

## Reflections of Continuous Exposure to American Digital Content: The Case of EFL Students in Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

It is spotted many EFL students in Saudi Arabia utilizing American digital content as the main digital learning tool. It occurs due to the vast majority of American media and American digital platforms they use. Some signs like accent, ideas, and beliefs were noticed on some of EFL students who are exposed to American content. A quantitative research method used via “Google Forms” out of 17 items addressed to EFL students in Qassim University of Saudi Arabia. The research showed that EFL learners who are exposed to American multimedia resources are more indulged into American culture, ideology, society, history, and even accent. It is seen that facing American content unwarily might be negatively noticed in EFL behaviors. The study concluded that American digital content lacks pedagogical and academical roles to be implemented in EFL classes. It is recommended to instruct EFL students who use English content informal resources to be more aware when they are into American visual or verbal content. It is also suggested that American content should be applied as an interactive learning tool under the supervision of English learning practitioners.

**Keywords:** Exposure, American digital content, EFL students

### INTRODUCTION

This research is made to measure the implications of American content on the Saudi EFL students. With the ubiquitous spread of internet and mobile phones, it is observed through the time that EFL students are considered familiar with digital western content (especially American). The phrase “American Digital Content” includes all types of visual or verbal internet materials that are initiated or related to the US. However, new technologies of digital entertainment have made it much easier for EFL students to be more acquainted with the US media more than others. It is seen over the years the in EFL classes that students are getting closer to American culture, politics, and even the use of words.

Digital content could be a great learning tool. However, there should be reflections regarding to verbal or visual content. Changing of behaviors is a clue of learning. According to (Brown) principles of learning, he stated “Learning is a change in behavior”. This indicates the results of learning from American and western media on EFL students.

American content could be considered one of the best and most entertaining language learning tools, but only if we consider the side effects and work on to reduce them.

The American media has caused a huge influence on EFL Saudi students. It is observed in their behaviors, traditions, thoughts, art, and even in their language learning process. Some of students admire the American culture and even try to apply the lifestyle they see in Hollywood. They also prefer American-English learning material other than the most time offered English-English materials in their intuitions. The phonetic pronunciation of American English sounds is simpler to them due to the exposure and normalization of daily American digital content.

### **STUDY OBJECTIVE**

The field of research is conducted among EFL students due to their need to be continuously practicing English, and nearly all of them must be exposed to any type of American digital content. The main goal of forming this study is to analyze the clear changes shown on American content consumers.

Study Questions:

- What makes Saudi EFL students embrace the American digital content?
- What are the behavioral reflections of American digital content on EFL students?
- What are the lingual effects of American digital content on EFL students?
- How can American digital content be re-assessed for the optimal use?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

It is clear that the impact of American media was an important factor of power that made USA as the only polar of the world. (Hamilton, 2003) mentioned that due to the enormous revolution of technology, people across the whole world got affected by American culture via digital media. They like to listen to American songs and music. They admire the industry of Hollywood. They even got more interested to study English in favor of exploring the American content.

According to (Gonçalves et ai, 2018), He agreed that users of social media have a bias towards American English even in geographical areas of British English. He also stated the dominance of American culture is structured through new digital media technologies. American English varieties are now known and mostly used other than other features of English. Due to the cultural and median dominance of United States, American English has become like the role modal of English around the world.

It is known that English content is dominated by American and British media. Some English learners who seek to learn a language cannot neutrally learn a language. In (Cook, 2003)'s book, he discussed the role of either American or British EFL content materials. English is the lingua franca of our world, and it is often used either British or American content for EFL learners. It is difficult or nearly impossible to separate language from culture for EFL students. This indicates a challenge for EFL pupils who want to learn English without being culturally, and believably affected by English materials.

(Subjaga et al., 2020) added up, the tremendous rate of the amount of countless digital western media in mobile phones made students more able to embrace western lifestyle. However, not all the outcomes of media could be bad. Students might use western media to learn more efficiently. The main issue is abusing of media consumption. This issue could negatively cause several changes of human beliefs, culture, and thoughts.

Media is surely an efficient method to affect the perception of its audience (McCloud, 2007). This includes all types of content that are included in the massive media and digital world. The major problem is the mentality of trusting all of media sources as an EFL student who learns language and culture. This idea needs to be corrected immediately so they might be easily affected by media if they don't build the immunity towards what seems right or wrong of what is shown in the vast area of media and its content.

