

## **Saudi EFL Learners' Attitudes towards the Effect of the Internet and Social Media in Developing their English Language**

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### **Abstract**

*The present study focuses on Saudi EFL Learners' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language at the university college of Taymaa. The sample of the study consisted of 40 students who have been studying English Language and Islamic Studies in the same college and who are in their fourth academic year. A questionnaire, to measure the participants' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language., was prepared in advance by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items. The data that were obtained from the participants' responses in the questionnaire were analyzed using different statistical analyses. The findings of the study showed that the participants have a positive point of view towards using the internet and the social applications in developing their English language. Furthermore, the results pointed out that there are no significant differences between the participants' views towards the effect of the internet that could be attributed to their specializations as the results showed that they have a similar agreement rank about their point of view towards the effect of the internet and social media in developing their English language.*

**Keywords:** Facebook, Internet, Saudi EFL attitudes, Social Media, Twitter.

### **1. Introduction**

People nowadays are living in a world that is best described as a global village as they can move from one site into other easily and quickly depending on the internet and other social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Such these applications help people to interact and collaborate with each other smoothly (McCarthy, 2010). In the past, people used to use their old mobiles and home telephones to communicate with each other. Nowadays, the situation is completely different as they depend mainly on their laptops and their modern mobiles to keep in touch with the latest news and events in the world. Because of the rapid changes that took place in the world, people look on other modern means of communication to get the things they want easily and quickly. Because of these changes; technology, internet, and the social media applications become necessary in the peoples' life as well as in the students' education life.

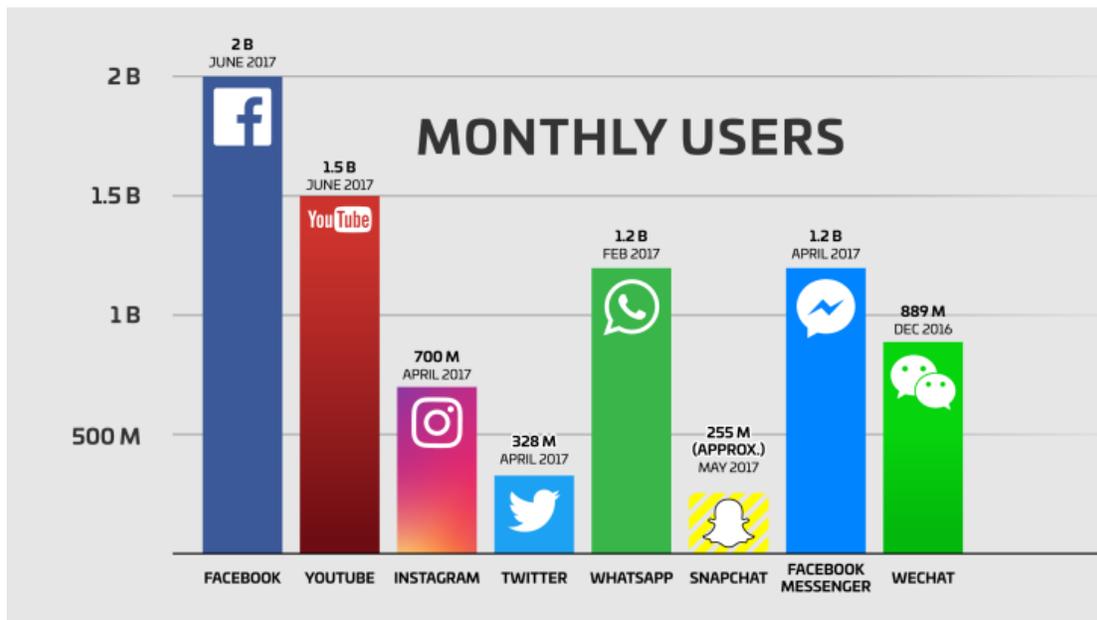
In this context, Prensky (2001) indicated that a new generation was born due to the changes that take place in the world of technology and the internet when they stated that people interacted and communicated heavily via the internet when it was allowed to be open free. He called this generation as a "digit natives". The generation of people is born nowadays surrounded by the strong effect of the internet and its different applications, so they become a major part in their lives.

People depend on the internet to do many different things such as communication, bargaining, selling, and buying. The social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Wikis, and Instagram are considered major components of the internet. These applications are defined by Chotipaktanasook (2016) as the tools that help and allow people to take an active part to comment or share their videos, images, texts, and their video or audio recordings online with their friends or other universal online sites.

