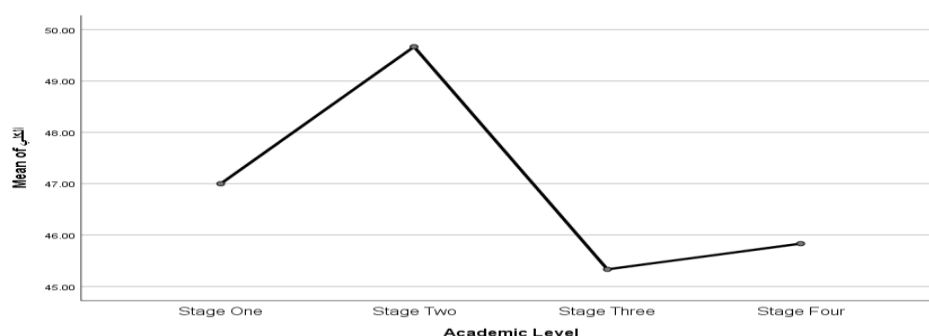
To identify which academic stage uses social media in developing writing more significantly than others, post hoc tests were used. The results of multiple comparison analysis show a significant difference between Stage Two and stage three at the level of significance (.012< 0.05), on the one hand, a significant difference between stage two and stage four at the level of significance (.034< 0.05) on the other hand. In brief, students in the second stage come close to the first stage in employing social media in learning academic writing, as for stage three and stage four, students use social media in learning academic writing less than the students in the second stage.

4.2. Discussion

As a significant means of interacting and exchanging feelings, thoughts, and information in virtual communities, social media have taken a vital role over the past decades as mediated tools allow students to participate actively at a convenient time to discuss plans, express ideas, and acquire new knowledge. Social media have offered an educational environment that instigates constructivist learning, thus the current research aimed to identify the role of social media in developing Iraqi EFL

learners' level in academic writing. Three questions were raised; the finding of the first question is congruent with the findings of studies conducted by Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich, 2013; Mensah & Nizam, 2016; Sakkir , Rahman & Salija, 2016; Bakeer, 2018; Abdullahi et al., 2019; Wil et al., 2016; Lakhal, 2022) shown that social media has a significant positive role in developing students' academic writing performance. It supports them in developing their repertoire of terminology and provides them with opportunities to communicate in English in a way that enables them to boost their linguistic aptitudes. The result is incompatible with similar studies achieved by (Belal, 2014; Ghouali, Kamila., & Benmoussat, 2019) where social media has a negative effect on students writing performance. They found that students tend to use informal abbreviations, expressions, and contractions, which were acquired due to the overuse of social media. As for question two, the result revealed that there is a significant difference among students based on their academic stage in learning academic writing through social media use, in which, the second-stage students showed a significant difference compared to the other academic stages in learning academic writing. Second-stage students with more robust self-regulation were more resistant to external disturbances and could keep their learning behaviors under control compared to students in the other academic stages that may browse the Internet just for fun, chatting with their friends. The second-stage students showed great ambition in seizing the opportunity of the internet to gain higher learning results.

4.3. Conclusion

The current research was carried out to identify the role of social media in developing Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing and to examine if there is a significant difference among students in social media use based on their academic stage. Furthermore, the research aimed to identify which stage do students use social media in learning academic writing more than the other stages. The findings of the research disclosed that social media has a strong positive role in developing

Iraqi EFL learners' level in the academic writing. There is a significant difference among students in social media use based on their academic stage. Students in the second stage come close to the first stage in employing social media in learning academic writing. As for stage three and stage four, students use social media in learning academic writing less than the students in the second stage.

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دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تطوير الكتابة الأكاديمية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في العراق

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الملخص:

يهدف البحث الحالي إلى التعرف على دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تطوير مستوى الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية استقصاء ما إذا كان هناك اختلاف كبير بين الطلاب في استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على أساس مرحلتهم الأكاديمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يهدف البحث إلى تحديد المرحلة الدراسية التي يستعمل فيها الطلاب وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعلمهم الكتابة الأكاديمية أكثر من المراحل الأخرى. وعليه تم اختيار مائة وعشرين طالبة من طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية للبنات/ جامعة بغداد بطريقة عشوائياً كعينة لهذا البحث. تم تطبيق استبانة مكونة من (12) فقرة ذات الخمس بدائل من إعداد صالح (2019) على عينة البحث. تم استخدام الإصدار(23) من برنامج SPSS للإجابة على الأسئلة المطروحة والتي تضمنت اختبارات: اختبار t-test العينة واحدة، وتحليل التباين الأحادي (One-way ANOVA) ، واستعمل الباحث الاختبارات البعدية المخصصة لتصنيف المرحلة الأكاديمية التي استعملت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أكثر من غيرها. حيث أظهرت نتائج البحث أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لها دور إيجابي قوي في تطوير مستوى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الكتابة الأكاديمية. توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الطلاب حسب مرحلتهم الأكاديمية في تعلم الكتابة الأكاديمية من خلال استعمال وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. يقترب طلاب المرحلة الثانية من المرحلة الأولى في توظيف وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعلم الكتابة الأكاديمية. أما في المرحلتين الثالثة والرابعة، فإن استعمال الطلاب لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعلم الكتابة الأكاديمية أقل من طلاب المرحلة الثانية.