Furthermore, (Maisuwong, 2012) argued: Hollywood is a kind of the dominant culture. It spreads the American ideology through several of its works. Hollywood is the digital gate where US has started to make people more familiar to the American culture. Hollywood is effecting the way people dress, eat, and even speak. They speak and prefer the American accent due to the familiarization of digital American content. She also addressed that embracing American media could affect in both negative and positive sides. It could replace and change the characteristics of our society by the smeared American media across the world, or it could normalize great attitudes and behaviors in our community.

In addition to the previous statements, (Al-biladi. et ai, 2018) discussed the relation between American movies and learning. They found that hollywood movies could be used as a crucial English learning. It could enhance the learning procedures and the compulsory language skills. They also mentioned that American movies are not directed to EFL/ESL students. It is an entertainment tool does not focus on the pedagogical role of language learning. They also pointed out that American movies reflect pictures of American culture in the minds of EFL students.

Moreover, original language resources helps EFL students to face daily practical language rather than academic language. This should enable student to use language more efficient as the natives do. However, the cultural role of learning resources should be included to initiate a relation between the learner and language. The main objective is to make the learner closer to the target language, but not to directly follow that culture. (Kilickaya, 2004).

Following up, (Algharabali & Taqi, 2018) reported that some of EFL students sound like a bit of native-american. This phenomenon is happened directly because their high exposure to American digital content which made them acquire American English more effectively. He also expressed how some of them believe that American English is used as a high social class. They try to speak like Americans, their knowledge of American accent is fed by new entertainment technologies. These technologies approved that EFL students could use American digital content as a revolutionary language learning material, however, it lacks important academic and pedagogical.

This doesn't ignore the massive role of acquiring and learning a language through media. American movies with subtitles for example is a great tool for understanding spoken American English. (Ebrahimi & Bazee, 2016) Confirmed that English movies in general makes EFL students more familiar with the most two common accents, American and British accents. They reported as well that American movies endorse the role of motivation and enhance their desire for EFL learners.

(Damanik & Katemba, 2021) found out that in American movie and series platform as Netflix, EFL learners could use content such as movies, series, or music to upgrade their vocabulary level. However, these platforms could make learning less boring for English learners.

(Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019) stated that also American social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and X (Twitter) could contain many creative learning and teaching methods. It has all the needs for language learning, and it is also considered resilient and entertaining for language learners. It mainly improves communicative skills for language learners. Institutions could apply the role of social media and any other American media to achieve interactive and enjoyable learning.

(Haque & Al Salem, 2019) pointed out also that social media could be used as a new way of teaching and learning besides the traditional ways. Social media is a new technology that encourages students and teachers to be closer outside the classroom. They could use it in working together and conversing with each other so they all get benefit of social media. However, the insertion of social media in interactive learning could give the best benefit if the teacher could hold the responsibility of managing the social media access and discussed topics. There should be a balance between entertaining to catch the students' interest and pedagogical language teaching.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A quantitative data collection method is conducted by using "Google Forms" questionnaire out of 17 item on ... EFL students in Saudi Universities. Each item of this questionnaire is formed by Likert agreement scale by 5 possible answers. The main role of this method is to calculate the measurement of two indicators. The first goal is to measure the range of exposure of American digital content and the consumed time on American digital content. Thus, it is required to determine the effects of the exposure on EFL students.

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) has shown the reaction of EFL students of a public university (Qassim University) in Saudi Arabia in the academic year 2023-2024. It was formed on both EFL male and female students. Their answers are shown in the tables and the figure below.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire items from 1 to 17

Item no.	The questionnaire items
Q1.	EFL students are intentionally interested in American digital content ( )
Q2.	EFL learners like to spend their free time in watching American content ( )
Q3.	American digital content is more entertaining than any other type of content ( )
Q4.	They believe that children are easily attracted by American digital content ( )
Q5.	Participants consider American digital content as a useful learning tool ( )
Q6.	They usually listen to American songs and have favorite American artists ( )
Q7.	They like collecting any kind of merchandise of their favorite American public figures ( )
Q8.	They believe that American digital content has made American dialect easier to adapt than other English dialects ( )
Q9.	They are interested in the newest trends of the United States in social media platforms( )
Q10.	They are inspired by a certain series, movie or a movie character of Hollywood productions ( )
Q11.	American content has affected their thoughts or beliefs ( )
Q12.	They usually listen to American podcasts ( )
Q13.	They believe it is common to encounter inappropriate language, behaviors, or ideas in American digital content ( )
Q14.	They think American digital content made them aware of the political state of the United States ( )
Q15.	They admit that they know a lot of the history of USA by consuming American digital content ( )
Q16.	They see that American digital platforms and channels represent the reality of American community ( )
Q17.	They find some difficulties in understanding American digital content ( )

