

The Influence of Social Media on Improving the Pragmatic Skills of EFL Saudi University Students

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Abstract

Social media platforms can be a gateway through which English as a foreign language (EFL) students gain access to the world of the target language, communicate with native speakers, and learn more about their culture. Against this background, the present study aims to investigate whether EFL students' use of social media has impacted the development of their pragmatic competence and conversational skills. Sixty Saudi EFL students, aged 17 or older, studying in the English Language and Translation Department at the Saudi Electronic University participated in the study. Data were collected through an online questionnaire that assessed the participants' perceptions of using social media networks to practice their English conversation skills. The results showed that social media use had a positive impact on the students' pragmatic and conversational skills. Specifically, a significant proportion of the participants reported an awareness of conversational and pragmatic improvements resulting from social media use that may not be available in traditional classroom settings. These findings suggest that technology-assisted language learning, particularly learning using social media, should be incorporated into language instruction to improve EFL students' pragmatic and conversational knowledge. In this regard, social media networks are especially valuable in providing authentic and meaningful language and interaction opportunities. Future research could examine other forms of technology-assisted language learning beyond social media and employ a mixed-methods approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) on EFL learners' pragmatic and conversational proficiency.

Keywords: social media, pragmatic competence, conversational skills, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), EFL students /Saudi students

1. Introduction

In English language teaching, one of the main goals is to develop students' abilities to communicate effectively and appropriately using the target language (Zughaibi, 2022). This ability is called pragmatic competence, which entails the ability to use linguistic resources appropriately to produce and interpret utterances in various social contexts (Barron, 2003). Acquiring pragmatic competence is essential to second language (SL) or foreign language (FL) learning, as it enables learners to communicate effectively in social settings (Simmons et al., 2014).

In this context, pragmatics refers to the multifaceted field of study that encompasses verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Verbal skills include managing conversations, using various speech acts and register styles, and expressing politeness (Murza & Nye, 2013; Zufferey, 2015; Cohen, 2016). Non-verbal aspects of communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and eye contact, are also crucial to pragmatic competence (Simmons et al., 2014). Despite the obvious importance of pragmatics, EFL professionals often overlook students' pragmatic and conversational development in language teaching classrooms, focusing instead on grammar and writing (Al Asmari, 2015; Koran & Koran, 2017). This can hinder the learners' capacities to use English appropriately in various social contexts. One possible solution to address this issue and develop EFL students' pragmatic competence is to incorporate technology into the language teaching classroom (Taguchi & Sykes, 2013; Sykes, 2017; González-Lloret, 2019).

Mobile technologies offer valuable new possibilities to improve learners' pragmatic competence by providing further opportunities for students to receive both oral and written input and interaction (Eslami et al., 2015; Sánchez-Hernández & Barán, 2022). Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is an emerging approach to language learning that has transformed language instruction practices in recent years (Valarmathi, 2011; Rajendran & Yunus, 2021). It involves the use of mobile technologies, such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops to facilitate language learning (Kukulska-Hulme, 2013). These devices are highly portable and allow for easier access to a vast and practical spontaneous learning multi-context (Huang et al., 2012). Using these technologies, instructors can create a space for students to engage in thematic interactions to supplement learning in the classroom environment.

MALL enables learners to interact and engage in learning discussions outside the classroom (Hsu et al., 2013). Further, it provides a more personalized form of learning by aligning learners' needs with devices suited to their learning styles (Martin & Ertzberger, 2016). Social

media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Telegram are examples of MALL technologies that can be used in language learning. These platforms offer a variety of communicative contexts for learners to practice a foreign language, enabling them to use their practical knowledge of various linguistic repertoires (Kramsch, 2014).

