

The Impact of Influencers on Social Media platforms in learning English as a foreign Language

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Abstract

The current study is applied to examine the effect of social media influencers on the learning of the English language among Iraqi university students. Under its mixed-methods approach, the current study distributed questionnaires to 300 University of Baghdad and Al-Iraqia University students and conducted interviews. This study focuses on the perceptions of the personalities of the influencers and on the improvements they motivate and create. Findings from the study indicate that social media influencers are influential motivators to the learning of the students. More so, these social media influencers are beneficial for the improvement of the oral skills of the students, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and listening skills. Nonetheless, the study reveals some limitations, such as accuracy concerning grammar. More so, the study reveals that there is informality concerning the learning from social media. The current paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the role of digital learning among Iraq's higher education systems and offers recommendations for educators, students, and institutions seeking to utilize social media for language development.

Keywords: Impact, Influencers, English language, Social Media Platforms.

تأثير المؤثرين في منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تأثير المؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بين طلاب الجامعات العراقية. شملت العينة 300 طالب من جامعة بغداد والجامعة العراقية، واستخدمت الدراسة تصميمًا مختلطًا يجمع بين الاستبانات الكمية والمقابلات النوعية. تركز البحث على إدراك الطلاب لجاذبية شخصية المؤثرين، وجودة المحتوى، ومستوى التحفيز، والتطور اللغوي الملحوظ. أظهرت النتائج أن المؤثرين على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يعززون بشكل كبير دافعية الطلاب ويساهمون في تحسين مهارات اللغة الشفوية، خاصة النطق والمفردات وفهم الاستماع. ومع ذلك، تشير الدراسة إلى وجود محدوديات تتعلق بدقة القواعد والطابع غير الرسمي للتعلم عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. تشير النتائج إلى أن المؤثرين يعدون أدوات مكملة فعالة، إلا أنه ينبغي تقييم محتوهم نقديًا ودمجه بحذر ضمن تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية الرسمي. تسهم هذه الدراسة في فهم دور التعلم الرقمي في التعليم العالي العراقي وتقدم توصيات للمعلمين والطلاب والمؤسسات للاستفادة المثلى من وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في اكتساب اللغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تأثير، المؤثرين، اللغة الإنكليزية كلفة اجنبية، منصات مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The progression of digital technology is one of the developments that brought critical changes to the approaches of education worldwide, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Social media such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become instruments of learning rather than entertainment tools, offering learners constant opportunities to access the natural form of the target languages while allowing them to engage with the content through audiovisual,

interaction, and repetitive approaches, which are essential components in learning a new language (Siemens, 2004).

Amongst the most prominent influences on this digital learning platform are the social media influencers. They have emerged as non-traditional teachers who have demonstrated potential in engaging and mobilizing considerable numbers with their charismatic personalities, simple articulations, and use of everyday spoken communication. The theory of Bandura (1977) on Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals tend to learn new behaviors or skills by watching and mimicking admired individuals, and this is an area where they are most influential to university students as they are inclined towards non-traditional learning environments that are flexible and not so formalistic.

In Iraqi society, English is considered a foreign language, and learners at the university level are often deprived of exposure to native speakers of English. In the past, in Iraq, the conventional approach to ELT emphasizes the importance of grammar study as well as test preparation. This may limit opportunities for communication (Dörnyei, 2001). Therefore, Iraqi university learners are using social media influencers as a tool to improve their speaking, listening, reading, or writing. The evidence supported by the results of this research illustrates that influencers are effective in stimulating learners' motivation to learn English.

1.2 Problem of the Study

Although social media influencers are commonly used in EFL learning in university communities worldwide, their impact in EFL learning is a contentious issue that has not yet been explored adequately in the domain of Iraqi universities. Although researchers demonstrated that EFL is enhanced through learning with the assistance of influencers regarding pronunciation and vocabulary (Al-Qahtani, 2019; Khalil & Ahmed, 2021), concerns persist about the linguistic inaccuracy of

information provided in relation to grammar and the overall informal nature of teaching (Martínez & López, 2022).