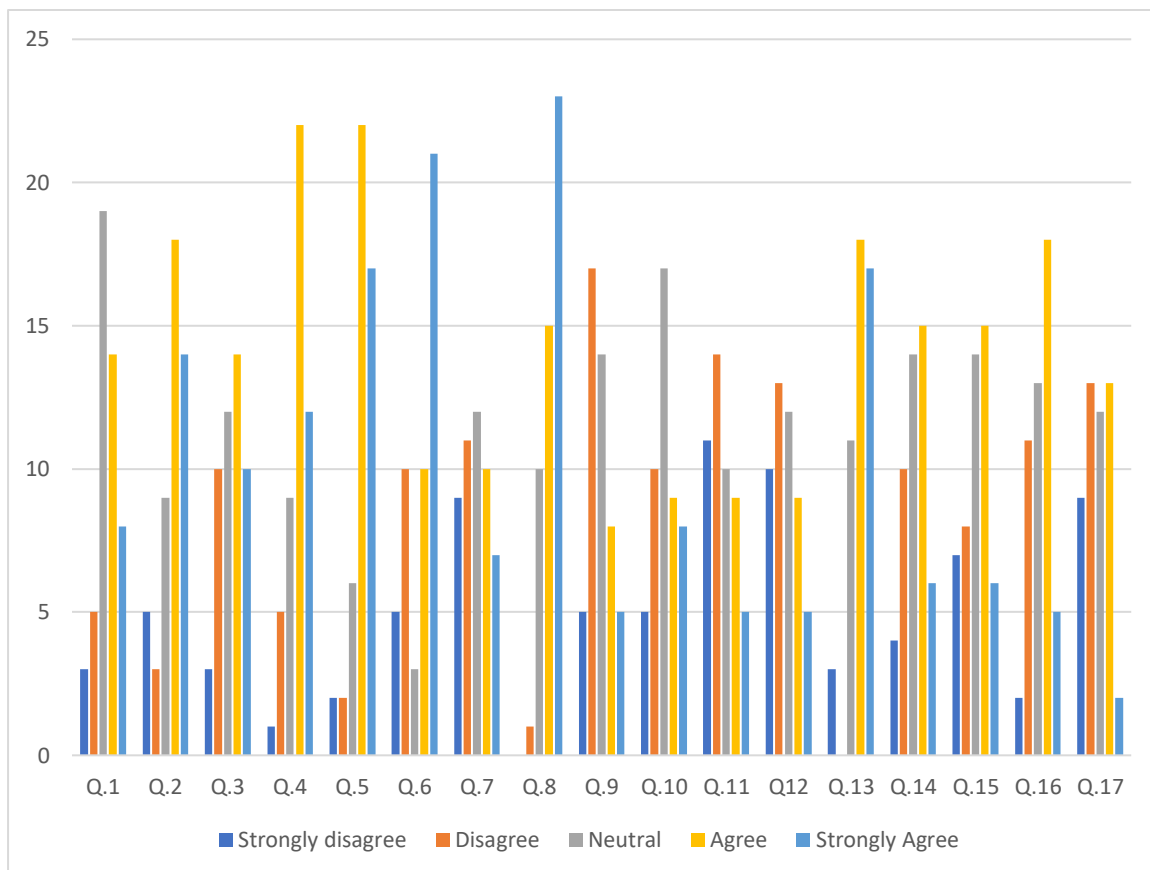
**Table 2.** The percentage of participants responses to the questionnaire items

Item no.	Percentage				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	6.1%	10.2%	38.8%	28.6%	16.3%
Q2	10.2%	6.1%	18.4%	36.7%	28.6%
Q3	6.1%	20.4%	24.5%	28.6%	20.4%
Q4	2%	10.2%	18.4%	44.9%	24.5%
Q5	4.1%	4.1%	12.2%	44.9%	34.7%
Q6	10.2%	20.4%	6.1%	20.4%	42.9%
Q7	18.4%	22.4%	24.5%	20.4%	14.3%
Q8	0%	2.1%	20.4%	30.6%	46.9%
Q9	10.2%	34.7%	28.6%	16.3%	10.2%
Q10	10.2%	20.4%	34.7%	18.4%	16.3%
Q11	22.4%	28.6%	20.4%	18.4%	10.2%
Q12	20.4%	26.5%	24.5%	18.4%	10.2%
Q13	6.1%	0%	22.4%	36.7%	34.7%
Q14	8.2%	20.4%	28.6%	30.6%	12.2%
Q15	14.3%	16.3%	30.6%	28.6%	10.2%
Q16	4.1%	22.4%	26.5%	36.7%	10.2%
Q17	18.4%	26.5%	24.5%	26.5%	4.1%

