

The Correlation Between English Grammar Competence Development and Social Media Engagement

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Abstract

Learners have become heavily exposed to foreign languages through various sources. We are at an era where it is easy for us to get familiarized with new languages. Either through language learning applications or through other digital means. One of the sources that has caught our attention is social media. This is due to the fact that the aim of these platforms does not target language development necessarily. However, students are exposed to language there. This study represents a continuum of our previous work, where we have established that learners' grammatical competence is influenced by the learners' social media engagement. This work comes to the surface to investigate the issue even further as this work investigates the type of correlation between social media engagement and the development of students' grammatical competence. The sample of this study were third year Moroccan university students who belong to the English department at Moulay Ismail University, faculty of arts and humanities. The data was gathered through a 5-scale Likert scale and a written grammar test. For the results, the null hypotheses of this work were rejected. Moreover, the students exhibited awareness for their online presence and displayed positive attitudes towards social media engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

E-learning is a type of learning where students rely on informational systems to obtain knowledge (Salehudin et al., 2021). This could be done either by adventuring solo in the digital world or working with an online community or group to attain knowledge. Including technology in the process of language learning has become quite a popular practice to take into consideration when designing a course. With the recent changes in the field of language learning, instructors are now encouraged to adopt new technologies to adapt to the era of digital natives. This is an era where students already come equipped with skills that enable them to partake in new technologies for learning purposes with ease due to their early exposure to them. Therefore, the inclusion of digital platforms by the students or by the instructors is a must and not an option anymore. Inconclusive results towards the use of technology in general and for social media specifically exist in relation to language learning. On the one hand, some

scholars support the adoption of social media means to deliver and attain knowledge for the potential advantages it could have. While on the other hand, a multitudinous number of scholars disagree with the concept of adopting social media for learning with the claim that it has more negative side effects than its positive ones. This is because they view these platforms as merely an entertainment port. Despite all of the numerous works on social media and language, the aspect of grammar seems to be rarely discussed in a Moroccan context. Thus, the current study aimed to investigate the relationship between the use of social media and the grammatical competence of Moroccan learners of the English language. The study investigated this relationship quantitatively the data provided by third year English department students of Moulay Ismail University school of arts and humanities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The post pandemic take to teaching and learning created a lot of new opportunities yet a lot of new challenges. While online learning was adapted through the pandemic period as a serious approach to education, online learning environments have been a debatable idea long before the pandemic. Scholars such as Mohammadi et al. (2011) suggest that the educational system should adapt e-learning elements instead of traditional teaching methods for its potential benefits. This outlook on teaching approaches showcases that interest in teaching and learning through digital means and through an online environment has been present for a while. Other researcher who also took part in this interest are Mohammadi et al. (2011). Their findings discussed how e-learning can facilitate the availability of information, cater to the students' different paces and needs and even provide different perspectives from different educators on the same subject. However, not all advantages contribute to the facilitating of the educational process only. The shift to learning through online means can also influence language and its competencies, and in the case of this study the development of the grammatical competence of the English language in higher education.

The findings of Singman (2012) suggest that social media could have a positive effect on the grammatical competencies of EFL students. This researcher was the first to use a quasi-experimental approach to test the relationship between the variables. His study suggested that the adoption of alternative methods to teaching could help improve the quality of students' writing in general across all writing competencies. Despite his study focusing on the effect of social media on students' writing, what Singman (2012) considered as 'social media' is an outdated idea of what social media is nowadays. This researcher labelled online writing blogs as social media, and while they do exist under the umbrella term of social media, they are not what this study targets as social platforms such as Twitter otherwise known as X, Facebook, and Instagram.

In their study, Ansari and Khan (2020) observed that the academic performance of students who were learning through collaborative learning environments was higher than of those who did not. They were able to examine the influence of social media as a collaborative learning environment on students' writings. They also observed an increase of creativity in their sample's work. Moreover, the sample was observed to be more enthusiastic and dynamic through its interactions with their colleagues and instructors. However, these researchers still had some concerns on the adoption of their findings; they suggested that the difference in contexts and learning environments might produce different results.