In the era of technology, students often use social media as an independent and informal language-learning method. Therefore, the primary focus in this study is on the role of social media, specifically, in developing pragmatic skills, rather than other technologies that are usually used in language learning. The choice to focus on social media can be justified by its widespread use in the Saudi context. According to the latest report issued by the Saudi Communications, Space & Technology Commission (2022), approximately 50% of Internet users in Saudi Arabia spend about seven hours or more online every day across four social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram; these are among the top 10 ten visited websites in Saudi Arabia [see figure 1]. This widespread use of social media has made it easier for people in Saudi Arabia to communicate with people with different linguistic backgrounds from all over the world using English as a global language of communication, as well as giving them exposure to richer and more authentic content in the English language (Sharma, 2019). Therefore, it is worthwhile to see if this increased social media use among people in Saudi Arabia has any influence on the development of Saudi EFL pragmatic skills.



Figure 1. Most visited websites in Saudi Arabia

Therefore, given the dearth of research studies in the area of pragmatics in Saudi Arabia, and the need to explore the effects of social media on the pragmatic and conversational skills of EFL Saudi students, the current study aimed to make a significant contribution to research in this field by investigating whether the use of social media has influenced the development of the students' pragmatic and conversational skills and sought to answer the following research question:

- **To what extent do social media networks influence the conversational and pragmatic skills of EFL Saudi students?**

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Pragmatic Competence Among EFL Learners

In EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia, the focus is typically on teaching grammar, reading, and writing skills, rather than on developing communicative skills. However, using language for communication is one of the main goals of language learning, and mastering communication skills can be challenging. It requires advanced abilities, such as the ability to express oneself appropriately, understand contextual cues, and consider the needs of other participants in social interactions (Almehmadi et al., 2020; Alshumaimeri & Alhumud, 2021).

Communicative competence, as defined by Crystal (2001), includes not only formal knowledge of the language but also "awareness of the factors that govern acceptable speech, such as how to begin and end conversations, how to interrupt, how to address people, and how to behave in special speech situations." Along with grammatical and psycholinguistic skills, pragmatic competence is a crucial element of broader communicative competence (Savignon, 1991). The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA, 2019) defines pragmatic competence as using language for different purposes, changing the language based on the listener's needs, and following appropriate conversational rules.

English-language learning in Saudi Arabia has become a crucial part of education, with the government prioritizing the development of English for communication (Zughaibi, 2022). However, despite these efforts, students often struggle with communication in English, and many graduate from secondary schools and universities without the ability to engage in short conversations (Alshumaimeri, 2003). This lack of proficiency underscores the importance of developing learners' pragmatic and linguistic competence, as it enables them to

communicate successfully in the target language and avoid misunderstandings.

However, both teaching and learning pragmatics in the traditional classroom environment in Saudi Arabia can present challenges. These challenges include limited contact hours, a lack of variety of social contexts, and power differentials between teachers and students. Additionally, many EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia are non-native English speakers who may not possess comprehensive awareness of all aspects of the target language's culture and pragmatics. Moreover, there is often a lack of opportunities for authentic language use in traditional classrooms; authentic language use is necessary for the development of learners' pragmatic competence (Tang, 2019). In such traditional classrooms, teachers typically hold a position of greater authority than students, leading to limited opportunities for practicing the target language and restricting the input students receive. These challenges pose difficulties in developing learners' pragmatic competence in the EFL context (Wain et al., 2019). Therefore, alternative approaches, such as the use of technology, may provide new possibilities for enhancing learners' pragmatic and conversational skills. For example, the use of social media platforms can offer varied social contexts and authentic language use to develop learners' pragmatic competence.

2.2 Social Media Networks as a Tool for Learning

The use of mobile technologies in EFL teaching and learning has grown in recent years (Keezhatta & Omar, 2019) due to the development of the internet and technology in general. These emerging technologies have opened up an entire virtual world for students, with many features similar to those of the real world (Shao, 2011). As such, these technologies can support learners by providing a collaborative and communicative environment that facilitates a broad range of meaningful learning activities (Alsharidi, 2018).