**Table 3.** The frequencies of participants responses to the questionnaire items

Item no.	Frequency				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	3	5	19	14	8
Q2	5	3	9	18	14
Q3	3	10	12	14	10
Q4	1	5	9	22	12
Q5	2	2	6	22	17
Q6	5	10	3	10	21
Q7	9	11	12	10	7
Q8	0	1	10	15	23
Q9	5	17	14	8	5
Q10	5	10	17	9	8
Q11	11	14	10	9	5
Q12	10	13	12	9	5
Q13	3	0	11	18	17
Q14	4	10	14	15	6
Q15	7	8	14	15	5
Q16	2	11	13	18	5
Q17	9	13	12	13	2

Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of research findings in a bar chart to all of the questionnaire items in Likert scale (starts from Strongly Disagree up to Strongly Agree). formed



**Figure 1.** Participants responses to the questionnaire items

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the pace of the world and the favor of the internet. All people around the globe could use their free time on the internet. It is an easy and accessible tool that could afford the benefit of self-entertainment. It has already created new fields of entertainment as blogs, videos, and interactive environment. English is the Lingua Franca of the digital world as in the real world. This means English is the key to be a part of the digital world. However, the US have the biggest part of digital media and digital platforms. According to the statistic of (Walsh, 2023), from the top 10 social media apps of monthly active users, 9 apps of 10 are American apps with only excluding "TikTok" which is a Chinese app. However, the US obviously also dominate the industry of gaming and movies. With an example of some of most common entertainment platforms in the world like Netflix or PlayStation, we can clearly say that the US has the upper hand across the majority of content across the world.

The previous analysis illustrates the aspects of Effects of American digital media and content upon Saudi EFL students. The analysis shows that nearly 45% of Saudi EFL students are interested in The digital content that is provided by the US , and more than 65% of them agreed to spend their free time on this content. This huge amount of acceptance to American digital content illustrates the intentional exposure to this type of content.

It is also observed that more than 69% of EFL students agreed on that also the US content could easily catch a kid's attention, which potentially entails that children could be easily grabbed by American media and content. Nearly 80% of the participants visualize American content as a useful learning tool, which according to the statement of (Roslim et al, 2021) that some of English digital content such as movies could help in developing communicational skills. He added as well that movies and such might reduce the stress of learning a new language like English.

More than 63% of Saudi EFL pupils listen to American songs, and also with the podcast revolution, 28.6% of participants listen to American podcasts. (Lundström a & Lundström b, 2020) approved "listening to a podcast also means engagement". This ensures that EFL students are engaged with issues that are related to the US and American community. However, the percentage above is nearly 30% of EFL students which is considered quite low due to the recency of podcast industry. This percentage might tremendously increase in the future with the endless variety of podcasts and the constant development in podcast industry.

It is noticed that American artists and public figures have a large fanbase among Saudi EFL students. From 49 students, 31 of them agreed on that they listen to American songs and have favorite American artists too. Also, it is mentioned that 17 of 49 participant like to possess anything related to their favorite figures. Another 17-pupil agreed on being inspired by Hollywood and they could name their list of favorite movies and actors. More importantly, 14 out of 49 Saudi EFL students who live in a quite conservative society agreed on the effectiveness of American digital content on their thoughts and beliefs. It means every 1 of 3.49 EFL students who are massively exposed to that type of content

could get their thoughts or beliefs affected. The type of effects is usually goes towards the major ideology of American community; this is because most of American content is naturally directed to Americans. The impact of these effects varies from one society to another.

The orientation of EFL students to American digital content originates from two things. EFL students want to practice English with entertainment content. This is one of the most common features of American digital content nowadays. They also want to be culturally aware because languages are closely related to culture. This behavior clearly creates benefits of language self-learning; however, it could contain side effects if it not done carefully. As it is shown above, EFL students who intensively face western content could be easily affected by some of foreign ideologies that might not be acceptable in different societies. As the study displays, only 3 of 49 with the percentage 6.1% have disagreed on encountering inappropriate content. The issue here is subjective according to the vision of the students to consider what is appropriate or not. However, with more than 70% of Saudis have decided that they have faced considered inappropriate digital materials regarding to the Saudi community. We can say that most of American digital content is against many of Saudi costumes and traditions. As we mentioned earlier, American content is generally based on American standards. This issue is seen as one of the major and most common problems that face EFL learners who live in Saudi Arabia. There are some safe platforms such as YouTube which according to (Watkins & Wikins, 2011), YouTube can be a safe learning tool for its vast library of videos. It could improve all English required skills, and it is also preventing unsafe content such as any video that contains violence or nudity or anything inappropriate. It is considered an optimal site for both language teaching and learning.