Not all researchers who investigated the influence of social media on language development found out that grammar was key variable. For instance, Al-Khalidi and Khouni (2021) investigated the effect of social platforms that were of a collaborative nature and those of a reflective nature on language. Their findings state that students did notice an improvement, but it was on the level of speaking and pronunciation. Another example is the findings of Bergula et al. (2023). Their study began from an important premise: it was difficult to investigate the effect of social media on students' grammatical competence because the participants were already digital natives, making it challenging to isolate social media as an independent influencing factor. This means that the students were born in era where the

use of the internet, social media, AI tools, and overall digital means is a normal thing. They did not need to adapt to learn how to use them. In fact, it is difficult to separate the use of digital means from the lives of digital natives. The students that Bergula et al. (2023) had in their sample were elementary students; however, they still were consistent and active users of social media. Despite their heavy use of social media, Bergula et al. (2023) concluded that the grammatical competence of students was not affected by social media use. From another perspective, the findings of Khudair (2025) do not support or defy the previous claims. According to her work, social media does not deserve all the negative stigma that surrounds it. There are certain aspects of social media that could help in language development. Those could be observed from the study of Ovsienko et al. (2025) who detected an enhancement of vocabulary items and grammatical structures due to the use of gamified aspects of social media. However, Khudair (2025) states that despite what social media can offer, educators should still integrate it in their teaching approaches it with caution. According to her work, all digital exposure should be guided by strong foundations of digital literacy.

3. METHODS

The study's approach and design

The approach used in this work is a quantitative approach. Although the perspective of students would have generated an insightful perspective on this issue. We have decided that we needed to understand the relationship between the variables and its dynamics in terms of development. Since our work focuses on the grammatical competence, a competence that could be measured through grades for utmost accuracy and efficiency, the choice of this approach was not a negotiable. As for the design, this work relied on an explanatory correlational design. The aim of this design is to describe the relations between the variables. This study is a continuum of our previous work (Laabidi & Ouahbi, 2023), therefore, we no longer need to investigate if social media exposes students to grammar but we rather need to investigate whether it influences the grammar they already have (their grammatical competence), and if yes how does it influence it. These ideas become clearer through the research questions that this work relied on. They are as follows:

1. Does the use of social media influence the grammatical competency of the student?
2. Does social media positively influence the grammatical competence of students?

The hypotheses for this work is as follows:

3. H1: The use of social media is assumed to influence the English grammar of students
4. H2: The use of social media is believed to positively affect the grammatical competence of students

The sample of the study

The sample of this study constituted of third year bachelor (BA) Moroccan students, who belonged to the English department at the faculty of arts and humanities, at Moulay Ismail University. The reason behind the choice of this sample was the academic level of the students. Students enrolled in the bachelor programs are entitled to three years to go through their modules and complete their courses. These students receive courses in multiple areas including grammar. By the third year they should have an adequate level of grammar that in the case of our study would make them eligible to pass the grammar test. However, this level of grammar does not equal mastery of language, so this leaves the students with room to grow and develop. That is why we chose this sample. It has a certain level that enables it to meet the requirements of the test and the study, yet they can still improve or worsen their grammatical competence through exposure.

The sampling design

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Concerning the sampling methods, convenience sampling was used in this study. Although convenience sampling is not favored in rigorous studies since it is not a type of random sampling, this type was used in this study for the advantages it offered. This type of sampling granted the researcher the time and accessibility to the participants. Relying on a sampling framework would not have granted the number of participants this study aimed for in the short amount of time we had. Relying on convenience sampling presented the study with 288 participant, a number that would allow a decent representation of the population.

Data collection instruments and procedure

The research instruments that were used in this study are a questionnaire with multiple statements that the participants could engage with through a 5-scale Likert scale and a grammar test. The statements were developed by the researcher in accordance with relevant literature. As for the grammar test that was adopted in the study, it was developed by an American non-profit organization titled College Board. This organization was founded 120 years ago and aims to students navigate their academic careers in higher education. Among the most renowned tests that this organization developed and offers we can find the SAT tests and other tests such as PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10, PSAT 8/9, SpringBoard, Pre-AP, AP, BigFuture, ACCUPLACER, CLEP, CSS Profile, PowerFAIDS (The College Board, 2018). The test that was used in this study is the ESL Language Use test, which is a section of the ACCUPLACER. The test used aims to see if students can use grammar correctly in sentences (What's on the Tests -- ACCUPLACER | College Board, n.d.). (To see which areas the grammar test covers alongside the reliability and validity of the instrument, please refer to our previous work (Laabidi & Ouahbi, 2023)).

