

Digital Discourse and Language Change Linguistic Features of English in Social Media Platforms

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Summary:

In this study, the pedagogical possibilities of the digital discourse are explored through the consideration of linguistic characteristics of the English language utilized in social media and ways to incorporate it into the EFL learning process. Although digital communication has presented some observable alterations in language usage including abbreviation, a shorter syntax, multimodality, and contextual meaning, this study examines such alterations as educational tools instead of non-conformity to the conventional standards. The research is based on a mixed-method, quasi-experimental design that entrusts 60 EFL learners who are split between experimental and control group throughout an eight-week period of instruction. Experimental group was taught with the help of the resources based on the real social media language, posts, comments, emojis, interactive expressions, etc., and the control group was taught with the help of the standard textbook. The participation was based on the pre- and post-tests of communicative competence, classroom observation, and a questionnaire on the attitude of the learner. The findings show that the experimental group was significantly superior in communicative competence when compared to the control group. Also, students under the influence of digital discourse-based learning showed better classroom engagement, a better speaking fluency, less pragmatic misunderstanding, and more positive orientations to the learning process. The results indicate that when applied appropriately through a pedagogically controlled and balanced approach to teaching

and learning of formal language, the introduction of the chosen characteristics of digital discourse into language teaching could positively affect the communicative performance and language use awareness of the learners in the real life situations.

1. Introduction

The nature of language is dynamic and its evolution is strongly influenced by the evolving social procedures, technological conditions and cultural modes of interaction. In an online setting, communication is becoming more of a networked place where discourse is created, shared and redefined in real time. This meaning of computer-mediated discourse can be interpreted as the language created in the course of interaction with the help of networked technologies, and social media discourse, in particular, is characterized by a high rate of circulation, reconceptualization, and altering meanings when the text travels between various communicative contexts (Herring, 2004, p. 612; Jones, 2023, p. Consequently, the modern English in social media has acquired the compressed, interactive, highly contextual, and semiotically dense forms, incorporating words with emojis, images, hashtags, and other multimodal tools.

This change has significant consequences on English language teaching since learners are no longer exposed to English solely in textbooks or classroom-based activities, but they are also exposed to it every day in real digital contexts. Several recent pedagogical studies have criticized excessive reliance on decontextualized instruction resources and the necessity to re-establish classroom teaching in relation to real-life communication and real-life language situations of learners (Wong et al., 2017, p. 10). In this view, social media can be employed as an excellent opportunity to learn languages since it contextualizes the use of language in real communal situations outside the classroom and promotes interaction, sense making, and integration of official and non-official learning environments (Wong et al., 2017, p. 11). Similarly, studies of Instagram-based learning indicate that social media might facilitate interaction, enable learners to be more engaged with English, and give them a chance to use language in more real and meaningful applications (Al Fadda, 2020, p. 6).

In terms of teaching strategies, this transformation requires the need to rethink the way modern English ought to be delivered in EFL classrooms. Authenticity of material has also been proved to have the pedagogical advantage, as the studies indicate that displaying material of more realistic nature can enhance the behaviours of students being on-task and motivation in the classroom (Al-Shammari, 2021, p. 1246). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that social media settings help learners develop a wide spectrum of English language skills, in particular, speaking and writing, and also enhance the development of reading, listening, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Mahmud et al., 2022, p. 122). Moreover, the introduction of the use of authentic digital practices in the English language teaching process can reinforce digital literacy and English proficiency, which is growing in significance in the context of modern education (Iskandar et al., 2022, p. 76). In line with this, the current research paper takes up digital discourse and language change, not as descriptively defined linguistic phenomena, but as pedagogically relevant tools that could be used to build communicative competence, interactional awareness, and sensitivity to language variation among the learners in the real-world context.

2. Research Problem

Although most of the learners have been exposed to the English language through the social media platforms, most of the English language teaching practices are still based on decontextualized, formal, and traditional models of language. This puts a distance between the classroom language study of the English learners and the real-life situations that they meet in the digital world.

The research issue is that very few pedagogical applications of digital discourse are made to English language teaching even though it has a strong impact on linguistic patterns of learners, their communicative behaviors as well as the perception of the current English usage.

