

## Original Paper

# ELT & Social Media in Covid-19 Era: A Case Study

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### Abstract

*In March 2020, with the increasing confirmed cases of COVID-19 pandemic in the State of Kuwait, the Kuwaiti Cabinet decided to suspend face-to-face teaching in all schools and universities. The following month the Ministry of Education and Higher Education adopted Online instruction in both public and private educational institutions. The current quantitative research aims at examining the implementation of social media by Kuwait University students and potential implementation of high-tech facilities in language learning. About 400 male and female students from the English Department were surveyed. The researcher used SPSS to analyze students' responses of the questionnaire. The findings demonstrated a substantial increase in the use of SM because of COVID-19. Questionnaire respondents illustrated positive attitude towards the implementation of SM. The future of SM in Kuwait is promising. The study recommends that education institutions, public and private, adopt various SM platforms to sustain and develop the teaching process.*

### Keywords

*English learning, social media (SM), Covid-19, attitudes, prospective*

## 1. Introduction

The various SM tools have enabled people to select a wide variety of choices of platforms to choose from. Therefore, communication has become instant regardless of time differences. People can share data, such as videos, sound, PDF, and Word files, and create live conferences (Devi, Lakshmi V, Eragamreddy, 2019). As a result, SM can be a substantial element in education. However, the lockdown triggered the boom use of SM in the teaching process. SM has become the sole tool of education available in many countries to support students in their studies.

The present teaching platforms are extremely helpful for language learners. They constitute a priceless source and access to knowledge. Virtual classes, online lectures and webinars have become available at

fingertips. However, language learners have access to free online language classes and courses, making the process of language acquisition an easy task.

English language is enjoying a prominent position in Kuwait. It is highly demanded by the Ministry of Higher Education. Students joining Kuwait University are requested to take an English proficiency test before joining the university. Moreover, English is the medium of instruction in many faculties, such as the medical and dental schools, all engineering faculties, and other faculties of scientific nature. Other faculties require students to complete certain numbers of English language courses as prerequisites to pass to other levels and for graduation. However, the general lockdown inspired decision makers to adopt the online mode of teaching to guarantee that students' study is not interrupted. Based on the new teaching situation, the current paper is designed to examine the merits, perspectives, and potential future adoption of SM as an established teaching tool.

According to (Makkai, 2021), classical or traditional teaching incurs several disadvantages such as limitations in facilities, space, and time. Not much research is available on the advantages of social media on the learning-and-teaching process (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Such research demonstrates that social media has enhanced students' performance, supported the learning environment and enriched students' involvement in class. Other scholars claim that very little research has been conducted on the impact of online education on communication and cooperation skills (Camilia, Ibrahim, & Dalhatu 2013; Zarzycka, Krasodomska, Mazurczak-Mąka, & Turek-Radwan, 2021; Smith, 2017).

The significance of this paper stems from its focus on the implementation of social media and its functions during total lockdown imposed by COVID-19 pandemic. The main focal point of the study is the influence of the lockdown on the nourishment of social media utilization in educational institution. Moreover, learners in general attain remarkable abilities in accommodating themselves with sophisticated technology (Makki, 2021). Scholars, such as Devi, Lakshmi V, Eragamreddy (2019) conclude that the pedagogical implementation of social media encouraged learners to openly express insights and thoughts properly in addition to their active engagement in the learning process. The objective of this research is to examine the usage of social media in Kuwait University. The objectives the researcher puts are:

- 1- Investigating the potential use of social media by Kuwait University students and whether the use social media developed during the lockdown
- 2- Examining students' performance in learning English
- 3- Investigating student's attitudes towards the implementation of social media
- 4- Addressing potential similar circumstances that might force the use of social media in the future.

### *1.1 Research Hypotheses*

- 1- The increase implementation of social media by students during the lockdown.
- 2- Students' reaction to using social media and their attitudes exceed expectations.
- 3- Students views and about future implementation of social media are above expectations.