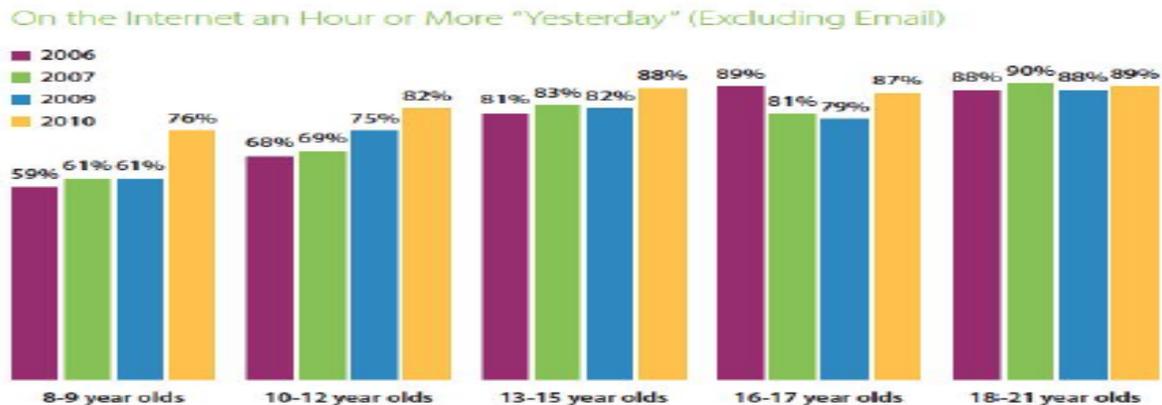
Students who learn English as a foreign language may invest these applications to develop their language skills as there are some sites which present some of free online programs to improve the students' language that are considered great opportunities to develop their language learning (Blattner& Fiori, 2009;Brick, 2011;Lamy & Zourou, 2013; Stevenson & Liu, 2010).

Kaya & Bicen (2016) supported this point of view when they looked at the social media as one of the most useful communication methods in the world and because of their importance, they become an essential part in their lives. Facebook, for example, becomes the prominent social media application in the people' everyday use as there are more than 2 billion who have their own Facebook accounts (Zephoria,2018). Moreover, there are about 1.74 billion mobile active users in the world. On the other hand, there are about 330 million people who have their active accounts on Twitter (Salman,2018).The following graph shows the most popular social networks worldwide as of June 2017, ranked by number of active users (in millions).

**Graph 1: The Most popular social networks worldwide as of June 2017, ranked by number of active users (in millions)**



The graph shows the most popular social networks worldwide ranked by number of active users in millions. The graph shows that Facebook, as a social media application, comes in the first rank; whereas Twitter comes in seventh rank. Statistics show that there is an increase in the use of the internet and the social media applications day after day since 2006. In the Arab world, Facebook is widely used by people as they depend on it as a medium of communication and learning. In the Gulf countries, Twitter is considered the main application for the majority of people and students. People may depend on these applications mainly as means of communication but they also provide them with great valuable chances to improve their language grammar, accuracy, fluency, and vocabulary (Wu&Wu,2011).Moreover they may help people as well as students to develop their language competence (Dieu, 2004),and they may help in developing their language four skills (Lee,2010).Harris (2010;p.3) indicated that there is an obvious evidence that the persons between 18-24 year olds spend daily at least 4.5 hours online daily using the internet and its applications. (Figure 1).



Source :( Harris Interactive 2010).

## 2. Review of Related Literature

Yunus & Salehi (2012) investigated the effectiveness of Facebook groups on teaching and improving Writing from the Malaysian students’ perceptions. The sample of the study consisted of 43 B.A students who were in their third year and studying TESL, in the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The researchers measured the students’ perceptions through a questionnaire that they prepared in advance. The questionnaire consisted of 10 close-ended items as well as 3 open-ended ones. The researchers created a group on the Facebook and they called it ‘Write Out Loud’. The researchers asked the participants to participate and interact in the group. The results of the study showed that using the Facebook groups could be of great value for improving the students’ writing skills.

Monica-Ariana&Anamaria-Mirabela (2014) presented a study to investigate the effect of computer and social media in improving students' vocabulary knowledge of English language namely vocabulary acquisition. The researchers focused on Facebook to do the study. The sample of the study consisted of intermediate and upper intermediate first and second year ELT students who were chosen from the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Oradea with a number of 127 students. The study tried to answer the following: Can social media affect students' development and progress in the foreign language? To apply the study, they used two groups; an experimental as well as a control one. To answer the question of the study, they designed a project based on Facebook for the experimental group. They assumed that there were not any significant differences between the two groups in using social media for learning purposes. The findings of the study showed that the differences between the two groups were not that significant but the results pointed out that there was a progress for the both groups in their post-test scores compared with the results of the students in their pre-test scores.

