

## Influence of social media on EFL undergraduate students' academic learning performances during Covid-19 lockdown period

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### Abstract

Due to the spread of the pandemic, the learning system has changed which affected the students' performance to master the English language appropriately inside classrooms. Social media is an essential means that facilitate the learning process for both learners and teachers. Therefore, this study aims to find out if the students are affected negatively or positively in their learning process through the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how social media contributes to EFL students. This study has been carried out using a qualitative interview conducted with 9 (male and female) students. In this study, the findings revealed that third-year EFL students beneficially used social media applications; they were impacted positively by the adoption of social media in learning the English language. So, students' learning performances were improved. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic affected their English language skills positively.

**Keywords:** Academic learning performances; COVID-19 pandemic; Lockdown; online learning social media.

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## 1. Introduction

Social media is one of the internet technologies that are widely used to create and share online information, which has contributed to helping individuals throughout the world to collaborate and participate with one another (Boholano, 2017). Nowadays, the invention of social media provided the opportunity for men and women to exchange personal life information through the use of several social networking sites namely, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. (Manca, & Ranieri, 2016; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Wang, Chen, Liang, 2011). Additionally, the wide use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and YouTube has impacted how people live in various ways: communication, information delivery, knowledge exchange, commerce, education, and all aspects of life (Sakarneh, 2021). Furthermore, with the vast spread of various social networking sites, researchers from different fields have started to direct their attention and shed light on the impact of social media on all aspects, especially the educational one (Habibi, et al. 2018; Helou & Rahim, 2014; Namaziandost, Esfahani, & Ahmadi, 2019; Raut, & Patil, 2016).

The majority of people around the world use social media applications as vital tools to communicate. They also use them widely in the educational process. In the last few years, starting from the beginning of 2020, a pandemic called Corona Virus (COVID-19) has appeared and spread rapidly, affecting all walks of life. Algeria was one of these countries that announced a global emergency related to this COVID-19 (Sharifzadeh, Rahimi & Siahpour, 2022). Its educational system faced a new direction in the teaching and learning process, moving from traditional face-to-face methods to distance learning. Algerian institutions and universities suspended teaching and learning processes due to the pandemic. The latter induced educational authorities and the ministry of higher education in Algeria to find alternatives and solutions to keep students motivated under the new mood of learning during the pandemic by encouraging them through creating learning environments either outside or inside classrooms, which may lead to keeping the teaching and learning process ongoing (Gipal, Carrillo & Mallonga, 2022). It was necessary to move to the abrupt transition of learning, so they employed E-learning to teach and learn through online platforms by utilizing social media to wrap up the academic year (Thamarana, 2016).

### 1.1. Conceptual background

A few decades ago, the teaching and learning processes in Algeria were based on a direct learning system; involving classroom attendance which required students and pupils to come to universities and schools to attend lectures. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study pattern in universities changed to distance education, so it relied primarily on social networking sites, especially Facebook, which played a crucial part in the teaching and learning process (Caligaris, Rodraguez, & Laugero, 2020).

Algerian students, particularly at Bordj Bou Arreridj University, we're bound to quarantine regulations for their safety (Blizak, Blizak, Bouchnak, Yahiaoui, 2020). The effect of social media on university students during the period of COVID-19 has had both positive and negative impacts (Benharrats, 2021). Due to the development of technology, has had a great impact on the educational field, especially in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the University of Bordj Bou Arreridj - Algeria. The English language is one of the most useful languages throughout the world; as it is considered and recognized as a global language. Among the users of the English language are the pioneers of social media, they use it daily to interact with themselves, this also motivated university students to use English as a means of communication among their peers and friends (Asilkan & Domnori, 2020).