3. Research Questions

1. Which are the most noticeable linguistic elements of the English language in the social media platforms?

2. What do these features indicate the patterns of language change in digital discourse?

3. What are the ways to pedagogically incorporate the chosen aspects of the social media English into the EFL teaching?

4. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Determine the key linguistic characteristics of English in the social media.
2. Discuss such characteristics as the evidence of the continuing linguistic change in online communication.
3. Redefine these aspects in terms of methods of teaching.
4. Create a pedagogical implementation that will be grounded on chosen attributes of digital discourse.

5. Previous Studies

Previous research on the present topic may be organized into three main directions.

First: Studies on digital discourse and internet language

The study on this line has been keen on the contrast regarding the digital platforms transforming the shape and role of language on web-based interaction. Tagg claimed that an English language and social media studies have demonstrated that digital communication does not represent a revised iteration of traditionally personnel must utilize language, but on the contrary, changes the essence of language use by utilizing networked media resources, encompassing various modalities and multiple languages and hence necessitates a redefinition of conventional methods of analysis methodologies (Tagg, 2020, pp). 568, 572–573, 576–577). Similar to this research, hypothetically related study by Konrad et al. considers the use of stickers and emojis within the Facebook Messenger; regardless, the usage of graphic on is compatible with the evolutionary scale, wherein more recent and updated semiotic means gradually replaces/conquers the older ones and develops conventionalization in the domain of pragmatic functionality, as opposed to acting as the forces that simply represent the emotion (Kon 217–220). The body of these studies points to the fact that digital discourse is systematic in the

development of semiotics and is not an individual's variance with the orthodox language rules.

Second: Studies on language change in social media

The second stream of thought has considered social media as a mass medium to view language change in action. Goel et al. compared the data of more than six million users on Twitter and showed that phonetic transcription and net speaking abbreviations propagated under social pressure and densely connected social ties were more significant than the geographical locality to spread linguistic novelty (Goel et al., 2016, pp.). 41–43). Equally, Grieve et al. constructed the provenance and dissemination of new lexical forms with a cross-billion-word Twitter corpus and outlined lexical innovation recurrently across regions. They additionally revealed that cultural geography rather than any other factor significantly contributed to the spread of new vocabulary on Twitter, which was largely propelled by the African American cultural centers (Grieve et al., 2018, pp). 293–294, 309, 314). The combination of these works indicates that social media does not merely hasten apparent alterations in language but also enables its patterns of spreading to trace empirically with exceptionally excellent precision.

Third: Studies on technology and English language teaching

The third direction has been considering the pedagogical importance of the social media and digital tools in English language learning. In a quasi-experimental study, Rajayi and Maleki established that vocabulary learning by using asynchronous social media was more effective compared to studying vocabulary in conventional settings (Rajayi and Maleki, 2023, pp.). 186, 190–191). Al-Senafi et al. examined the use of the online platform among EFL students in Kuwait and said that social media facilitated veritable communication, peer cooperation, and platform accessibility, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X, and WhatsApp (Al-Senafi et al., 2024, pp.). 1, 7–8). Ghimire in a qualitative school-based study identified that social media assisted with both formal and informal English language learning, supported the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills as well as encouraged collaborative learning, though structural constraints were still an issue (Ghimire, 2022, pp.). 529–530, 534, 539–540). Similarly, Kawinkoonlasate focused on the

idea that technology integration in the English teaching process can enhance the lack of engagement, motivation, and growth of the four language skills provided that it is designed in a pedagogical manner and introduced meaningfully into the classroom environment (Kawinkoonlasate, 2019, pp.). 203–205, 210–211).

Although such studies are valuable, there is still a notable gap present. The former two directions often primarily cover digital discourse and language change in linguistic and sociolinguistic terms whereas the third direction frequently broaches technology in language learning in general. In the limited number of studies, there is a direct relationship between the particular language characteristics of English found in social media sites with the step-by-step pedagogically structured classroom focus to improve the communicative competence of learners. The given research will help fill this gap by connecting the inquiry of digital discourse to the area of English language teaching techniques providing both descriptive and practical research.

6. Methodology

The given study was based on the mixed-method, quasi-experimental design as there is the need to investigate the pedagogical impact of including the chosen linguistic properties of digital discourse in the teaching of EFL. The design was in the form of a descriptive-analytical element, which was utilized to uncover plausible recurring linguistic phenomena or patterns within the English social media discourse and an experimental intervention in classroom setting that compared experimental group and a control group.