Alharthy& Alfaki (2014) conducted a study to examine the possibility of using social networks to promote learners’ English language. To apply the study, the researchers adopted the experimental method. They collected the data from pre- and posttests. The sample of the study consisted of 80 students who were chosen randomly. The data were analyzed using the SPSS program. The findings of the study showed that the students in the experimental group achieve a remarkable progress compared with the scores of the students in the control group who did not use the social networks. The researchers concluded that learning through using social networks is more effective than the traditional learning atmosphere as technology and internet are considered major methods and strategies in improving students' foreign language. The researchers recommended using technology and the internet in a wide context and trying to reduce the use of the traditional learning environment.

AbuSa’aleek (2015) conducted a study to explore the effect of Facebook as an online application on English language learning. Moreover, it tried to examine whether this learning model has the ability to enhance students’ learning of English. In addition, it also aimed to explore the students’ perceptions towards learning English and the students' perception about the effect of Facebook in their language improvement, confidence, motivation and attitude. The participants of the study were 65 B.A students from English language and translation department. The results of the study pointed out that the students who participated in the study looked at Facebook as a facilitator and a supporter for their learning. Moreover, they showed that it encouraged them to learn English as a foreign language. Moreover, the results showed that the participants' motivation and confidence increased when using Facebook.

Kaya & Bicen (2016) conducted a study to measure the effects of social media on students' behaviors and they took Facebook as a case study to do their study. They tried to find whether there was a positive relationship between confidence, social media participation and social media related behaviors in relation to the use of Facebook. To collect the data of the study, the researchers used a scanning model to observe the attitudes of 352 high school students. The results of the study indicated that Facebook is used for many different purposes such as communication, entertainment, and sharing their news, pictures and songs. Moreover, the findings showed that students kept their own Facebook profile picture alone. In addition, the results pointed out that the students were able to keep and protect their social identity because they did not share their own privacy with others.

Chotipaktanasook (2016) conducted a study to measure the effect of social media applications, for the EFL classrooms' students, in enhancing the Thai students' of low affective filter and to examine their willingness to communicate. The sample of the study was 40 learners from Dhurakij Pundit University. The researcher asked the participants to take a part in only one type of the social media as an Instagram. They were asked to post pictures of what they learned during the classes and they were asked to reflect what they learned in English. Moreover, he administrated questionnaires among the students and he followed-up an interview for the participants.

The findings of the study pointed out that the use of social media helped positively in lowering the students' affective filter. Moreover, the results showed that there was an increase willingness from the participants to communicate because of that.

What makes this study different, somehow from the above studies, is that the majority of the presented studies discussed the effect of the internet or one of the social media's applications such as Facebook on the learners and on only one of the language skills. Furthermore, they tried to measure the applications' effect on learners from different nationalities but very few measured their effect on the Saudi EFL learners' linguistic competence. This study deals with the effect of the internet as well as the social media's applications in general on developing the Saudi EFL learners' English language through their use to the internet and the applications of the social media.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language. To be more specified, the study aimed to answer the following two questions:

- 1-What are the Saudi EFL students' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language?
- 2-Do these attitudes towards the effect of using the internet and the social media in developing their English language, vary according to their specialization?

#### **3.2. Significance and Limitations of the Study**

The significance of the study stems from the fact that it tries to investigate the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language as the internet and the social media applications play a vital role in our lives. As presented above in the literature review, one could notice that there are several studies that tried to examine the effect of technology in the learning environment, but few of them examined the effect of the internet and the applications of the social media from Saudi EFL students' perceptions. The recommendations of this study could be of great help for instructors as well as curricula designers and developers to include some of online activities and lessons to develop students' linguistic competence.

The study is limited due to the following reasons:

- 1-Only 40 Saudi EFL students participated in this study.
- 2-The study investigated the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language from the students perceptions in only two specializations Languages and Translation Department as well as Islamic Studies Department at the University College of Taymaa.