Third-year undergraduate students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) major exploit the advances of technology to feed their needs, this can be seen at the university of Bordj Bou Arreridj – Algeria which used social media networks to facilitate the learning process and connection between EFL students and

lecturers through using certain applications (Ferdosipour & Harami, 2022). In addition, the use of technology in education through "social media networking sites" can help students to develop their capacities and abilities in learning the English language so that they have access to more technological tools outside of the university. Social media applications in English language learning classes can help EFL students develop their English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and language sub-skills such as vocabulary and grammar (Khaloufi & Laabidi, 2017). Third-year EFL undergraduate students download courses and documents that are shared by the teachers on Facebook and Telegram applications, which may motivate and empower them to adapt to online learning (Yehya, 2020).

### **1.2. Purpose of study**

This study aims to find the effects of using social media applications on undergraduate students' learning performances during the COVID-19 pandemic at Bordj Bou Arreridj University in Algeria. As a result of the abrupt transition of study and the new wave of learning from face-to-face method to distance learning, social media has become a central point in the educational system from 2019 onwards.

**Research questions** 1. What are the impacts of using social media on third-year EFL university students' learning performances during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What are the students' perceptions towards the use of social media in promoting their learning performances during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Participants**

In this research, a qualitative method is used to identify the impacts of social media on undergraduate students' academic performances. 09 third-year EFL undergraduate students participated in conducting semi-structured interviews.

### **2.2. Data Collection Instrument**

A semi-structured interview was conducted with 9 (4 males and 5 females) EFL undergraduate students. The interview protocol consists of nine open-ended items. The items are reported as follows: 1- Nowadays, the learning system has changed to a new direction from attendance learning to distance learning due to the pandemic of COVID-19, how do social media affect your learning performances? 2- How do social media affect your English language acquisition? 3- Does the use of social media help you to develop your English-speaking skill? If yes, how? 4- Does the use of social media in online learning mode motivate you to enhance your English language skills during the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, how? 5- From your perspective, what are the challenges that you faced in online learning? 6- What are the positive impacts of using online learning? 7- What are the negative impacts of using online learning? 8- During the pandemic of COVID-19, how do you benefit from social media applications in distance learning?

### **2.3. Data Analysis Technique**

The goal of selecting EFL students in this study is to see how using social media influences their English language learning abilities. Each interview, which lasted around 25 minutes, was captured on a smartphone audio recorder and was manually transcribed. The participants in the semi-structured interview were coded as shown in Table 1 to provide a systematic description of the data and an analysis of the interview data. Whereas EFLMS 4 denotes male English as a foreign language student whose interview code is 4, FEFLS 5 denotes an EFLFS whose interview number is 5. The interview replies were categorized and analyzed thematically.

**Table 1**

*The illustrations of the participants' coding*

Interviewees	Interviewees' number	code
English as a foreign language Male student	4	EFLMS
English as a foreign language Female student	5	ALL

### 3. Results

Findings revealed that the usage of social media in enhancing students' English language learning performances during the COVID-19 pandemic is categorized into four main themes as follows: (1) the Positive impact of using social media in the English language learning, (2) Promoting learning, (3) Increasing student engagement in using different Apps, and (4) English Language acquisition through social media, as shown in Table 05.

**Table 2**

*Themes emerged from interviews*

No.	Themes
1	The positive impact of using social media on English language learning (ELL) during COVID-19
2	Promoting learning
3	Increasing student engagement in using different Apps
4	English Language acquisition through social media

#### 3.1. The positive impact of using social media on ELLs during COVID-19

The theme of the positive impact of using social media in ELL is concerned with how social media affects the respondents learning process. Based on the findings, most of the students stated that social media has affected their learning performances positively and helped them improve their learning as it is a new method of teaching and learning. As a respondent claimed "Personally, using social media helped me improve my learning performances because I began to rely on myself in conducting my research on any given topic rather than waiting for the teacher to provide me with information "(EFLMS/1). The use of social media in the learning process supports EFL students to promote their English language skills.