The data for this work was collected online. All students who study in Moulay Ismail University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities create online groups, whether on Facebook or on WhatsApp to communicate with each other and make the process of information sharing a bit easier. With this knowledge, the researcher tried to contact students from those groups. Since there was no contact or access to the students' WhatsApp groups, the researcher was able to locate and post on the students Facebook groups. The post informed the students about a call for participation in a study. The moderators of the third year groups of Moulay Ismail University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities reached out privately to the researcher. They were then informed about the rational and purpose of the study. The moderators were able to distribute / share the questionnaire and the test with their respective groups. Since the sample was aware that participation in this study was not mandatory, they took their time to partake in it. Four months was the period that the data collection phase took to achieve the large number of responses that the study works with. To ensure that the students did not cheat or use artificial intelligence to complete the test, the researcher validated the responses of the students. Each students response was analyzed to examine its internal consistency and determine whether the student used the help of certain tools to complete the test.

4. RESULTS

This study is investigating the relationship between the use of social media and the grammatical competence of students. This investigation is based on 2 research questions that are as follows:

- Does the use of social media influence the grammatical competency of the student?
- Does social media positively influence the grammatical competence of students?

As for the research hypotheses, to guide the investigation process between the variables the following research hypotheses are formulated

- **H1** the use of social media does influence the l2 grammar of students
- **H2** the use of social media does positively affect the grammatical competence of students

Characteristics of the sample

The sample constitutes of 288 participants, male and female. As noted in Table 2 below, 25% of the sample are males and 75% of the sample are females. This big gap between the genders of the participants was not intentional. The researcher did not approach a certain gender specifically or favored the representation of a gender over the other. The gap that we take not of in the table is simply due to the availability of the participants and the willingness to take part in the study. The researcher distributed the research instrument online to the respective population, and whoever was willing to take part in the study from the population did. In the case of our work, female students were more willing to take part in the study.

Table 2. Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender

				Valid	Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Percent	Percent
Valid	Male	72	25,0	25,0	25,0
	Female	216	75,0	75,0	100,0
	Total	288	100,0	100,0	

Another measure that was taken to ensure the quality of the study is to determine the participants who are grammatically competent from those who do not meet the requirements. That procedure resulted in having 192 students who were grammatically competent and 96 students who did not meet the requirements. This number is presented in Table 3 below, where students are distinguished by grammatical competency and gender. Table 3 also shows the age groups that took part in the study.

Table 3. Grammatically Competent by Age Cross-Tabulation

Grammatically competent * Age Cross tabulation

Count

		Age			
			between	20	
		from 16 to 19	and 25	26 and above	Total
grammatically_compete	yes	8	166	18	192
nt	no	4	74	18	96
Total		12	240	36	288

The first research question that investigated whether social media influences the grammatical competence of students is answered through 2 statements:

-After I spend time on social media platforms I have a desire to change/ modify some of the grammatical structures I already know

-My engagement with social media platforms influences my English

For the first statement, Table 4 showcased the following:

Table 4. I Want to Change My Grammatical Structure After Using Social Media

		Frequen	Percent	Valid	Cumulati
		cy		Percent	ve Percent
Valid	strongly agree	54	18,8	18,8	18,8
	Agree	102	35,4	35,4	54,2
	Neutral	84	29,2	29,2	83,3
	Disagree	36	12,5	12,5	95,8
	strongly disagree	12	4,2	4,2	100,0
	Total		288	100,0	100,0

The biggest percentage in Table 4 was 35,4% for the value of “agreeing” with the statement as 102 participants out of 288 participants agreed that after using social media they wanted to change and/or modify some grammatical structures they already knew to new ones they were exposed to from social media. The percentage of the participants who disagreed with the statement was 12,5%. This means that not a big percentage of the sample felt the need to change the grammatical structures they knew because of social media.