#### **3.3. Participants**

The study was conducted at the University College of Taymaa in the second semester of the academic year 2017/2018. To conduct the study, 40 male students, who were chosen randomly, participated in the study. The participants belong to two different specializations. The first group of the students studies Islamic Studies in the college whereas the second group of the participants studies English at Languages and Translation Department in

the same college. The participants belong to different academic levels. The participants were asked to read the questionnaire's items carefully and then indicate to what extent they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement in the questionnaire by choosing one of the four LikertScale statements.

**3.4. The Instrument**

To achieve the main purpose of the study, a questionnaire was prepared in advance by the researcher. The researcher prepared the questionnaire after reading a lot of related literature. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items. It consisted of different related items to measure the participants' attitudes towards the importance of the internet and the social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter in developing their English language. The researcher used a four point Likert Scale. He asked the participants to indicate their levels of agreement with the given statements in such a way that (4) reflected strongly agree (SA), (3) reflected agree (A), (2) reflected disagree (D), and (1) reflected strongly disagree (SD).

**3.5. The Questionnaire Correcting Method**

In order to give the degree of acceptance, the researcher classified the means into three levels according to the statistical model as follows:

Low	1	1 - 2.33
Moderate	2	2.34 - 3.66
High	3	3.67 - 5

**4. Results and Discussion**

To make the discussion more convenient, the researcher analyzed the students' responses in the questionnaire using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in terms of their attitudes as well as their specialization variables. The researcher tabulated the students' responses in tables to make easy to be read and understood. The study tried to find out answers for the following two questions:

- 1-What are the Saudi EFL students' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language?
- 2-Do these attitudes towards the effect of using the internet and the social media in developing their English language, vary according to their specialization?

To answer the first question, means and standard deviations were calculated to the participants' responses in the questionnaire. The results were ordered in a descending order from the highest mean until the lowest one.

**Table (1): Means and standard deviation for students' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language**

Descriptive Statistics						
No.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement Degree	Rank
1	I think that technology is important in our life.	40	3.6750	0.79703	High	1
2	I think that most of my colleagues have Twitter accounts rather than Facebook ones.	40	3.5500	0.81492	High	2
3	I think that the internet helps me in finding the needed information easily and quickly.	40	3.4750	0.81610	High	3
4	I could find a lot of authentic materials when using the internet.	40	3.3250	0.88831	High	4
5	I see that the internet could help me in my studying.	40	3.3000	0.79097	High	5
6	I believe that we should invest the internet in our educational life in particular.	40	3.3000	0.88289	High	6
7	I could develop my speaking skill through using some of online voice programs.	40	3.3000	0.82275	High	7
8	I have an account on Twitter.	40	3.3000	1.09075	High	8
9	I can use the internet in learning new English words.	40	3.3000	0.75786	High	9
10	I use the Twitter most of the time.	40	3.2250	0.94699	High	10

11	I could develop my writing skill through writing and exchanging my comments on different topics.	40	3.2000	0.68687	<b>High</b>	<b>11</b>
12	I can learn new vocabulary when using Twitter.	40	3.2000	0.93918	<b>High</b>	<b>12</b>
13	I always enjoy using my laptop or my mobile to improve my English.	40	3.1000	0.92819	<b>High</b>	<b>13</b>
14	I could develop my listening and reading skills through registering in some of online learning sites.	40	3.0250	0.94699	<b>High</b>	<b>14</b>
15	I think that I am experienced in using the internet and its applications.	40	3.0250	0.86194	<b>High</b>	<b>15</b>
16	I believe that social media could be helpful in learning English as a foreign language.	40	3.0250	0.99968	<b>High</b>	<b>16</b>
17	I could improve my language if I have a pen friend.	40	2.9750	1.07387	<b>Medium</b>	<b>17</b>
18	I think that in using the internet, we can share my learning activities with my colleagues online.	40	2.9000	1.15025	<b>Medium</b>	<b>18</b>
19	I believe that having a Twitter account does not help me in learning English.	40	2.4750	1.08575	<b>Medium</b>	<b>19</b>
20	I believe that having a Facebook account does not help me in learning English.	40	2.4250	1.10680	<b>Medium</b>	<b>20</b>
21	I can learn new vocabulary when using the Facebook.	40	2.3250	1.14102	<b>Medium</b>	<b>21</b>
22	I have an account on Facebook.	40	2.2750	1.35850	<b>Low</b>	<b>22</b>
23	I think that we should not use the internet at all.	40	1.9500	1.03651	<b>Low</b>	<b>23</b>
24	I use the Facebook most of the time.	40	1.9500	1.10824	<b>Low</b>	<b>24</b>
	Valid N (listwise)	40				
	TOTAL MEANS		<b>2.9833</b>	<b>0.95968</b>		

Table (1) shows that the means and the standard deviations for the students' responses in the questionnaire. The table shows that the means ranging from (**3.6750– 1.9500**).The highest mean reached (**3.6750**) with standard deviation (0.79703) for item (1) and the lowest mean was (**1.9500**) for item (23) with standard deviation (1.03651) as well as item 24 as it got the same mean (**1.9500**) with standard deviation(**1.03651**).The **Total Mean reached (2.9833)**with **Standard Deviation (0.95968)** by moderate agreement and as the questionnaire correcting method shows.