One tool that can be used as part of MALL is social media networking. Social media networks provide learners with exposure to the target language as it naturally occurs in different social contexts, without the simplification or formal revision typically found in classroom language use. Social media thus can be an effective gateway through which EFL students can access the world of the target language, communicate with its native speakers, and learn more about their culture (Guth & Petrucco, 2009; Alsharidi, 2018).

Research has highlighted several advantages of using social media networks in EFL learning. For instance, studies by Indrastana and Rinda (2021) have shown that incorporating YouTube into EFL teaching and learning enhances students' confidence, increases their creativity, and develops their critical thinking skills. Similarly, Shamsi et al. (2019) demonstrated that utilizing social media platforms like WhatsApp for speaking activities can effectively reduce learners' anxiety when speaking the target language. Moreover, other studies, such as Azlan et al. (2019) and Gonulal (2019), have explored the potential of Instagram as a MALL tool. These studies have found that Instagram motivates learners to practice English and improve their communication skills. Instagram offers a lively and collaborative learning environment that provides entertaining and interactive content, thereby enhancing learners' motivation to engage with the target language.

The benefits of using social media networks in EFL learning extend to the development of learners' pragmatic skills. Pragmatic competence encompasses not only knowledge of vocabulary and structures, but also the ability to use and adapt language appropriately to different situations (ASHA, 2019). By providing learners with opportunities to use language freely and creatively, social media platforms can facilitate the development of pragmatic skills beyond the constraints of classroom communication (Lomicka & Lord, 2016; Lantz-Andersson, 2018). Moreover, social media networks have the potential to influence learners' pragmatic knowledge through their provision of practical assistance and exposure to authentic language interaction (Taradi & Taradi, 2016). These platforms offer informal and casual learning contexts that simulate real-world settings, providing learners with opportunities to practice their practical language use by engaging in conversations with different users (Lantz-Andersson, 2018). Integrating social media networks as MALL tools can complement traditional classroom instruction, offering learners varied social contexts and authentic language use to enhance their pragmatic competence and conversational abilities.

2.3 Overview of Previous Studies

A considerable body of literature exists on the effectiveness of social media in developing various language skills, such as writing (e.g., Shahzadi & Kausar, 2020; Wil et al., 2019; Chang, 2020; Le, 2021), vocabulary (e.g., Helan & Tamilarasan, 2022; Zainal & Rahmat, 2020; Al-Jarf, 2022), grammar (e.g., Ghorbani & Ebadi, 2020; Parsa & Fatehi Rad, 2021), listening (e.g., Agustin & Ayu, 2021), and reading (e.g., Napratilora & Bangsawan, 2020; George, 2018). However, compared to the many studies that focus on the influence of social media in developing skills among EFL learners, there is a noticeable lack of research investigating the impact of social media on the pragmatic and conversational abilities of this particular group (Qadha, et al., 2021; Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Zain & Bowles, 2021). For example, Blattner and Fiori (2011) investigated the impact of using Facebook as a pedagogical tool for developing pragmatic awareness among 13 undergraduate students learning Spanish as a second language. To collect the data for this study, the students were asked to join a Facebook group and perform a linguistic analysis of specific topics related to their course, such as greetings and leave-taking. The findings showed that the students could recognize different pragmatic elements and that by using this electronic platform and joining the Facebook group, they were able to increase their pragmatic awareness. Ultimately, such resources provided them with opportunities to engage in authentic communication through which it is possible to understand language as it functions within particular cultural and social contexts.

Similarly, Simin and Ghobari (2015) conducted a study investigating the influence of using Viber online groups on the pragmatic competence of EFL students from Iran. In this case, 50 students were assigned to two groups, which consisted of an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was taught and practiced different speech acts on the Viber platform, while the control group

were taught the same speech acts using the traditional classroom method. The experimental group exhibited significantly higher levels of pragmatic competence compared to the control group, which suggests that using technology is effective in improving the pragmatic competence of EFL learners.