The next statement showcased:

Table 5. My Engagement with Social Media Platforms Influences My English

		Frequen	Percent	Valid	Cumulati
		cy	t	Percent	ve Percent
Valid	strongly agree	36	12,5	12,5	12,5
	Agree	132	45,8	45,8	58,3
	Neutral	66	22,9	22,9	81,3
	Disagree	36	12,5	12,5	93,8
	strongly disagree	18	6,3	6,3	100,0
	Total		288	100,0	100,0

The biggest percentage in Table 5 belonged to participants who “agreed” to the statement with 132 participant out of 288 making up 45,8% out of 100% of the sample. As for the participants who “disagreed” with the statement the percentage was 12,5%. This means that the majority either agrees with 45,8% or strongly agrees with 12,5% that the use of social media does indeed

affect their grammar. Although these percentages have a clear gap between them a chi-square test is still need to reject or accept the second null hypothesis.

Table 6. Grammatically Competent by Social Media Engagement Cross-Tabulation

Grammatically competent * social media engagement Cross tabulation

		My engagement with social media platforms influences my English					Total	
		strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	strongly disagree		
Grammatically competent	yes	Count	12	102	48	18	12	192
		Expected Count	24,0	88,0	44,0	24,0	12,0	192,0
	no	Count	24	30	18	18	6	96
		Expected Count	12,0	44,0	22,0	12,0	6,0	96,0
Total		Count	36	132	66	36	18	288
		Expected Count	36,0	132,0	66,0	36,0	18,0	288,0

In Table 6 above the expected count did not match the observed count. It is to note as well that most of the participants who agree with the statement are grammatically competent with 102 grammatically competent participants voting for “agree” and 12 grammatically competent participants voting for disagree.

Table 7. Chi-Square Tests – Research Question 1

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	30,273 ^a	4	,000
Likelihood Ratio	29,143	4	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	,222	1	,638
N of Valid Cases	288		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6,00.

The chi-square test for this section had a P value of 30,273^a indicating association; also the sig value for Table 7 was less than 0.05. Having this value made it possible to reject the null hypothesis that dictates that social media doesn't influence the grammatical competence of students. The alternative hypothesis that stated H2: social media does indeed influence the grammatical competency of students was accepted. After accepting that there is an association

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between the variables, to test the size of the effect the symmetric measures table can be referred to.

Table 8. Symmetric Measures – Research Question 1

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal	by Phi	,324	,000
Nominal	Cramer's V	,324	,000
N of Valid Cases		288	

Table 8 above is a 2 by 2 table; thus phi’s value was referred to. The value in question is 0.324 thus the use of social media has a moderate effect on the grammatical competence of the participants in this section.

Although that the pervious tables painted an association between the variables, it is not enough to see that social media influenced the grammatical competence of the students, and whether students wanted to change some aspects in their grammatical competence.

The second research question

The influence of social media should be further investigated to see if it is positive (not committing errors) or negative one (committing errors); therefore, this research question investigated whether social media encourages grammatical errors or not through its use with 3 statements: the first statement presented the following results:

Table 9. I Use Many Informal Words in the Academic Setting

I use many informal words in the academic setting because I’m used to using them in social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	12	4,2	4,2	4,2
	Agree	102	35,4	35,4	39,6
	Neutral	12	4,2	4,2	43,8
	Disagree	84	29,2	29,2	72,9
	strongly disagree	78	27,1	27,1	100,0
Total		288	100,0	100,0	

The biggest noticeable percentage in Table 9 was for the value of “agree” with 35,4%. Moreover if the values of “agree” and “strongly agree” add up they would make up 39,6%, however this percentage still does not overshadow the total of the values “disagree” and “strongly disagree” which was 56,3%. The addition of the total of values shows that more than 56% of the sample is not in favor of this statement. This means that although some participants agree that they use informal words in the academic setting because of social media, more than half of the sample disagrees with the statement.