Due to the mass spread of American media and content across the internet, all news of the US has become more familiar with ESL/EFL learners. They could share and understand social problems, comprehend and send American memes between them, and express their thoughts on the newest trends that occurs in the US. They even could elaborate the current state of the US from all of its angles. However, 21 students approved that American digital content was the gate for them to learn about the political state of the US. 6 of them strongly agreed on the same idea as well. 20 participant say that the content was their reason of knowing a lot of American history. This is not necessarily bad, unless they reach the domain of believing everything they see. . It is viewed that 23 EFL student truly believe that American society is reflected as it is seen in movie. It might seem a great tool to learn about culture which is relatively connected to language, however, if false information transferred from a culture to another, it cannot be corrected easily. This includes the case of American digital content and how believing every minute detail that is found there could affect the perception of culture on EFL students. They might believe in false information and cause misinformation in their perception of the US.

All of these findings were to illustarte the relation between EFL students and the American English by the most common content in the world. It is clearly said that students favor the American content due to its authenticity and entertainment. Even if not all of them could comprehend this type of content. Even with 30% of participants



could not comprehend all of the presented content to them, this didn't hold them from enjoying and using that content. American digital content is easy to watch and it is the most common amongst the Saudi EFL students, children, and society in general. The exposure of American digital content occurs on a daily basis. Not many students could understand American digital content. There are 20 EFL learners who have difficulties in understanding American digital content. They lack essential resources for English learning. (Jdetawi, 2011) pointed out that Arab EFL students don't use English outside the classrooms. That's why they lack of four English skills. He also mentioned that they lack of exposure of target language. This ensures that it is necessary to EFL students to make sure that they're exposed to native tongues. To prevent language comprehension inability, students should be constructed since the beginning to build their vocabulary from early stages. As (Silverman & Hines, 2009) reported, ELLs young children should be well-established by creative teaching methods to enhance their language abilities. Applying interactive methods such as visual or verbal content would promote their vocabulary so they could understand sheer texts in next stages.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is clear that the vast majority of EFL students have American content as a practical method to learn language. Although they consider it as an efficient learning material, they need to be aware and filter what they receive from that content. It seems like a necessity to use American digital content as an entertainment or learning tool. Nevertheless, they need to consider the cultural differences and the targeted audience in the digital world. Institutions should apply learning by American content so they promote the pedagogical role and increase the interactive learning. Teachers ought to know what content they should reveal to their EFL students in the context of language teaching. This will ensure to get in the best benefit and reduce the side effects of any potential danger to their students. As well for students who are unwarily occupied by American digital content, there should be some awareness sessions regarding this subject. It will help EFL learners to be more secured when they are massively exposed to any foreign digital content.

## **Recommendations**

- 1- Increasing the right amount of awareness from being negatively affected by American digital content
- 2- Developing American digital content academically in institutions by practitioners.
- 3- Affording official digital platforms to display American filtered content that is suitable for Saudi EFL students

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## APPENDIX

Item no.	The questionnaire items
Q1.	I am interested in American digital content ( )
Q2.	I like to spend my free time in watching American (movies, series, or videos)( )
Q3.	American content is more entertaining to me than any other content material ( )
Q4.	I believe children could be easily attracted by American digital content ( )
Q5.	I consider American content as a useful language learning tool ( )
Q6.	I usually listen to American songs and I have favorite American artists ( )
Q7.	I like collecting any kind of merchandise of my favorite American (artist, actor, or content creator ( )
Q8.	I think American content made American dialect easier to me than other English dialects ( )
Q9.	I am interested in the newest trends of the United States in social media platforms ( )
Q10.	I am inspired by a movie, series, or a character of Hollywood productions ( )
Q11.	American content has an effect on my thoughts and beliefs ( )
Q12.	I usually listen to American podcasts ( )
Q13.	I believe it is common to encounter inappropriate language, behaviors, or ideas in American content ( )
Q14.	I think American digital content made me aware of the political state of United States ( )
Q15.	I believe I know a lot of the history and culture of the United States by consuming American digital content? ( )
Q16.	I see that American digital platforms and channels represent the reality of American community ( )
Q17.	I find some difficulties in understanding American digital content ( )