It is thus that to deduce pedagogically significant discourse aspects on the chosen social media texts, which comprised the following items abbreviation, reduced syntax, emojis, discourse markers, informal lexical elements, pragmatic compression, direct address, and reaction-driven expressions were utilized in this descriptive stage. These aspects were later accommodated into teaching or teaching materials and anticipatory classroom activities.

The experimental phase focused on the experiments of whether or not exposure to such materials would help participants ameliorate their communicative competence, classroom activity, and pragmatic awareness compared to conventional instruction.

60 Iraqi EFL undergraduate students represent the sample of the current study. There were two intact groups (experimental, 30 students; control, 30 students) of the participants. The programme was sustainable over the course of 8 weeks, consisting of two teaching sessions in a week, and the total of the 16 sessions.

The materials were the classroom lessons that were taught in the experimental group based on the selection of English-language social media works. They were utilized in organized pedagogical exercises that were aimed at facilitating language awareness and communicative performance. The instructional intervention comprised brief natural posts and comment threads, activities discerning abbreviations and acronym in the context, guided analysis of reduced syntax and abbreviation, decoding emoji and multimodal meaning, practice differentiating informal digital discourse and formal academic discourse, pragmatic decision-making of tagging, and reaction-based discourse, role-plays simulating social media interaction, and rewrite. The members of the control group were taught on classic textbook-based sources, teaching the same general communicative topics, except that digital discourse characteristics were not systematically employed.

A pre-test and post-test of communicative competence, a classroom observation checklist, a questionnaire on learner attitudes, and instructional materials deserving of chosen discourses of social media were the four tools used in the study. The independent variable was the instruction on the basis of the chosen linguistic characteristics of digital discourse and the dependent ones were the communicative competence, classroom interaction, and pragmatic awareness.

Means, the standard deviations, independent-samples t-test, paired-samples t-test and the percentage distributions of questionnaire responses were used to analyze the quantitative data. The interpretation of the patterns of classroom performance during the intervention was supported by observation data.

7. Data Presentation

Variable	Experimental Group (n = 30)	Control Group (n = 30)	Total
Male	12	11	23
Female	18	19	37
Age 19–20	14	15	29
Age 21–22	16	15	31
Third-year students	30	30	60

Table (1): Distribution of the Study Sample

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Experimental	30	61.83	5.41	0.37	0.712
Control	30	61.27	6.02		

Table (2): Pre-test results in Communicative Competence

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Experimental	30	81.4	4.76	7.89	0
Control	30	69.53	6.54		

Table (3): Post-test Results in Communicative Competence

Item	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
The lessons were more engaging than regular classes.	90	6.7	3.3
Social media texts made English feel more authentic.	86.7	10	3.3
The activities helped me understand informal English better.	93.3	3.3	3.4
I became better at distinguishing formal and informal English.	88.3	8.4	3.3
The lessons improved my confidence in communication tasks.	83.3	10	6.7
Emojis and digital expressions were useful for interpreting meaning.	80	13.3	6.7
I would like similar activities in future English classes.	91.7	5	3.3
This method improved my participation in class.	85	11.7	3.3

Table (4): Learners' Responses to the Attitude Questionnaire**8. Results**

The statistical tables set the parameter of baseline similarity of two groups and validated the post intervention superiority of the experimental group. The results are further presented in form of four graphical display further to offer a more attractive representation of performance patterns as opposed to the summary values of the statistics which are presented in a tabular format of presentation.

Figure 1. Weekly Growth in Classroom Participation Across the 8-Week Intervention

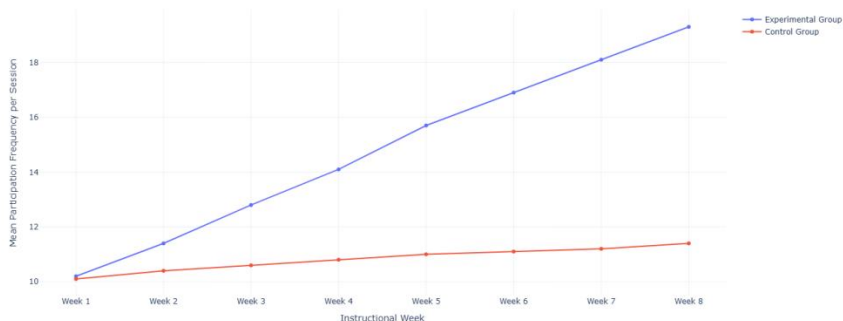


Figure (1): Weekly Growth in Classroom Participation Across the 8-Week Intervention

This number displays an upward trend recently in the frequency of

Figure (2): Development of Speaking Fluency Across Performance Checkpoints

Figure 2. Development of Speaking Fluency Across Performance Checkpoints



participation in the experimental group during the period of intervention. The control group, on the contrary, had a mild range of variation over the same period of time. Pattern to be followed The trend suggests that digital discourse-based teaching may lead to long-lasting classroom engagement and not to the effect of the motivation by itself.