According to WHO (2020), COVID-19 is classified as a pandemic communicable disease. On 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2020, Kuwait witnessed the first recorded case of the virus. However, within a fortnight only, the pandemic spread like bushfire. As a result, Kuwait Cabinet decided to close all schools, universities, and other educational institutions as well as almost all economic segments, such as malls, shopping centers and even religious places. To maintain the pace of the learning process, educational authorities were left with only one option, i.e., adopt online teaching, including social media (Makki, 2021).

To avoid the negative impact of long interruption of the learning process, Kuwait University authorities had to search for alternatives to face-to-face teaching. After just a few weeks of suspension, teaching was resumed via social media and other online platforms, such as Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet.

For the purpose to properly communicate with each other and with their teachers on a large scale, Kuwait University students were engaged in many online communication styles, such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups. The unprecedented access to social media for learning purposes inspired the researcher to investigate the influence of such tools on students' academic performance, especially in learning English.

## 2. Review of Literature

Technology has dramatically changed the teaching-learning process. The uses traditional pen-and-paper materials have become obsolete. Other notetaking materials, such as smart phones and iPads, have emerged and spread worldwide. Prior to the sudden outbreak of the pandemic, students were familiar with laptops, iPads and other electronic devices to help them take notes and do homework. Students relied on social media applications and other technology devices in education. The current paper examines the attempts of utilizing social media as a learning tool by Kuwait University students to perform academic tasks.

The social media platforms included Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp, Teams, and Google Meet. The diversity of these tools enabled Kuwait University students to be 24/7 in touch with their instructors and colleagues. Moreover, students were enabled to take part in discussions, assignment submission, attempt quizzes and tests as well as reviewing the video-recorded lectures. According to Anderson (2019), social media platforms have facilitated the recovery and share the learning outcomes and prospects.

Since language is the main means of communication, it is essential to understand and comprehend language as an inevitable resource of motivation to pursue study. Kuwaiti citizens, including students, are aware of the importance of learning English not only for businesses but also for tertiary studies. The major skills needed for everyday life are listening and speaking, so that students work hard to elevate their levels in English. Listening and speaking facilitate the face-to-face communication. The other two language skills, reading and writing, are effective in academic situations. Therefore, it is essential for students to master these skills as much as possible.

### 2.1 Considerations on Social Media

Social media is the natural outcome of globalization and unprecedented development in technology.

The basic function of social media is facilitating individual and collective communication (Devi, Lakshmi V, Eragamreddy, 2019). In 2020, Wikipedia defined social media as “interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks” (Wikipedia, 2-6-2020). On the other hand, Cambridge Dictionary defines social media as “forms of media that allow people to communicate and share information using the internet or mobile phones”.

However, COVID-19 outbreak has obliged both teachers and students to seriously consider the implementation of the technological tools in the teaching-learning process on a large scale. Some researchers believe that students consider social media groups are interactive enough to open horizons and widen the existing ones in online learning. Students tend to utilize social media more profoundly in the learning process than it is believed (Sobaih, Hasanein, & Abu Elnasr, 2020).

## *2.2 Research History*

Since the emergence of social media is still relatively new, not too much research has been conducted on the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of the implementation of social media in education. (Makki, 2021; Zarzycka, Krasodomska, Mazurczak-Mąka, & Turek-Radwan, 2021; Batubara, Nur, Lubis, & Arianto, 2021; Raut, Patil, 2016). Nevertheless, the exact image of students’ attitudes is still vague. One of the early researchers is Mardinina (2016) who thinks that social media has tremendous potential provided it is used appropriately merged or incorporated into education. On the other hand, the potential harm of social media on education should not be ignored as the focus of educators and students should be on the optimum implementation of social media in the teaching-and-learning process.

Other scholars, such as Ghouali and Benmoussat (2019), researched the impact of social media on the writing skills. The findings of the study were shocking. The researchers found that the level of writing among Algerian students deteriorated as students could not distinguish between formal and informal register, style, grammar, and vocabulary. Colloquial or slang language was prominent in students’ writings. However, other researchers examined students’ perception and attitudes towards social media (Al-Jarrah, Jarrah, Hassan, & Talafhah, 2019). The findings of the study demonstrated positive development in students’ word bank or vocabulary. This is because students tend to heavily rely on social media to use social media in learning new vocabulary. Such vocabulary development is reflected on students’ writing abilities.