Moreover, other respondents demonstrated a positive influence on the usage of social media in the learning process which helped them to acquire the English language in terms of its positive effects. For example, a female respondent claimed that social media has a "positive impact helped me to gain information, and it is a useful tool" to rely on it in the learning process, in this context, some of the excerpts are illustrated below:

*"It affects my learning performance when I use the Internet to submit the assignments to the instructors via e-mail. In my opinion, it has a positive impact on the learning process and it is time-saving" (EFLMS2)*

*"It affects my learning performances positively since it is a new method in the learning and teaching processes" EFLMS3*

*"Personally, social media applications helped me to gain information, prepare my lessons, and do my assignments and gave me the chance to share my ideas with teachers and classmates such as 'Facebook application that facilitates the communication process and other educational platforms such as Zoom*

*and Google meet were used by instructors to explain the lessons well through the use of video, sounds and this made me feel like I was inside the classroom". EFLMS4*

*"Social media affects my learning performances in a positive way" FEFLS1.*

As previously stated, EFL students in this study were enthusiastic about using social media in their learning. The majority of students believed that social media helped them in improving their English language learning skills. Besides, students showed an interesting influence of social media in English language acquisition that helped them to develop their speaking skills. Some of their opinions are illustrated in the excerpts below:

*"Social media, in general, and Facebook in particular, helps learn English by watching online videos and following Facebook learning groups". (EFLMS1)*

*"When someone tries to communicate with others on social media, he will acquire the language through maintaining the use of the English language, even when chatting; it is a great and effective way to acquire the English language and gain more words and vocabulary". EFLMS2*

*"Social media affects my English language acquisition positively due to the wide use of essential applications of SM such as Facebook pages and YouTube channels" EFLMS3.*

*"I used apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with foreign friends and developed my English language skills using text messaging and video games" EFLMS4.*

*"Social media affected my English language acquisition positively because I used important applications to exploit the advantages of social media". FEFLS1*

*"By using SM, I see that my English language acquisition has improved". EFLS2*

*"Watching native speakers can help me learn the right pronunciation. It can help me develop my English-speaking skills through the use of Twitter and Facebook." EFLMS1*

### **3.2. Promoting learning**

EFL students reported that the use of social media in EFL classes has had a positive impact in promoting learning; students observed that they are making progress in their learning. In this context, FEFLS claimed that "I noticed that my English language has developed as a result of my use of social media." (FEFLS1). In addition, other participants claimed similar opinions about promoting learning through social media as follows:

*"I improve my conversational skills when I utilize Google Meet or a video call on Messenger. Thanks to social media, I was able to share my views and information with my peers". FEFLS2*

*"Social networking provides me with the opportunity to improve my academic achievement". FEFLS5*

*"The use of social media enabled us to debate learning issues and establishes a learning environment". MEFLS2*

*"I beneficially used social media apps. I developed my learning skills by following the Facebook pages of some native speakers." MEFLS3*

The data shows that participants agreed on the usefulness of using social media to promote their learning; it benefits them positively since they may publish announcements to attend live lectures; and much more. Using Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram applications have also helped students learn English. They enhance their speaking abilities so that they can communicate effectively with native

speakers all around the world, as well as engage and communicate effectively with their instructors both outside and within the classroom. According to the participants in this study, as online learning has grown more popular, SM helps students train in the English language and become skilled in using technology.

### **3.3. Increasing Student Engagement in Using Different Apps**

EFL students reported that students are more motivated to connect when they can use technology to obtain information, communicate effectively, express ideas, and create presentations to extend and enrich their studies and display their command of the English language. MEFLS claimed that « social media has had a significant impact on raising my learning interests in specific courses, providing me with the option to engage in learning, and enhancing my sense of connectivity » MEFLS4. Even so, learners nowadays want to actively connect and communicate, and they want an environment that allows them to do so. In addition, less confident Students are more likely to engage in constructive activities. Because the platform allowed for debate in the acquisition of information, online involvement eclipsed classroom participation, and some students became more active online. With this context, some of the excerpts are illustrated below:

*“I’m a shy student, so the Facebook and Telegram apps helped me interact and discuss my courses, as well as boost my self-confidence.”* MEFLS4

*“Through social media applications, during an online session, I improve my concentration and awareness, which drives me to accomplish higher critical thinking abilities and maximize the effectiveness of learning experiences.”* FEFLS1

Importantly, participants acknowledged that social media encourages self-directed learning, which equips students to demand information and make decisions on their own. These social media abilities can be directed and polished in the classroom to promote greater learning outcomes and critical awareness.