Additionally, Mirzaei et al. (2016) examined the effectiveness of a computer-mediated communication course delivered through social media networks on the development of L2 learners’ pragmatics skills. Here, the researchers gathered data from 90 (EFL) undergraduate students from Iran. The experimental group received pragmatic instructions for four months using two platforms (Facebook and Yahoo! Messenger), and the control group received the same pragmatic instructions in a traditional face-to-face setting. The results indicated that instructional design affected the rate of the participants’ pragmatic development. Specifically, the experimental group, who received the intervention and obtained instructions through social media platforms, exhibited more improvement than the control group, thereby indicating that using social media platforms is effective in improving learners’ pragmatic skills.

In the Saudi context, there is generally a lack of research investigating pragmatic development in EFL settings, with the few studies that do exist focusing mainly on the pragmatic awareness of EFL teachers, rather than that of students. For instance, Zughabi (2022) aimed at investigating the pragmatic awareness of 320 EFL Saudi instructors by considering the importance of pragmatics as an essential part of communicative competence. In this study, the teachers’ pragmatic awareness was investigated through a questionnaire. The findings revealed that most had sufficient awareness of pragmatic competence, but that there was some variation in the opinions of the teachers regarding the importance of pragmatics in teaching foreign languages, as well as some diversity in the actual pragmatic educational practices to which they adhered. These results underscore the importance of enhancing both teachers’ pedagogical skills and their understanding that pragmatic knowledge is essential to the linguistic competence of students.

Similarly, Al-Qahtani (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine the extent to which Saudi EFL teachers introduce and teach pragmatic skills in their classrooms. Combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews and observations, the researcher gathered data from 120 Saudi EFL teachers. The results indicated that, although the Saudi teachers were aware of the importance of pragmatic skills and the necessity of teaching them to students, the inclusion of pragmatic instructions in classroom activities was not yet satisfactory. Accordingly, this study highlighted the importance of providing support and training to teachers to effectively integrate pragmatic instructions into their pedagogical practices and work toward developing their students’ pragmatic skills as an essential element of L2 communicative competence.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed in this section underscores the potential of social media networking as a MALL tool to develop learners’ pragmatic and conversational abilities in the EFL context. Due to the fact that only a few studies conducted in the Saudi context have focused on pragmatic development, this study specifically attends to the significance of pragmatics and places students at the center of the inquiry by investigating their pragmatic competence and the influence of the use of social media in developing their pragmatic skills. Building on this theoretical background, this study investigates the effectiveness of social media networking as a supplementary tool for EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia, wherein students often struggle with communication skills. By examining this topic, the study will provide valuable insights into the potential of social media networking to enhance Saudi EFL learners’ pragmatic and conversational abilities and contribute to ongoing efforts to improve the quality of EFL instruction in the country.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This study aimed to quantitatively analyze Saudi EFL students’ use of various social media platforms and apps to improve their pragmatic skills in English conversations. The data were collected from 60 students who were aged 17 or older and enrolled at the English Language and Translation Department at the Saudi Electronic University. The participants were selected to represent diverse perspectives and experiences with social media, based on their level of study, age, gender, and years of English study, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the attitudes and habits of Saudi EFL students in relation to social media. Prior to participating in the study, the students provided informed consent and were assured that their privacy and anonymity would be protected throughout the study. Table 1 presents information about the sample, including gender, age range, years of English study, and level of study.