The current research study findings indicate that although the Iraqi university students recognize that there is a major improvement in their linguistic abilities in terms of both speaking and receiving through social media influencers, they seem to show poor knowledge of grammar, which might cause confusion in the process of teaching. The gap in pedagogy is thus identified. Therefore, the problem of the research study is that there is limited empirical research that clearly indicates to what extent social media influencers impact English language learning in universities.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The goals of the current study are:

1. Investigate Iraqi university EFL students' perceptions of learning English through social media influencers.
2. Evaluate the effects of social media platforms influencers on the learning motivations of English as a Second Language students.
3. What are the English language skills that the students feel have been improved the most through Influencer-Based Learning?
4. Explore the relationship between influencers' persona appeal and students' motivation to learn English.
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages in the utilization of social media influencers as additional resources in university EFL teaching?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study emerges from the theoretical, pedagogical, and pragmatic implications it offers for EFL learning. On the theoretical side, the current study seeks to expand Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Connectivism Theory (Siemens, 2004), and Motivation Theory (Dörnyei, 2001), and their applicability in the realm of

influencer learning. This area has not received extensive attention in Iraq.

Pedagogical implications of the findings:The findings are of great significance to the instructors of a university. This is due to the fact that the findings will encourage the instructors to incorporate and utilize social media for learning since it influences the students' motivation and pronunciation of words, as well as their listening skills, which in most cases are not interactive.

Thus, the practical implication of the study is that it increases the awareness of university students about the benefits and perils of learning English through social media by its scholars. It has to be noted that although the influence of social media can prove helpful for learning English, the importance of properly analyzing the content of the various websites that are used for the learning of grammar has been highlighted by the study.

1.5 Research Questions

The objectives of this study are to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Iraqi university EFL students' perceptions of learning English through social media influencers?
2. To what extent do social media influencers impact the motivation of university students to learn English?
3. What English language skills do the students think are developed most significantly by influencer-based learning?
4. Is there a strong correlation between influencers' persona appeal and students' motivation in learning English?
5. What are the perceived limitations of relying on social media influencers in English language learning?

1.6 Limits of the Study

The present research targeted 300 Iraqi university EFL students from the University of Baghdad and Al-Iraqia University for the academic year 2024–2025.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

1. Impact: The statistically significant change in learners' performance that occurs as a result of applying a specific instructional strategy, method, or intervention. (Fraenkel et al. (2012)).

2. Influencers: Individuals who create and share English language learning content on social media platforms and who, through their perceived credibility, expertise, and personal engagement, influence the attitudes, motivation, and learning behaviors of other learners (Freberg et al. (2011)).

3. Social Media Platforms: Web-based and mobile-based digital applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content, facilitating communication, collaboration, and knowledge exchange among individuals and communities. Such as Instagram, Tiktok, Youtube, Facebook. (Boyd & Ellison (2007)).

4. English as a Foreign Language (EFL): The study of English in a context where English is not the primary language of communication, such as in Iraqi universities, and where learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. (Richards & Schmidt (2010)).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Social Media platforms in Education

Social media today has evolved from being used merely for entertainment and social interaction to being used for the advancement and delivery of education. According to educational researchers, social media provides platforms for construction and promotion of learner-centered environments wherein autonomy in learning can be achieved anytime and anywhere for lifelong learning (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

For instance, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook can provide learners with opportunities to develop real-life language learning using videos, comments, live streams, and live discussions (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

A number of studies have pointed out that social media increases student engagement due to the combination of modes: visual, auditory, and textual learning. Such a multi-modal approach is particularly advantageous for English as a Foreign Language learners, who might hear the correct pronunciation of certain sounds, see in their head facial expressions, and understand the context of using such language all at the same time (Blake, 2013). Moreover, social media allows activities that promote collaborative learning, interacting with peers and content creators, exchanging opinions, and practicing language skills in real communicative situations (Wang & Vásquez, 2012).

Moreover, social media in learning also facilitates the creation of informal learning environments, which create a motivating condition and reduce learning anxiety for the learners. This is because they feel comfortable studying outside the normal learning environment since, in such a condition, the fear of committing mistakes is not a dominant factor (Reinders & Wattana, 2014). This can therefore be perceived as a contributing factor to the influence of social media rather than replacing the normal education system.

2.2 Influencers as Digital Educators

Influencers have been found to be new forms of unconventional digital educators, who play an important role in language acquisition using social media sites. Unlike other teaching professionals, they seem to have an established emotional relationship with their learners, which helps them increase the interest of the learners in the material (Telleria & Alonso, 2020). This success of the influencer as a digital educator depends upon some factors, which include personality, credibility, style

of teaching, consistency, and authenticity (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017).