This number and data show the progress in the speaking stage fluency four checkpoints of instruction. The experimental conditions indicate that the experimental group demonstrates a consistent increase, which indicates the enhancement of interactional flow, lexical knowledge, and communicating confidence. The control group had also been improving only to a lesser and slower rate.

Figure 3. Reduction in Pragmatic Misunderstanding During Interaction Tasks

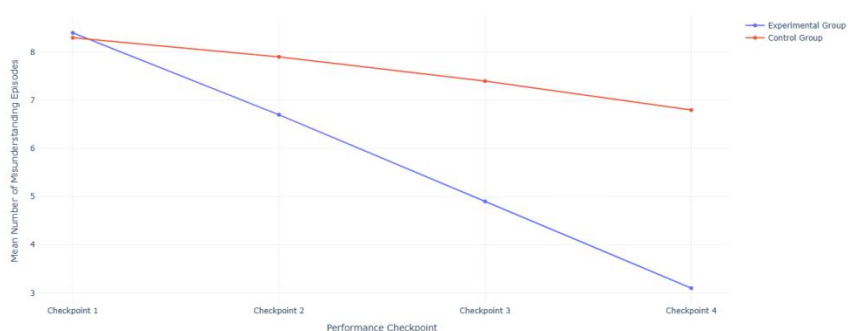
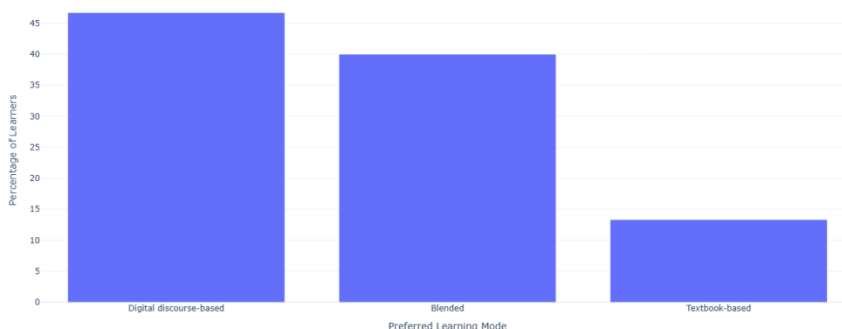


Figure (3): Reduction in Pragmatic Misunderstanding During Interaction Tasks

This value follows the decreasing number of misunderstandings in the process of interaction in the classroom as a part of a task. The experimental group showed a more drastic sloping, which is indicative of more efficient pragmatic interpretation of sense, underlying sensitivity to circumstances, and capability to handle digitally mediated discourse characteristics when communication is involved.

Figure 4. Distribution of Preferred Learning Modes After the Intervention

**Figure (4). Distribution of Preferred Learning Modes After the Intervention**

This figure presents learners' preferred modes of instruction after the intervention. The largest proportion favored digital discourse-based learning, followed by blended learning, while textbook-only learning received the lowest preference. This result supports the positive attitudinal pattern found in the questionnaire but presents it from a broader behavioral preference perspective.

9. Discussion

The results of the current research point to the fact that the introduction of the chosen aspects of the digital discourse into the EFL teaching turned out to have an apparent pedagogical benefit of the experimental group. This was not only in the post-test outcome, where the experimental group performed in better results as compared to the control group but also in the development of classroom participation, speaking fluency, pragmatic control, and preference toward the instructional mode of the learner in a weekly basis. Combined, these results indicate that the digital discourse, filtered pedagogically and being purposefully modified, can be used as an effective classroom tool in the construction of communicative competence, but not serve as a source of linguistic interference. It can be read in tandem with the perspective that social media communication is redefining contemporary English based on multimodal and network resources, thus multiplying the amount of meaning-making and meaning-negotiated in the communication (Tagg, 2020, pp.). 576–577).