### **3.4. English Language Acquisition through social media**

The adoption of social media in online learning has positive effects on students' English language acquisition; they exploited the advantages of these applications in the classroom to enhance language skills, capacities and abilities. Furthermore, students must stay up to date with technological advances and be aware of the English language skills that each learner holds. These skills must be utilized and developed further to both engage learners and improve their English language skills. Below are examples of the excerpts:

*“Using social media applications in classroom attendance or even outside the classroom aided me to enhance the English language learning, they are helpful applications.”* MEFLS1

*: During the covid-19 pandemic, social media applications were useful that motivated me to study the English language I developed my writing skill and I achieved a high level in my English language capacities.”* FEFLS3

From the interviewee's responses, they revealed that social media benefits increase opportunities for English as foreign language learners to interact with the learning community (students, lecturers, and friends) in English and to improve language skills in their everyday lives. In addition, undergraduate students can achieve better learning performances using social media Apps in university spheres.



#### **4. Discussion**

The purpose of this research is to determine the effects of using social media on third-year EFL university students' learning performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found some common opinions, which were revealed by the interviewees' responses regarding the usage of social media in EFL learning classes. The results show that the learning performances of EFL students at the university of BBA were influenced positively. Furthermore, students' learning processes in enhancing English language skills used social media in a beneficial way that encouraged them to acquire language skills. Furthermore, social media is expected to play an important role in the educational process. Accordingly, students maintain their English language speaking proficiency by relying on applications like Facebook, where they can interact with overseas friends who speak English, and YouTube channels, where they can listen to English music and native speakers. The students' speaking abilities were then influenced by social media, which allowed them to engage with classmates and friends (Benraghda & Radzuan, 2018). However, Wang, Chen, and Liang (2011) found the opposite: social networking applications hurt students' learning performance, and students faced several barriers that challenged their English language ability. On the other hand, another study collaborates with the findings of the current study done by Mushtaq and Benraghda (2018). They researched the impacts of social media on learners' academic learning.

The study's findings demonstrated that it had a positive impact on academic performance. The majority of students believed that using social media in the classroom aided their learning. In the same vein, a study conducted by Mingle and Adams (2015), stated that the usage of social media in language learning has had a great impact on the learning process, it increases the students' engagement in classroom lectures. Terms used such as helpful, useful, motivated me, and enhance the English language demonstrate positive perceptions and attitudes of the participants regarding social media use by the students, therefore, they exploit the advantages of social media applications. Moreover, Balbay and Kilis, (2017) in their research study effect of using internet tools for Enhancing EFL students speaking skills have indicated the role of online diaries on students' speaking skills development. He has explained that online sources of internet motivate English language learners towards the English language learning process because it is interesting for the English learners, and enables them to learn English through social interaction and social contexts with friends, classmates, and teachers (Benraghda, Radzuan & Ali, 2018; Benraghda & Radzuan, 2019).

Overall, the majority of students agreed that online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic impacts the students' learning performances positively. It does help them to acquire the English language, so the interaction between EFL students and their teachers becomes easy and sufficient. In addition, students promote learning. The results of this analysis revealed that there is no significant difference in perceptions of the impact of social media sites on English language learning between male and female students.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The primary goal of this chapter is to provide comprehensive answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this study. 09 EFL students were involved through a semi-structured interview as an instrument for this study. The results revealed that most EFL third-year university students were influenced positively by social media applications during the COVID-19 pandemic. The students' learning performances were highly improved. They learned English through the use of Facebook and YouTube applications. Moreover, they enhanced their language sub-skills and competencies during online learning that was caused during the period of COVID-19. This type of learning and teaching encouraged them to study using technology. The more they use social media, the better their learning skills become.

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