Personality traits like friendliness, enthusiasm, humor, and self-confidence command the learners' attention. Research has also shown that students tend to prefer influencer personalities like humor, the use of stories, and scenarios of communication. This makes the learning experience enjoyable and engaging for the learners (Abidin, 2016). Credibility of an influencer is also important as the learners tend to prefer influencers with good language skills, clarity of pronunciation, and clear explanations (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

In a similar vein, teaching style impacts learning outcomes. Influencers' ability to "simplify vocabulary explanations, provide relatable examples from people's daily lives, and interact with their audiences through comments or live videos" enables them to become effective influencers (Liu, 2021). Moreover, regularity and authentic nature assist learners in engraining language learning because influencers become role models motivating learners to master English through constant practice.

2.3 English Language Learning Through Social Media platforms

There has been extensive research on the role of the integration of social media into EFL learning. All studies have confirmed the benefits associated with the learning of different language skills, such as pronunciation, vocabulary development, and listening comprehension (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Wang & Vásquez, 2012). Pronunciation improvement is achieved through constant interaction with native or near-native speakers through audio-visual media and imitation of utterances demonstrated through videos (Al-Qahtani, 2019).

Vocabulary development is also facilitated through short and captivating videos that contain information in context. Microlearning videos, which focus on small pieces of information, aid in the retention of vocabulary effectively (Khalil & Ahmed, 2021). Besides, listening skill development

is facilitated by the exposure of students to actual usage of words by integrating social media materials.

Nevertheless, there has been a concern over the uncontrolled use of social media for language acquisition. There has been little quality control within these sites, as not all social media contributors provide accurate linguistic content. Grammar errors, overly simplistic grammar rules, and too much slang can affect the student's academic outcome of a grammar lesson (Martínez & López, 2022). Therefore, while social media has been beneficial to learners, it should not be overused, but used with a measure of caution.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by three major education theories that describe the potency of influencer marketing in EFL learning through social media.

The first one is the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which is based on the idea of learning by watching or imitating others. It is observed that learners are willing to imitate the persons they look up to, especially if they are observed to be successful and accessible role models. "Influencers are the role models that are looked up to by the learners and are very influential with regards to language use".

The second theory is the Connectivism Theory, proposed by Siemens in 2004. The theory of Connectivism Theory entails the phenomenon of learning. The social media sites present a picture of a learning network, where language mastery occurs through interaction in the network.

Theory number three is Motivation Theory created by Dörnyei (2001). This theory stresses how important personality characteristics are for teachers and intrinsic levels of motivation among students. The

“engaging” personality, content, and style of influencers all contribute positively to students’ intrinsic motivational levels.

2.5 Previous Studies

Several empirical studies have examined the role of social media platforms and digital influencers in English language learning across different contexts and time periods.

1. AL-Qahtani 2019

A study was conducted by Al-Qahtani (2019). In the research, the researcher sought to address the issue of the impact of YouTube videos by English-speaking influencers on the pronunciation skills of EFL learners. In the research, the researcher decided to use a group of undergraduate students enrolled in English courses in a public university. In the findings, the researcher found that YouTube videos helped students to improve the segmental and suprasegmental features related to the learners’ pronunciation skills. In the conclusion part of the paper, the researcher found that YouTube had the potential to enhance the pronunciation skills of EFL learners.

2. Khalil & Ahmed 2021

The research that Khalil & Ahmed (2021) conducted in Egypt focused on the impact of using microlearning videos accessed via TikTok by EFL secondary school students. The study that Khalil & Ahmed undertook in their research is a quasi-experimental study. The study led to the conclusion that students who frequently utilize the microlearning videos provided by influencers on TikTok for the acquisition of vocabulary scored better in retention than the ones who didn’t. The study also asserted the significance of microlearning videos in the memorization of vocabulary by the students.

3. Park 2020

The research by Park (2020) was focused on university students' perceptions of learning English from social media influencers rather than their conventional English tutors. The participants were university EFL learners of the English language, especially those affected by English teaching YouTubers and Instagram influencers. The research suggested that the students felt social media influencers were approachable and friendlier compared to their conventional English teachers, hence easing the students' classroom language anxiety of having to communicate English.

4. Martínez and López 2022

Martínez and López (2022) surveyed the risks of informal English acquisition through social media in Spain, with an emphasis on grammar and the use of academic English. The study found that English acquisition through social media, which depends too much on influencer contributions, carries the danger of informal expressions, slangs, and grammar errors. According to Martínez and López, English acquisition without teacher control carries the danger of fossilized errors, particularly in scholarly writing.