The next statement’s results came as follow:

Table 10. I Do Not Pay Attention to Grammatical Mistakes When Using Social Media

I do not pay attention to grammatical mistakes when I use social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	36	12,5	12,5	12,5
	Agree	102	35,4	35,4	47,9
	Neutral	36	12,5	12,5	60,4
	Disagree	96	33,3	33,3	93,8
	strongly disagree	18	6,3	6,3	100,0
	Total	288	100,0	100,0	

The biggest percentage in Table 10 above was for the value of agree with 35,4%. This means that most of the participants do not pay attention to the grammatical mistakes they commit or witness when using social media. As shown in Table 11, 33,3% of the sample disagrees with that statement. Even though that the percentages are somewhat close, when adding the total of the extreme values of “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” the percentages do show a noticeable difference then as 48% (rounded) agree/strongly agree with the statement while 39,6% disagree/strongly disagree with the statement.

The last statement for this section investigated whether the participants committed grammatical mistakes even outside of the social media setting. The results were as follows:

Table 11. The Use of Social Media Made Me Commit Grammatical Mistakes Outside Social Media

The use of social media made me commit mistakes in grammar in English even when I am not using social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	18	6,3	6,3	6,3
	Agree	84	29,2	29,2	35,4
	Neutral	54	18,8	18,8	54,2
	Disagree	96	33,3	33,3	87,5
	strongly disagree	36	12,5	12,5	100,0
	Total	288	100,0	100,0	

33,3% of the sample disagrees with the statement. This means that the use of social media does not encourage grammatical mistakes outside of the social media context. Even if the totals with the addition of the extreme values were to be accounted for, the majority of votes would still be for the value of disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with a percentage of 45,8% in comparison to 35,4% of the sample that agreed with the statement. To reject or accept the last null hypothesis stating: H0: the use of social media does not encourage grammatical errors, a chi-square was conducted and the results were as follows:

Table 12. Grammatically Competent by Social Media Engagement Cross-Tabulation – Research Question 2

**Grammatically competent * social media engagement
Cross tabulation**

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			I commit mistakes even when I'm not using social media					
			strongly agree	agree	Neutra l	disagree	strongly disagree	Total
Grammatically competent	yes	Count	6	60	36	60	30	192
		Expected Count	12,0	56,0	36,0	64,0	24,0	192,0
	no	Count	12	24	18	36	6	96
		Expected Count	6,0	28,0	18,0	32,0	12,0	96,0
Total		Count	18	84	54	96	36	288
		Expected Count	18,0	84,0	54,0	96,0	36,0	288,0

Table 12 showcased that on the one hand the observed count does not match the expected count, hinting that there might be association between the variables. On the other hand, it is to note that the highest votes was for the values of “disagreeing”, furthermore, these votes were by students who were grammatically competent. This means that the use of social media does not negatively affect nor does it encourage mistakes in the grammatical competence of grammatically competent students.

Table 13. Chi-Square Tests – Research Question 2

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15,107 ^a	4	,004
Likelihood Ratio	15,004	4	,005
Linear-by-Linear Association	2,959	1	,085
N of Valid Cases	288		

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6,00.

Going along with the previous assumptions, the P value for Table 13 was 15,107^a indicating association between the variables. Moreover the sig value was 0.004 which is less than 0.005 made it possible to reject the null hypothesis that stated that social media does not positively affect the grammatical competence of students. After the alternative hypothesis was accepted, to test the size of the effect a symmetric measures table can be referred to.

Table 14. Symmetric Measures – Research Question 2

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approximate Significance
Phi	,229	,004

Nominal by Cramer's V	,229	,004
Nominal		
N of Valid Cases	288	

Table 14 above is a 2 by 2 table; thus phi's value was referred to. The value in question is 0.229 therefore; the use of social media has a moderate effect on the grammatical competence of the participants in this section.

5. DISCUSSION

The first research question looked at the influence of social media engagement in relation to the grammatical competence of students. The results of the descriptive statistics and the chi-square test were all in favor of social media engagement. The results showed that the use of social media does influence the grammatical competence of students as 54,2% of the sample wanted to change some aspects in their grammatical structures. Furthermore, the value of the Pearson chi-square was high showcasing association and the sig value was also inferior, thus rejecting the hypothesis that dictates that social media engagement does not influence the grammatical structure of students.