Other research examined the possible influence of social media on communication and collaboration between learners. After surveying 234 students, Zarzycka et al. (2021) found that “can provide a valuable teaching tool that enhances student learning and form an important infrastructure for productive collaboration and communication between students and teachers”. According to Batubara et al. (2021), teachers should supervise the e-learning process to make the experience successful. The researchers believe that “lecturers must be able to use methods and approaches as well as use appropriate facilities and infrastructure so that the teaching and learning process becomes interesting and enjoyable”.

In 2021, Makki examined the effects if implementing social media in teaching. Her experiment was

conducted on about 1200 students. She gave the participants a questionnaire which is built on the postulation that adolescent students would rather easily adopt high tech tools implemented in education. The findings the researcher came up with are focused on the necessity of building adequate and reliable networks and up-to-date hardware and software facilities.

### 3. Research Methodology

The researcher adopted the qualitative approach to facilitate the study process. The sample targeted students are 400 Kuwaiti males and females taking English language courses at Kuwait University. Before finalizing the questionnaire, the researcher referred to previous similar works of other scholars among whom are Al-Jarrah, Jarrah, Hassan and Talafhah (2019), Chen and Bryer (2012). However, the items of the questionnaire have been modified to fit the current study. Some colleague experts examined the reliability and clarity of the questionnaire, and amendments were fixed based upon recommendations. Moreover, before administering the questionnaire to the 400 Kuwait University students, the researcher piloted it to about 32 volunteer students to verify the reliability of the questionnaire. However, next is the reliability table of the questionnaire.

**Table 1. Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.841	.867	23

The first component of the questionnaire consisted of biographical data of the participants, such as sex and education. The second component of the questionnaire is divided into five parameters, including 23 statements. The parameters go as follows:

1. The frequency of using social media before the pandemic
2. The frequency of using social media during the pandemic
3. The frequency of using social media to learn English
4. The attitudes of students towards social media
5. Student's prospective of social media

#### 3.1 Data Analysis

On six successive days – between 27<sup>th</sup> July and 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 – the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the participants. The questionnaire targeted students enrolled in the English Department only, so that responses were limited to those students only. The first part of data analysis focused on the biographical information of the participants, while the second part analyzed the 23 statements of the questionnaire.

The following table demonstrates the biographical information of the participating students.

**Table 2. The Biographical Information of Participants**

Sex of participants	No.	%
Male	170	42.5%
Female	230	57.5%
Total	400	100%
English Courses	No.	%
course090	155	38.75
course141	123	30.75
course142	122	30.50
Total	400	100%

The percentage of students for sex is 42.5% males and 57.5% females.

**Table 3. The Mean Value of the Frequency of Using Social Media during the Pandemic**

Test Value = 0						
	t	No	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
before	55.843	400	.000	4.35172	4.1974	4.5061
during	66.134	400	.000	5.04828	4.8971	5.1995

Both Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate a substantial difference in the use of social media before and during the pandemic. In the pre-pandemic era, the mean of using social media presented in Table 3 was 4.35172. On the other hand, social media implementation during the pandemic was 5.04828, which means that the difference is obvious. Although students at Kuwait University used social media in learning language, they significantly increased the use of social media during the pandemic, supported by the P-value which is 000.

**Table 4. Social Media Variations Based upon Gender**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
during	Male	170	5.0868	.78692	.10809
	female	230	5.0159	.85557	.10779
before	Male	170	4.1887	.83979	.11535
	female	230	4.4889	.82053	.10338

Figures in Table 4 demonstrate that male students increasingly implemented social media during the outbreak because the mean score is 5.0868 compared to 4.1887 before the outbreak. On the other hand, female students showed less increase in the use of social media. The mean score before the pandemic was 4.4889 for female students. It increased slightly to 5.0159 during the pandemic. The interpretation of the slight rise is that females tend to use technology in normal life before the pandemic more than male students do. Scholars, such as Egbo, Okoyeuzu, Ifeanchio and Onwumere (2011) support this conclusion as they believe that female students accept technology more than males do.