In brief, studies carried out in different countries have over time demonstrated that Mlawyers can contribute to ELL in a positive way, particularly in pronunciation, word choice, and motivational aspects. Nevertheless, the potential risk of informal online learning is also evident from these studies, underscoring the need for guidance and critical evaluation of online learning created by social media lawyers. This underscores the importance of the present study on the effect of English lawyers on EFL learners in Iraq.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present research study has been designed with a mixed–method research design that combines both the quantitative and qualitative approaches of research. Quantitative research is used to measure the perceptions of university students with regard to the influence of English language influencers on the learning of the English language through statistical analysis of the responses collected with the help of a questionnaire. Qualitative research provides a deeper level of knowledge with the help of semi–structured interviews.

3.2 Sample of the Study

The sample consisted of 300 Iraqi university EFL students selected from two universities:

- University of Baghdad
- Al–Iraqia University

The participants were all undergraduate students of different departments in which English is taken as a foreign language. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 25 years, which is the average age of students found in class. A convenient sampling method was used. See the following table:

(Table 1)

University	Number of Students	Percentage
University of Baghdad	170	56.7%
Al–Iraqia University	130	43.3%
Total	300	100%

Distribution of the Sample by University

3.3 Instruments of the Study

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire with 30 items was planned to find out what university students perceive about learning English via social media influencers. Four dimensions were considered:

- Influencer Persona Appeal
- Quality of Educational Content
- Learners' Motivation Level
- Perceived Linguistic Improvement

A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

(Table 2)

Dimension	Item Numbers	Number of Items
Influencer Persona Appeal	1–8	8
Content Quality	9–15	7
Motivation Level	16–23	8
Perceived Linguistic Improvement	24–30	7
Total	—	30

Questionnaire Structure

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured method of interviewing was employed to interview 20 EFL students in a university to understand their experiences with EFL social media influencers. Furthermore, 5 EFL teachers in a university were interviewed to perceive the academic benefits and demerits of learning EFL through social media influencers.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The process of collecting this data required two months. The use of a questionnaire meant that it had to be electronically disseminated through Google Forms to encourage participants' response. A high response rate among university students was expected. The interview, on the other hand, had to be conducted through both face-to-face and electronic means, depending on respondents' availability for that mode of communication. The objective for conducting this study had to be made known to participants. Besides, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

3.5.1 Validity

In order to ensure that the research instrument is content valid, a pilot test was conducted among a group of five experts with specializations in English teaching, linguistics, and education technology from Iraqi universities. The research instrument was revised accordingly based on the experts' recommendations concerning clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of questions to variables. Therefore, the questionnaire was confirmed as appropriate for achieving the objective of the study.

3.5.2 Reliability

In assessing the reliability of the test, the formula for the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was applied. A pilot study was also conducted using 30 EFL university students. However, the subjects were not considered for the study. Analysis of the test was carried out using the SPSS software.

The overall Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire was 0.88. This is a high reliability measure, where any value greater than 0.80 is considered a high reliability measure.

(Table 3)

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Persona Appeal	8	0.86
Content Quality	7	0.84
Motivation Level	8	0.89
Perceived Linguistic Improvement	7	0.87
Overall Questionnaire	30	0.88

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients

The results confirm that this questionnaire is a valid instrument to gauge students' perception of the effect of social media influencers on learning the English language within a university context.

3.6 Statistical Tools

The quantitative data gathered was analyzed with the use of SPSS software. The following statistical tools were used:

- **Mean and Standard Deviation:** To determine students' overall responses
- **Frequency and Percentage Analysis:** To describe participants' demographic data and questionnaire responses
- **Independent Samples T-test:** To examine differences between groups
- **Pearson Correlation Coefficient:** To identify relationships between study variables.

Chapter Four

Results, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to reveal the findings and the interpretation based on the data collected from 300 Iraqi students studying English as a Foreign Language in the universities regarding the effect of English influencers on English acquisition using social media tools. In addition to this, you would be able to find detailed statistical results and conclusions derived based on the data collected for the purpose.

4.2 Results of the Questionnaire

4.2.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire Dimensions

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each dimension of the questionnaire to understand students' overall perceptions. (See table 4), (N = 300).