Despite the results showcasing an association between the variables, that research question did not answer whether the change or the influence was for the best or for the worst, it only confirmed that there is an association between the variables as social media does in fact influences the grammatical competence of students.

The second and final research question asked if social media positively influenced the grammatical competence of students. Because of multiple scholars such as (Jonassen, 1994), Maros and Taufek (2019), Chua, Fong, Goh, and Wong (2014) to mention a few there were many arguments that supported the positive influence over the negative influence of social media; this research question did take on the positive assumption as well concerning the use of social media and the grammatical competence.

The first issue that was addressed through the data gathered for this research question was the issue of the desire to change one's grammar after the use of social media. The results showed that 56% of the sample disagreed with the statement that suggested that with the increase engagement with social media platforms the use of informal words in the academic context also increases. The second issue that was addressed in the same research question's results was the issue of grammatical mistakes. The participants in the sample did agree with a rounded percentage of 48% that they do not pay attention to grammatical mistakes when using social media; it is to not that 39% of the sample disagreed with the statement. For those who agreed with the statement meant that they themselves commit grammatical mistakes when using social media and/or that they notice the grammatical mistakes of other users of social media. This statement was still lacking to provide an answer to the research question. This is where the following statement's results provide further explanation.

In the second statement that suggested that the participants would commit mistakes even when they are not using social media 45,8% of the sample disagreed, while 35,4% agreed with the statement. The majority of the participants who disagreed with the statement were grammatically competent further emphasizing their argument. The Pearson value of the chi-square test also showed an association between the variables and the sig value which was less than 0.005 made it possible to reject the null hypothesis that stated that social media does not positively affect the grammatical competence of students.

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The data provided by the participants for those statements showed that although they might commit mistakes in social media or overlook some mistakes, does not mean that those mistakes will transfer over to the academic setting. These results also further supported the claims of Maros and Taufek (2019) who suggested that the use of informal words or slangs does not hinder the development of the grammatical competence of a learner. Herring et al.'s (2007) also was a supporter of the use of social media emphasizing that social media allows learners a space where they can express themselves freely. This claim could be observed in the results of the current study through the participants' answers. The sample of the current work stated that they do not stress over the mistakes they make or encounter when using social media. Thus, they have the ability to express their ideas with no regards to academic structures.

Although this study did not examine the language that students use online to compare it to what they use in academic settings, the study did establish that students do not control their language when using social media as much as when they write academically. This could be observed through the percentage of 35,4% of the sample who agreed that they do not pay attention to the mistakes they commit when engaging with social media. This shows that the students write according to the context they are in, moreover, even their language quality depends on it. That is why the findings of this study support the findings of Maros and Taufek (2019) and Herring et al.'s (2007) studies. Furthermore, these studies offer insights on the side of language use that this study did not investigate which is the quality of written language on social media.

In the case of this study, the participants were able to differentiate between the informal settings and the academic setting. Despite their exposure to multiple types of language styles such as informal language terms on social media (such as slangs or abbreviations of certain words), the participants knew that it was inappropriate to use such styles, terms or structures in essays or assignments. They developed a consciousness to the language they use in their academic writing. However, this argument remains one sided since the study only examined their language use in academic settings.

Although the perspective of the participants on their stances towards the use of social media for learning purposes cannot be captured fully as there were no interviews conducted, the majority of the participants overall held a positive attitude towards social media use. The majority of the sample with a percentage of 45,8% agreed that social media attribute to their grammatical competence and 45,8% of the sample in comparison to 39,6% stated that their social media use does not encourage them to use nonacademic grammatical structures in their university assignments. Furthermore, the participants also showed that social media helped expose them to the English language and to the grammatical system of the English language.