One of the key findings of the research is the fact that there was a substantial increase in the communicative competence of the experimental group as opposed to the control group. This observation can be justified by the fact that experimental treatment subjects' learners to contextualized forms of language, which they in their daily digital communication are likely to experience. This kind of exposure seems to have rendered classroom communication more significant, available and operationally pertinent. The outcome is aligned with the findings of Rajayi and Maleki, who stated that the delivery of instruction in asynchronous social media had a trail of benefit in facilitating learning in EFL learners as well as their memory retention because the intervention in the experimental group was highly better than the control group (Rajayi and Maleki, 2023, pp.). 190, 192). Even though their study involved vocabulary learning but not communicative competence, both studies confirm the general argument that the instructional practices made through social media can produce better language gains than traditional ones when the materials are structured systematically and pedagogically appropriated.

It is as well worth highlighting the increased classroom participation over the course of the intervention. The graphical findings indicated that the experimental group progressively grew to be more active, responsive and interaction-oriented as time progressed. The fact can be explained with references to the authenticity of the materials used. Since the instructional activities were constructed with short posts, remarks, responses, and digitally common expressions, the learners were placed in a communicative setting in closer relation to the real-world language use than the textbook-only instruction usually provides. This is in line with the study that al-Shammari conducted that revealed that on-task behavior and general motivation to classes were enhanced by the use of authentic materials, particularly once the learners were adjusted to using the new materials (Al-Shammari, 2021, pp). 1243, 1247–1248, 1251).

Kawinkoonlasate(2019:203-13). maintained that appropriately incorporated technology can foster active learning, collaborative learning, and critical thinking in the classes working with English The current results then support

the pedagogical importance of authenticity and technological mediation are complementary and not competing aspects of language teaching.

The other significant finding is related to fluency in speaking and the decreased pragmatic misunderstanding in classroom tasks of interaction. The learners who were in the experimental group did not only memorize the digital expressions, but also they became able to understand meaning within the context, have better responses and the ability to maintain communication without as many communicative failures. This could be due to the fact that digital talk involves learners to interpret collapsed, multimodal and contextualized indicators, such as emojis, short form, address-voc address, and reaction utterances. In that sense, the observations made align well with the argument by Tagg that meaning in social media is becoming more of a multimodal combination and a networked resource of socially networked resources as opposed to an isolated form of verbal meaning (Tagg, 2020, pp.). 576–580). They also coincide with Ghimire who discovered that the use of social media allowed the learners to acquire skills to listen, speak, read, and write and gave them more confidence about learning English (Ghimire, 2022, pp.). 529, 538–539). The decrease in pragmatic misunderstanding that was observed in the current study implies that such input can be beneficial especially in formation of interactional awareness, not necessarily linguistic knowledge.

The use of the questionnaires further showed that there was a very positive response to the intervention by the learners particularly when it came to engagement, authenticity, confidence and the ability to differentiate between formal and informal English. This aspect is significant especially in the context of the fact that one of the main fears of social media language use in education is that it might promote non-standard use of this method with no restrictions. The current paper proposes the con when the exposure to digital discourse is planned correctly: it may also make learners more understanding of the register difference by requiring them to analyze, compare, and remake the informal discourse into the more official English. This finding aligns with Al-Senafi et al. that determined that social media can stimulate genuine communication, teamwork, and the availability of various linguistic materials besides assisting in the removal of the gap between formal

education and actual language use (Al-Senafi et al., 2024, pp.). 1, 7–8). Therefore, the educational merit of online discourse is not to substitute common English, but in merely placing a common English in conjunction with modern real-life application within a more pensive and functional pedagogy.

On balance, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of the intervention was not random and dependent on a specific linguistic subskill. Instead, it arose as a result of genuine digital input, conjectural classroom discourse, sensible analysis, and comparative practice of informal and formal language use. An even more general pedagogical implication of the findings is that the treatment of the linguistics of the digital era in English teaching that is mindful of the academic standards is beneficial to the learning of learners. In this regard, the current research builds on the earlier research by going beyond the general assertions about technology integration and by illustrating how the linguistic aspects of social media discourse can be pedagogically reified in ways that enhance communicative performance, engagement, and language awareness at the same time.