(Table 4)

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Influencer Persona Appeal	4.12	0.61	High
Content Quality	4.05	0.66	High
Motivation Level	4.21	0.58	High
Perceived Linguistic Improvement	3.98	0.69	High

Overall Mean	4.09	0.64	High
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Means and Standard Deviations of Questionnaire Dimensions

Discussion:

The results indicate a generally positive perception of social media influencers across all dimensions. The highest score in motivation level suggests influencers significantly boost students' willingness and enthusiasm to learn English.

4.2.2 Influencer Appeal

This dimension assessed perceptions related to influencers' personality, credibility, and teaching style.

(Table 5)

Item Focus	Mean	Std. Deviation
Friendly personality	4.25	0.59
Clear pronunciation	4.18	0.62
Credibility and trust	4.05	0.65
Use of humor and examples	4.12	0.60
Overall Mean	4.12	0.61

Mean Scores of Influencer Appeal Items

Discussion:

Students strongly valued the friendly and clear communicative style of influencers, which aligns with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory emphasizing the imitation of admired role models.

4.2.3 Content Quality

This dimension measured clarity, relevance, and accuracy of influencer content.

Table 6

Item Focus	Mean	Std. Deviation
Clarity of explanation	4.08	0.64
Relevance to learners' needs	4.02	0.68
Use of real-life examples	4.10	0.63
Accuracy of information	3.99	0.69

Overall Mean	4.05	0.66
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Mean Scores of Content Quality Items

Discussion:

While content quality was rated highly overall, the relatively lower score for accuracy indicates learners' awareness of occasional mistakes and the need for critical evaluation of influencer content.

4.2.4 Motivation Level

This dimension explored how influencers affect learners' motivation and engagement.

Table 7

Item Focus	Mean	Std. Deviation
Enjoyment of learning	4.30	0.55
Reduced anxiety	4.22	0.57
Willingness to practice English	4.18	0.60
Learning outside classroom	4.15	0.59
Overall Mean	4.21	0.58

Mean Scores of Motivation Level Items

Discussion:

These findings confirm that social media influencers significantly enhance motivation, consistent with Dörnyei's (2001) Motivation Theory emphasizing teacher personality's impact on learner engagement.

4.2.5 Perceived Linguistic Improvement

This dimension assessed perceived improvements across English skills.

Table 8

Skill	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pronunciation	4.15	0.61
Vocabulary	4.08	0.65
Listening	3.95	0.70
Grammar	3.74	0.72
Overall Mean	3.98	0.69

Mean Scores of Perceived Linguistic Improvement

Discussion:

Pronunciation and vocabulary benefited most from influencer content, while grammar showed lower improvement, highlighting social media's stronger suitability for oral and receptive skills over formal grammar learning.

4.3 Correlation Results

Pearson correlation was applied to examine relationships between influencer persona appeal and learner motivation.

Table 9

Variables	r	Sig.
Influencer Persona ↔ Motivation	0.68	0.01

Correlation between Influencer Persona and Motivation

Discussion:

The strong positive correlation confirms that influencers' personalities significantly boost students' motivation to learn English.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings reveal that social media influencers serve a valuable role in enhancing English language learning among Iraqi university EFL students. Influencers notably increase motivation, reduce anxiety, and improve pronunciation, vocabulary, and listening skills, making language learning more accessible and enjoyable beyond formal classrooms. However, their contribution to grammar learning remains limited and requires cautious supplementation with academic instruction. Overall, the study validates the integration of social media influencers as effective supplementary tools in blended EFL learning environments.

4.5 Recommendations

1. Integrate reliable influencer and social media content into formal English language instruction as supportive learning tools.
2. Encourage critical evaluation of online educational content to ensure credibility, accuracy, and academic quality.

3. Use social media and influencer-based learning as a supplement to, not a replacement for, structured classroom teaching and academic materials.

4. Promote digital literacy skills among students and teachers to enhance responsible and effective use of online learning resources.

5. Support blended learning approaches and ongoing research to improve the integration of digital tools in EFL university contexts.

4.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Perform experimental research that bases itself on the actual measurement of achievement in the use of

2. Compare the effectiveness of influencer-centered learning with promising AI-Assisted learning solutions.

3. Investigate university instructors' attitudes towards the integration of social media influencers in language teaching.

4. Investigate the variation in the impact of influencers in Iraqi public and private universities.

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