The researcher adopted a five-Likert scale as 1 represents “strongly agree” and 5 represents “strongly disagree”. Findings demonstrate that participants are more likely to accept social media tools in education, since most responses were either 4 or 5, which means they either “agree” or “strongly agree”. The mean of students’ responses regarding the implementation of social media in English language learning is 4.2448. The mean of students’ responses regarding the attitude toward the use of social media in English learning is 4.034. The mean of students’ responses regarding the potential use of social media in the future to learn English is 4.3908. However, a minority of participants believed that the use of social media in language learning is useless. In other words, about 12.1 % considered the implementation of social media in developing the listening skill is not effective, compared to 9.4% think that social media is inefficient in enhancing the writing skill. Speaking and reading skills constitute about 8% of negative responses.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The researcher built the work on four hypotheses phrased as follows:

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the considerable variation in the use of social media tools before and during the pandemic. It is to the researcher’s surprise that Kuwait University students were using social media applications before the outbreak. However, students intensified their use of social media during the pandemic. As the P-value is below 0.01, this hypothesis is proven accurate. Findings signify that students use social media to learn English.

**HYPOTHESIS 2:** Table 4 demonstrates the P-value of the parameter of implementing social media at .013. Hence, the null hypothesis is not accepted. The findings display considerable difference in the use of social media in English language learning.

**HYPOTHESIS 3:** Table 4 reflects the high responses of participants. This is because the means of both undergraduate and graduate are 4.1316 and 4.5773, respectively. The interpretation of such finding is that both postgraduates and graduates are close “strongly agree” in both the use of social media tools and their attitudes towards such tools.

**HYPOTHESIS 4:** Table 4 reflects the high responses of participants. This is because the means of both undergraduate and graduate are 4.6970 and 4.2037, respectively. The interpretation of such finding is that both postgraduates and graduates are close “strongly agree” in potential use of social media in teaching language in the future.

The general attitude of Kuwait University students towards social media use in learning language is positive. Moreover, female students demonstrated more interest in using social media than male students did. Finally, the potential or prospective of social media implementation in the future is interestingly promising.

## 5. Conclusion

The impacts of social media applications and platforms are obvious in all aspect of everyday life. However, the pandemic outbreak rooted the influence of social media at the time when life was about to be totally paralyzed due to lockdowns. School and university students were left with only one option, i.e., implementing social media tools in online teaching. Otherwise, their study would stop until further notice. Hence, students seized the opportunity and started using social media extensively to pursue their studies. The pandemic offered a priceless opportunity for social media by providing new channels for education. In general, the attitudes of students and teachers at Kuwait University towards using social media was positive. The current research aimed at examining the implementation of social media and its role in learning English language at Kuwait University. Moreover, the study investigated use attitudes of students and teachers towards the use of social media in language learning at present and potential use in the future. The 400 responses to the 23- item questionnaire demonstrated the overall trend of the increasing use of social media tools in language learning. The researcher noticed that students had positive stance towards social media implementation to learn language as they consider social media as the lifeboat to maintain continuous study at the university. Although a minority of students, about 8.6%, displayed negative attitudes towards social media at present and in the future, the research concluded that social media carries much future potential to represent as an effective tool in the teaching-learning process. The researcher recommends that all Kuwaiti educational institutions, such as schools and universities, are requested to consider of integrating social media tools since students displayed great interest in such tools on one hand, and the tools can be used in case of emergencies as a substitute of traditional teaching on the other hand. However, to overcome any technical obstacles in using social media, a proper infrastructure and well-trained staff should be available in all times.

## 6. Recommendations

The current empirical study aims to both assess the effect of using social media in the language teaching-learning process and study the potential implementation of new cutting-edge educational technology. The researcher recommends the following:

1. Adopt hybrid or integrated language teaching by combining both traditional (face-to-face) teaching and social media platforms.
2. Extend hybrid teaching to include, in addition to theoretical majors, scientific or technical majors.
3. Build the infrastructure required by assigning certain budget for online education platforms.



4. Train the teaching staff on implementing social media or other online platforms.
5. Include social media and online education in the curricula of the Faculty of Education.
6. Study the potential of implementing social media education in schools, especially in secondary schools.

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