Table 1. Participants’ information

Variable	Participants’ backgrounds					
	Gender	Female 88.3%	Male 11.7%			
Ages	17–20 5%	21–25 26.7%	26–29 18.3%	30–33 26.7%		34+ 23.3%
	Years of English study	>1 year 3.3%	1–2 years 26.7%	3–4 years 36.7%	5–6 years 5%	7–8 years 5%
Level of study	English language courses 5%	Bachelor 78.3%	Second bachelor 1.7%	Diploma 6.7%	Master 3.3%	PhD 5%

3.2 Data Collection and Procedures

The main tool used to collect data in this study was an online questionnaire developed by the researcher based on an extensive examination of the relevant literature and the adaptation of questions from two validated questionnaires from previous studies (i.e., Mo et al., 2021;

Mahfouz & Ihmeideh, 2009). The questionnaire was designed to collect data on the attitudes and habits of Saudi EFL students in relation to social media, specifically with respect to their perceived pragmatic needs and how they used various social media platforms and apps to improve their pragmatic skills in English conversations.

The original versions of the adapted questionnaire underwent extensive validity and reliability testing as part of the previous research (Mo et al., 2021; Mahfouz & Ihmeideh, 2009). However, to ensure its relevance to the current study objective and the targeted population, the adapted version was also reviewed and modified. This version was piloted with 10 students who had the same characteristics as the main participants, but who were not included in the main study sample. The feedback from the pilot participants was used to refine the questionnaire for the intended participants. The final version of the questionnaire was also reviewed by three experts in the EFL teaching field to ensure that it was comprehensive and clear. The final questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part collected demographic information, including age, gender, level of study, duration of English language study, and use of social media in learning English. The second part consisted of 16 closed questions about students’ use of online social media networks when practicing English conversations.

After obtaining ethical approval from the Ethics Committee at the Saudi Electronic University (No. SEUREC-4437), the questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed through email. The participants were asked to provide demographic information and then answer 16 questions on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) about their social media use. The estimated time to complete the questionnaire was approximately 10 minutes. At the beginning of the questionnaire, there was a clear statement about the purpose of this study and some ethical considerations that required the participants’ approval. After the data collection phase, the collected data were screened to ensure participants’ consent and to verify that they had answered all the questions. Sixty participants completed the questionnaire, and any incomplete responses or samples that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study.

The questionnaires submitted by the students through Google Forms were transferred into an Excel spreadsheet for in-depth data analysis. The collected data were analyzed to determine participants’ demographic backgrounds, including age, gender, level of study, and length of studying English, as well as the percentage of participants who reported using social media to practice English conversations and improve their pragmatic skills.

Overall, the data collection procedures used in this study were rigorous and appropriate for answering the research questions. The use of an online questionnaire allowed for efficient data collection while maintaining confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants. The pilot study helped refine the questionnaire, and the screening process ensured the validity and reliability of the collected data.

4. Results and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of social media networks on the conversational and pragmatic skills of EFL Saudi students, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in improving their language skills. The majority of the participants in this study reported using social media to practice English conversations and found it to be effective in improving their skills. The data analysis provided valuable insights into the influence of social media networks on the conversational and pragmatic skills of EFL Saudi students, as well as their perceptions of social media’s effectiveness in improving their language skills. These insights will be discussed in the following sections, which offer a more nuanced understanding of social media’s role in language learning for EFL Saudi students.

First, it is important to provide the background profiles of the participants (Table 1). It is worth noting that there were more female than male respondents in this study. Regarding age, there was a good balance of participants across different age brackets; such differences had implications for use of specific types of social media, as different platforms tend to be associated with different age groups.

The majority of the participants in this study had studied English for two to four years. Generally, the data included participants with different levels of English proficiency, although most had graduated with a bachelor’s degree, as indicated in Table 1. Significantly, only four participants reported that they did not use social media to learn English, representing only 6.7% of the participants (Table 2). These four participants were all female, which is unsurprising, given that most of the participants of the study were female. Of these four, two were over 34 years old, one was 30, and the other was in her late 20s. However, it is worth acknowledging that the limited number of respondents not using social media could potentially be attributed to personal choice, given that all backgrounds were well-represented within the participant group.