**Table (1)** shows that the students have a moderate agreement towards the effect of using the internet and the social media in developing their English language as the table shows that the **Total Mean reached (2.9833)** with **Standard Deviation(0.95968)**. Table (1) shows that item number (1) "I think that technology is important in our life" comes in the first rank as it got the highest mean among the 24 items that the questionnaire consisted of as the mean was(**3.6750**) with standard deviation (**0.79703**). Such a result indicated that the majority of the students, who participated in responding to the items of the questionnaire, and in the two departments, have a positive attitude towards the importance of technology in general in our life as well as the internet, and the social media applications in their life. This fact is supported by the results of the item number (2) "I think that most of my colleagues have Twitter accounts rather than Facebook ones" as it comes in the second rank. The item's mean was (**3.5500**) with a standard deviation (**0.81492**).

The result is supported by the fact that Saudi people, in general, are fond of having Twitter accounts rather than using or having Facebook accounts. This fact is supported by the results of the questionnaire as item number (22) "I have an account on Facebook" as well as the last item "I use the Facebook most of the time" had low agreement degrees. These results pointed out that the Saudi students do not care about Facebook as they cared a lot about Twitter as it is considered their main social media application that is widely used in the Saudi Kingdom by the majority of people there. Item number (8) "I have an account on Twitter" supports this fact as it comes in the eighth rank with a high agreement degree. It got a mean of (3.3000) with standard deviation (1.09075). The table shows that the last item got the lowest mean (1.9500) with standard deviation (1.10824).In the same context; item number (22) got also a low mean (2.2750) with standard deviation (1.35850) and it got a low agreement degree. The table shows that students believe that the internet as well as the social media applications could be of great help for them to develop their English language and its four skills.

This fact about the importance of the internet in developing the learners' language is supported by many researchers such as Alharthy & Alfaki (2014), AbuSa'aleek (2015), Kaya & Bicen (2016), Chotipaktanasook (2016), and Zephoria (2018). Item number 7 " I could develop my speaking skill through using some of online voice programs" supports this fact as it comes in the seventh rank and with a high agreement degree. In addition, item number 14 " I could develop my listening and reading skills through registering in some of online learning sites" comes also with a high agreement degree as students believe that they could use the internet in developing their speaking and listening skills. These results are supported by Yunus & Salehi (2012), and Monica-Ariana & Anamaria-Mirabela (2014) when they indicated that using the social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter could develop and improve the learners' English language skills.

To answer the second question, the researcher used the T-test to examine if there are any statistical significant differences in the students' attitudes towards the effect of using the internet and the social media in developing their English language that can be attributed to their specialization or their department. The participants, as stated above, belong to two different separate departments; English and Islamic Studies.

**Table (2): T Test Group Statistics**

Sig. (2-tailed)	t	Std. Deviation	Mean	No.		
0.680	0.416	0.54960	3.0146	24	English	Department
		0.49045	2.9521	24	Islamic	

**Table (2)** shows that there are no statistical significant differences in the students' attitudes towards the effect of using the internet and the social media in developing their English language due to specialization or the department where "t" values reached (0.416), (t= 0.416, p= 0.680). For more information see (Appendix B). This result indicated clearly that the use of the internet as well as its applications is important in the students' academic life as they depend on them heavily. They could depend on the internet as a source of online information that they need when they are asked to write some papers or researches as item 3,4,5,6, and 17 support this fact. Item (16) " I believe that social media could be helpful in learning English as a foreign language" comes with a high agreement rank with a mean of (3.0250) and a standard deviation of (0.99968). Because of this belief, Saudi students concern a lot to have their active Twitter accounts as they can use it in developing their English language competence. Items 7,11, and 14 support this belief as all of them came in a high agreement rank as the students in both departments indicated that they could use the internet and its applications to develop their speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills. Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Brick, 2011; Lamy & Zourou, 2013; and Stevenson & Liu, 2010 supported this point of view, when they assured that students who learn English as a foreign language have the chance to invest some of the internet applications to develop their language skills as there are many online useful sites that present a golden opportunity to develop their language learning.