10. Limitations of the Study

In the present study, the sample was quite small (60 participants), and it might prevent the generalization of the results. Second, the intervention was short-lived (eight weeks) and this might not be able to record the long-term effects. Third, the research was done on a particular EFL setting and findings might not be the same in other educational settings. It is suggested that future research will investigate larger samples, protracted interventions, and variety of learning situations.

11. Recommendations

As the results of this research indicate, there are a number of recommendations that can be raised. First, the chosen traits of digital discourse should be included in the English language curricula in an organized and led way. Second, professional development initiatives should incorporate ways of incorporating natural digital materials into the instructional activities in the classrooms. Third, the balanced approach is also preferred where the learners are allowed to differentiate between informal digital English and formal academic

language. Lastly, additional studies should be encouraged to determine how digital discourse integration will have a long-term effect on various language abilities.

12. Conclusion

This paper aimed to find out whether the chosen characteristics of English digital discourse were applicable to be incorporated into EFL teaching in a pedagogically relevant manner. The results indicated that the experimental group that was taught using activities based on social media discourse performed better in communication competency and also showed stronger promotion in classroom behavior, fluency growth, reduced rates of pragmatic misunderstanding and a more positive attitude towards the instructional strategy.

We can thus conclude that digital discourse is not just a modern phenomenon in linguistics that has to be described remotely, but it is also an excellent pedagogical tool that can support the teaching of English language when it is thoughtfully chosen, contextualized and counterbalanced with academic standards. The application of genuine online language seems to bring teaching closer to the real-life communicative experiences of the learners, whereas conflicts of classroom assignments enable these learners to differentiate between informal and context-based use of informal language and formal educational demands.

On a grander scale, the work champions a pedagogical approach according to which the classroom is no longer single and contained in the linguistic realities of the digital world. Rather, good pedagogy ought to assist students to shift among registers, understand multimodal meaning, as well as make an appropriate communication in different situations. This is why the introduction of digital discourse in EFL instruction can be regarded as a fruitful line to follow in the modern language teaching, particularly in the settings where students have to interact with the English language on a daily basis using social media.

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الخطاب الرقمي وتغير اللغة: السمات اللغوية للغة الإنجليزية في منصات التواصل الاجتماعي

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الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي؛ تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ الكفاءة التواصلية

الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الإمكانيات التربوية للخطاب الرقمي من خلال دراسة الخصائص اللغوية للغة الإنجليزية المستخدمة في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، وسبل دمجها في عملية تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وعلى الرغم من أن التواصل الرقمي قد أحدث بعض التغيرات الملحوظة في استخدام اللغة بما في ذلك الاختصار، وبنية نحوية أقصر، وتعدد الوسائط، والمعنى السياقية، فإن هذه الدراسة تنظر إلى هذه التغيرات كأدوات تعليمية بدلاً من اعتبارها خروجاً عن المعايير التقليدية. يستند البحث إلى تصميم شبه تجريبي ذي منهج مختلط، حيث تم تقسيم 60 متعلماً للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية إلى مجموعتين: تجريبية وضابطة، وذلك على مدار ثمانية أسابيع من التدريس. تم تدريس المجموعة التجريبية باستخدام موارد تعتمد على لغة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي الحقيقية، من منشورات وتعليقات ورموز تعبيرية وتعبيرات تفاعلية، بينما تم تدريس المجموعة الضابطة باستخدام الكتاب المدرسي القياسي. واستند تقييم المشاركة إلى اختبارات قبلية وبعدية للكفاءة التواصلية، وملاحظة داخل الصف، واستبيان حول موقف المتعلم. تُظهر النتائج أن المجموعة التجريبية تفوقت بشكل ملحوظ في الكفاءة التواصلية مقارنةً بالمجموعة الضابطة. كما أظهر الطلاب الذين تأثروا بالتعلم القائم على الخطاب الرقمي تفاعلاً أفضل داخل الصف، وطلاقة أكبر في التحدث، وفهماً أقل للغة البراغماتية، وتوجهات أكثر إيجابية تجاه عملية التعلم. وتشير النتائج إلى أنه عند تطبيقها بشكل مناسب من خلال منهج تربوي متوازن ومضبوط لتدريس وتعلم اللغة الرسمية، فإن إدخال خصائص الخطاب الرقمي المختارة في تدريس اللغة يمكن أن يؤثر إيجاباً على الأداء التواصلية ووعي المتعلمين باستخدام اللغة في مواقف الحياة الواقعية.