Table 2. Use of media to learn English

Do you use social media to learn English?	Percentage of participants
Yes	93.3%
No	6.7%

The results indicate that there was no particular correlation between the participants’ responses and their demographics, such as age, level of study, or time studying English. Therefore, the use of social media apps to learn English and the participants’ attitudes appear to be associated with personal preferences rather than biographical information. The data also reveal that most of the participants use more than one application to learn English, although nine participants reported using only one particular app, though not the same one. As shown in Figure 2, YouTube was the application most commonly used by the participants, followed by Instagram, Tik Tok, and Telegram, with Twitter and Snapchat also used by a reasonable number of participants. Only one participant reported using Facebook, and one mentioned the use of Tumblr and websites.

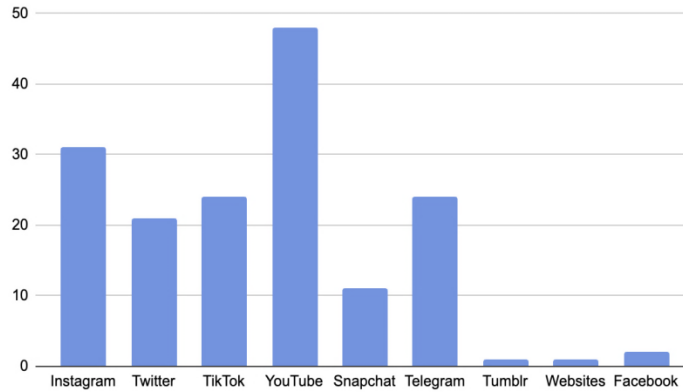


Figure 2. Social media applications used

Table 3 presents the results of the questions related to the participants’ use of online social media networks to practice English conversations. The participants were first asked about their usage of social media for English learning; the findings revealed that a significant majority, approximately 88% (strongly agree and agree), indicated that they indeed used social media for this purpose. This finding suggests that social media platforms offer a range of communicative contexts for learners to practice the target language, potentially allowing them to apply the skills acquired in the classroom (Kramsch, 2014). However, it is important to note that the benefits of social media for language learning can vary depending on the specific uses. While passive and input-based uses, such as listening to YouTube videos or reading posts, contribute to language exposure and comprehension, active and interactive uses, such as engaging in conversations, are particularly relevant for practicing conversational English skills.

Table 3. Social media perceptions

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I use social media to learn English in general.	28.3%	60%	3.3%	5%	3.3%
I follow English language teachers through social media networks to improve my language skills.	6.7%	28.3%	16.7%	6.7%	6.7%
I use social media to practice conversation.	25%	41.7%	20%	11.7%	1.7%
I feel more engaged in online conversations than face-to-face communication.	21.7%	36.7%	21.7%	15%	5%
I feel more confident in online conversations than face-to-face communication.	30%	40%	18.3%	8.3%	3.3%
I don't feel anxious in online conversations.	26.7%	33.3%	21.7%	16.7%	1.7%
I converse with native English speakers on social media.	18.3%	41.7%	26.7%	10%	3.3%
I discover more about English culture through social media interactions.	41.7%	48.3%	6.7%	1.7%	1.6%
Through social media interactions, I observe the patterns of conversational English.	30%	45%	13.3%	10%	1.7%
Through social media interactions, I observe the use of different speech acts.	33.3%	48.3%	10%	5%	3.3%
I can use English in a way appropriate to different situations in social media interactions.	28.3%	51.7%	13.3%	3.3%	3.3%
In social media interactions, I can express myself appropriately.	25%	48.3%	13.3%	8.3%	5%
In social media interactions, I can change my language style when I speak to people from different age groups.	28.3%	40%	16.7%	11.7%	3.3%
In social media interactions, I can change my language style when I speak to different people.	36.7%	38.3%	13.3%	8.3%	3.3%
In social media interactions, I can correct myself and repair the conversation when misunderstanding or miscommunication happens.	25%	50%	15%	10%	-
In social media interactions, I can interrupt an ongoing conversation appropriately.	23.3%	50%	13.3%	11.7%	1.7%