Based on the data and their analysis in the study, it was showed that nearly all of the students confirmed that the internet as well as the social media applications has a great effect in developing their English language. These applications provide them with a rich and meaningful learning environment for them to get benefit from the great services that could present to develop their English and its four language skills. The researcher believes that investing and using such a new technology presents a variety of rich potential opportunities to develop the learners' foreign English language. He believes that in using such tools, it is expected to gain a lot of advantage by the Arab EFL learners to develop and improve their English. Using this source of learning the foreign language help our students to achieve the linguistics proficiency and the future learning purpose. The findings of this study are consistent and it goes in complete harmony with other studies conducted by Alharthy & Alfaki (2014), AbuSa'aleek (2015), Kaya & Bicen (2016), Chotipaktanasook (2016), and Zephoria (2018). The results also indicate that the students who are studying English Language or the students who are studying Islamic Studies have similar point of views as there are no significant statistical differences between the students' responses in the two departments, as the students in both specializations look at the internet and the other social applications as a rich useful source that could help them to develop their English language.

**5. Conclusion**

The ultimate goal of the study was to examine Saudi EFL students' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English language as well as whether these attitudes towards the effect of using the internet and the social media in developing their English language, vary according to their

specialization. It was supposed that using the internet as well as the social media applications could help in developing the learners' English language. The findings showed that the participants had a positive point of view towards the effect of the internet and the social media in developing their English as 16 items out of 24 were ranked with a high agreement. The total mean of the questionnaire was (2.9833) which is considered a moderate mean. The results of the analysis as shown in Table 1 revealed that the internet and its applications may play a crucial role in developing the students' English language. This supports previous researches claimed that students could develop and improve their English language when they use the internet and its applications (Alharthy & Alfaki (2014), Abu Sa'aleek (2015), Kaya & Bicen (2016), Chotipaktanasook (2016), and Zephoria (2018).

Moreover, the results of this study indicated that there were no significant differences between the participants' attitudes towards the effect of the internet and the social media that could be attributed to their specializations as T-test analysis showed. The results of this study could present some recommendations for the instructors and teachers to increase the activities and the exercises that depend mainly on the internet and Facebook or Twitter as they are considered valuable effective applications to develop the learners' English language (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Brick, 2011; Lamy & Zourou, 2013; Stevenson & Liu, 2010).

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### Appendix A

Name:.....Specialization:..... No.( )					
SAUDI EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS the EFFECT of the INTERNET and SOCIAL MEDIA in DEVELOPING their ENGLISH LANGUAGE					
No.	Items	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
1-	I think that technology is important in our life.				
2-	I believe that we should invest the internet in our educational life in particular.				
3-	I see that the internet could help me in my studying.				
4-	I think that I am experienced in using the internet and its applications.				
5-	I always enjoy using my laptop or my mobile to improve my English.				
6-	I believe that social media could be helpful in learning English as a foreign language.				
7-	I think that the internet helps me in finding the needed information easily and quickly.				
8-	I have an account on Facebook.				
9-	I have an account on Twitter.				
10-	I use the Facebook most of the time.				
11-	I use the Twitter most of the time.				
12-	I can use the internet in learning new English words.				
13-	I think that in using the internet, we can share my learning activities with my colleagues online.				
14-	I can learn new vocabulary when using the Facebook.				
15-	I can learn new vocabulary when using Twitter.				
16-	I could find a lot of authentic materials when using the internet.				
17-	I think that most of my colleagues have Twitter accounts rather than Facebook ones.				
18-	I could develop my speaking skill through using some of online voice programs.				
19-	I could develop my writing skill through writing and exchanging my comments on different topics.				
20-	I could develop my listening and reading skills through registering in some of online learning sites.				
21-	I could improve my language if I have a pen friend.				
22-	I think that we should not use the internet at all.				
23-	I believe that having a Facebook account does not help me in learning English.				
24-	I believe that having a Twitter account does not help me in learning English.				

### Appendix B

Independent Samples Test									
t-test for Equality of Means							Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Std. Error Difference	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)	df	t	Sig.	F	
Upper	Lower								
0.36516	-.24016	0.15036	0.06250	0.680	46	0.416	.653	.205	Equal variances assumed
0.36527	-.24027	0.15036	0.06250	0.680	45.416	0.416			Equal variances not assumed