While the findings suggest an association between students' English grammar competence and their social media engagement, it is still important to consider the influence of other alternative variables. The first alternative explanation or variable is motivation. As Lou and Noels (2019) argued, motivation and the learner's mindset is the most important factor in the educational process. Motivation can even surpass age. Which is always debated to have a big impact on the pace and quality of language learning. Motivation or 'Language Mindset' as Lou and Noels (2019) identify it is the beliefs that individuals have for language learning. These beliefs are the fuel to the actions that those same individuals make towards their language learning process. In simpler terms, if someone believes that they will not learn a language because of a certain reason; they will not learn said language. Vice versa, if someone believes that they will learn a language through whatever means they have, they will learn that language. This could explain the results of this study. If we perceive that learning a language is driven by motivation, then students will learn the English language and try to improve their grammatical competence through their social media engagement. From this perspective, the learner is not passive, but rather active and trying to find any possible mean that will fulfill their motivation.

Another alternative explanation or variables to consider is students' prior language proficiency or prior knowledge. Since there was no prior testing and post testing, the results of the study cannot be confident that students' prior knowledge did not contribute to the responses they provided without the influence of social media. Students with stronger prior knowledge about the grammar of the English language and with heavy engagement in social media would excel in the grammar test. Thus, they would create an illusion that it is rather because of their engagement in social media that they excelled in the grammar test. In this case, their grammar level could actually be influenced by their social media engagement or it could be solely due to their prior knowledge and proficiency.

In addition to language mindsets and prior knowledge about the language, differences in grammar classes' instructions or writing instructions in the classroom could also affect students' performance in the test. The reason behind the consideration of these differences is the outcomes they lead to. According to Nassaji (2017) classroom instruction is a crucial element of language learning. Some students might have been exposed to different levels of grammar in terms of difficulty in their own respective classes. Even the context of the instructions and the instructor himself/herself play a part in this equation. The study tried to account for this issue by using a sample that had the same professors so that the quality of classroom activities and classroom instructions would not affect the results. Nevertheless, this study took into consideration the variables of instruction quality only in the period of data collection. This means that the participants could have had different instructors before the semester in which they participated in the study. For these reasons, classroom instruction should be taken in consideration as a mediating variable in the relationship of social media engagement and its effect on students' grammar competency. The relationship between these variables does not exist in isolation that is why we need to account for all alternative explanations and mediating variables that could influence this relationship.

The implications of this study

The findings suggest that we might need to develop a new approach to teaching that includes relevant knowledge sources that students can navigate. Students are heavily invested in social media, as we take note of the influencers and creators that are present on these platforms; we find them to be around the age of the participants. This shows that the age groups who are present on these platforms are most likely also in higher education. That is why we need to cater to their interests and link their social presence with learning. In theory, this might sound far-fetched, but this study shows that we could take more steps to investigate the creation of other teaching approaches that are more up-to-date.

At the classroom level, instructors may benefit from incorporating structured activities that connect students' social media engagement with academic writing skills. For example, teachers can use task-based language learning strategies in a new light. They can encourage students to critically analyse the grammatical structure of short-form digital texts such as posts, captions, comment threads, or educational content shared by influencers in order to develop awareness of the structures used, tone, coherence, language style, and rhetorical purpose. Similarly, guided comparisons between informal digital writing and academic writing workshops can help students recognize differences in register, organization, and argumentation strategies, thus develop their grammatical competence by observing what should be adopted and what should be disregarded.

Furthermore, using multimodal learning tasks may further support students' engagement with writing. The use of tasks such as producing reflective micro-posts, summarizing academic ideas in short digital formats, or even evaluating the credibility of online content creators can strengthen students' critical literacy skills while maintaining connections to their everyday digital environments. These tasks can help bridge the gap between informal language styles

and formal academic writing standards. These tasks also make use of the students' interests, thus they will yield engagement.

The findings of this study also concern policy and decision makers who have the authority to make such changes in terms of syllabuses. At the curriculum level, the findings suggest that policymakers and syllabus designers should consider updating writing instruction frameworks to reflect the realities of students' digital literacy practices. The students that we deal with nowadays are not the students who used to exist 10 years ago, that is why there is a need for updates to keep up with the current demographic. Syllabus designers should also take into account they are making academic content for digital natives. That is why they need input that would stimulate their curiosity for knowledge and not present them passively with knowledge.