In addition to using social media to learn English, the participants were also asked whether they follow English-language teachers on social media platforms. The results were that 35% of the participants responded positively, 16% were neutral, and 13% answered negatively. The positive response rate suggests that a significant number of students recognize the potential of social media platforms for language learning and actively seek out English-language teachers as a source of authentic input and targeted learning experiences. However, the neutral and negative response rates indicate that some students may not find social media to be an effective or suitable method for language learning. For example, some students may prefer more traditional classroom learning, language programs, or face-to-face conversations to practice their language skills and improve their proficiency. Therefore, it is important to address these concerns and explore alternative methods to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to access and benefit from language-learning resources.

Moreover, the results of the study indicate that a significant proportion of the participants (66%) use social media to practice their conversation skills. This finding is consistent with Alsharidi's (2018) claim that communication through social media provides learners with a comfortable and engaging environment in which to experience natural and spontaneous language use, communicate with other speakers in the target language, and practice speaking the language more freely. Further, this result aligns with the findings of Azlan et al. (2019), who investigated the impact of using Instagram to develop students' speaking skills. They reported that the platform provided opportunities for students to engage in oral conversations and participate in various activities, including questioning, answering, imitating, singing, and chanting. These interactive features facilitated their learning and contributed to the development of their speaking skills.

The data also indicate that 58.4% of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that social media apps made them feel more engaged than face-to-face communication, as shown in Table 3. A further 21.7% of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the claim. These findings indicate that a majority of the participants recognize the advantages of practicality and engagement that social media networks offer in EFL learning. The data align with previous studies that highlight the benefits of social media platforms for language learning, such as the ability to control the timing and content of language practice, as well as the accessibility and convenience they provide (Alsharidi, 2018; Gonulal, 2019).

Moreover, as shown in Table 3, the majority of the participants (70%) feel more confident in online conversations. This finding echoes the results reported by Indrastana and Rinda (2021), whose participants felt more confident after using YouTube as a teaching tool. Similarly, Shamsi et al. (2019) reported that other online platforms, such as WhatsApp, helped to reduce anxiety (Table 3), and 60% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that online conversations did not cause them anxiety. Anxiety is a significant factor hindering effective language learning, and thus addressing it is crucial (Indrastana & Rinda, 2021; Shamsi et al., 2019). In a classroom setting, students may experience heightened anxiety and a decrease in confidence when it comes to oral communication due to the fear of making mistakes in front of others. However, social media platforms can provide a more comfortable and less intimidating environment in which learners can practice their oral language skills. By engaging in conversational interactions through audio or video features, learners can communicate without face-to-face contact, which reduces the immediate need for correction and alleviates the fear of being judged by teachers or peers (Yaniafari & Rihardini, 2021). This allows learners to engage in oral language practice on social media platforms with greater freedom, promoting confidence and reducing anxiety associated with in-person interactions (Shamsi et al., 2019).

In addition to providing a comfortable and engaging environment for language practice, social media offers EFL students valuable exposure to authentic language, genuine activities, and proper input, which can contribute to their development of conversational skills. It is worth noting that opportunities for authentic interaction are often limited in traditional classroom settings (Rueda, 2006), resulting in some students graduating without significant communication experience or interactions with native speakers (Hassan, 2018; Tang, 2019). However, social media presents an opportunity for learners to engage in communication with native speakers of the target language, as reported by 60% of the participants in this study (Table 3). While it is important to differentiate between exposure to authentic language input and active conversational practice, interacting with native speakers on social media can provide learners with insights into the linguistic and cultural aspects of the target language, helping them develop a better understanding of how to use the language appropriately in different contexts. This exposure to authentic language input holds particular value for learners who have limited access to native speakers in their local communities. Thus, social media platforms can play a crucial role in facilitating learners' communicative competence and intercultural awareness, both of which are essential for effective communication in the target language (Lantz-Andersson, 2018).

Table 3 highlights the relevance of the cultural element that learning English through social media may bring. A staggering 90% of the participants reported that the use of social media to learn English allows them to discover elements of English-speaking culture. This finding aligns with expectations, given that many FL teachers in Saudi Arabia are non-native English speakers who may lack a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and pragmatic aspects of the target language (Alsharidi, 2018; Hassan, 2018). By using social media platforms, language learners can gain exposure to FL culture, which is vital for effective communication and proper language usage. This is particularly relevant for learners who lack access to native speakers or native-English-speaking teachers, who often have a lack of cultural understanding. Culture plays an essential role in language use, as each language has its unique way of expressing various pragmatic behaviors, including conversation, which is culture-specific (Farghal & Almanna, 2014).

Indeed, many aspects of a conversation are determined by culture, such as how to initiate and end a conversation, take turns, and interrupt one's conversational partners (Norbury & Sparks, 2013; Almeahadi et al., 2020). Therefore, awareness of FL culture and an understanding of the cultural differences between the native language and the target language are crucial for effective communication and proper language usage. Otherwise, learners may use the pragmatic conventions of their first language when performing in the FL, which can have severe consequences, as the speaker might be perceived as impolite, offensive, or rude (Kasper, 1992; Kramsch, 2014).

Finally, Table 3 provides insights into the participants' perceptions of their pragmatic skill development through social media. The results show that 75% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they encountered different conversational patterns online, which is crucial for developing their pragmatic skills. Moreover, 73.3% of the participants reported adapting their speech style to different social situations, while 68.3% changed their style depending on the age of the addressee. Additionally, 75% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they changed their style of speech when addressing different people online, such as teachers or professionals. These statistics indicate that social media is an effective medium for developing pragmatic skills. Further, 75% of the participants claimed that they could correct or resolve a misunderstanding when communicating online, while 73.3% felt that they could interrupt a conversation online while considering any cultural differences. These attributes are essential to developing one's pragmatic skills. The high percentages of these

pragmatic and conversational features in the participants' responses can be considered a positive outcome, as EFL students typically struggle to achieve effective communication using the different pragmatic skills necessary for a successful conversation, such as managing the conversation and addressing communication breakdowns (Landa, 2005; Drozdial-Szelest, 2011; Veneziano, 2014). Therefore, social media can be a valuable tool for developing learners' pragmatic skills and enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in the target language.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the potential benefits of social media networks as a MALL tool for developing EFL students' pragmatic and conversational skills. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms offer learners authentic and meaningful language and interaction opportunities, encompassing various formats such as written exchanges, audio conversations, and video interactions. These opportunities contribute to the enhancement of learners' pragmatic skills, which are indispensable for effective communication in the target language. The results emphasize the advantages of social media in providing learners with real-world language use and exposure to diverse linguistic contexts. By engaging in conversations, discussions, and exchanges on social media, learners can refine their understanding of the cultural nuances associated with the target language, communicative norms, and appropriate language use. Furthermore, social media bridges the gap between classroom instruction and real-life language use, enabling learners to apply their language skills in authentic communication settings.

The findings have significant pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and learners. Integrating social media networks into EFL instruction can be a valuable pedagogical approach for facilitating the development of pragmatic and conversational skills. However, it is essential for educators to guide learners in navigating the online environment safely and responsibly, while also promoting critical thinking skills in evaluating and engaging with online content.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, including the small sample size and the absence of qualitative data to explore the specific types and uses of interactions on social media for language learning. Future research should address these limitations by further investigating the effectiveness of social media platforms for language learning, examining their role in promoting intercultural communication, and exploring strategies for their effective integration into language teaching. Additionally, students' attitudes and habits regarding social media should be investigated to optimize its use in improving pragmatic skills in language learning.

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