Rather than viewing social media solely as a source of distraction, educational programs could incorporate digital literacy awareness as part of academic writing development courses. This would also help the students to regulate their use of helping tools such as AI. Developing digital awareness will help them move from a consumer position to a critical thinker/ producer position. Such integration may contribute to more relevant and motivating learning experiences for students in the context of higher education. Finally, the findings of this study contribute to change the stigma that social media has as a digital platform. This study might help us as educators consider new options for online and digital learning.

The limitations of the study

This study has faced multiple limitations. The first issue that needs to be addressed in the relationship of the variables. The study was successful in establishing an association between students' grammatical competence and their social media engagement. However, this study was not able to establish a causal relationship between the variables. Since the study used a correlational design, only the association between the variable could be tested. This work investigated the correlation between social media and the students' grammatical competence. However, this study relied on an already established competence. The work did not adopt an experimental approach or even a longitudinal approach to fully test whether social media have a significant impact on the students' grammatical competence. Although it might be difficult to control the students' use of social media, future studies are encouraged to build upon the current work and adopt an experimental approach or rely on a longitudinal design to fully test the cause and effect relationship between the variables.

In terms of the sampling design, despite this study relying on a large sample size, it did not rely on random sampling. Therefore, the requirements for generalization could not be met fully. Since this study focused on third year English department students, who study at Moulay Ismail University Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the sample may not be fully representative of students who belong to other disciplines or other universities but are also in the process of developing their grammatical competence. That is why; the findings of this study should be adopted with caution.

One more issue that should be addressed is the gender of the sample. Since the researcher did not control the settings of the study by using an experimental design, the sample was not controlled as well. These lack of constraints shows in the difference of the numbers of each gender. Females constituted 75% of the sample. This was not a choice of the researcher but simply a response to the lack of control over the environment and the sample. When the participants were presented with the questionnaire and the test, it was up to them to partake in the study. It should be noted that both enrollment and classroom attendance in BA programs are consistently higher among female students, who constitute the majority in these numbers. This claim is supported by the nature of work of the researcher who is a part-time professor in higher education in the English department and by the observations of other higher education

professors. For example, Hdii and Fagroud (2018) state the following “female students nowadays not only outnumber male students but also get better grades in all the categories of subjects” (p75). This could not be the case for all universities or institutions in higher education in morocco, but it definitely is the case for the University of Moulay Ismail, Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

These observations, be it by the researcher or by other professors, explain the big gap of percentage differences in terms of the gender of the sample. Although this distribution reflects the natural and actual enrollment patterns in BA English programs, it may influence the representativeness of the findings. Therefore, the results are likely to reflect female students’ quality of writing in regards to their social media engagement more than that of male students. Future research could benefit from a more balanced sample to allow for clearer gender-based comparisons. Moreover, since gender differences were not examined as a variable in this study, the imbalance limits the possibility of exploring whether the grammatical competence of students and their social media engagement differ across genders.

The measurements of the study is another issue that should be included. This work relied on self-reports. This means that the data that the study used reflects the sample’s perceptions about their social media use rather than the reality of their practices on social media. Future research could use a combination of self-report measures and observational data, or longitudinal assessment methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the reality of students’ social media engagement.

6. CONCLUSION

The current study sought to investigate the correlation between the development of the grammatical competence and social media engagement. The sample of this study were 288 third year Moroccan students. The sample belonged to the English department. This study used a quantitative approach and a correlational design to provide answers for the research questions. The instruments that were used in this study are an original questionnaire and the grammatical section of the ACCUPLACER test developed by College Board. Descriptive and inferential statistics were both used in this work. The results of this study showed that students' use and engagement with social media can affect their grammatical competence. Moreover, the students who took part in this study and who were grammatically competent stated that social media can contribute in the development of their grammatical competence. These results support the positive influence of social media on the grammatical competence of third year, English major students. Furthermore, the results show that the influence of social media goes beyond developing the grammatical competence and formal language structures that are usually used in academic language. It shows that social media exposes the students to a style of language that is not used in academic settings. However, it is to note that the participants of this study displayed a level of awareness that enabled them to filter the language structures that they started learning. They were able to differentiate between academic structures and informal ones.

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