



SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: JORDANIAN EFL LEARNERS' PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

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Abstract:

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the EFL learners' practices and understand their experiences with SNSs (social networking sites) as a tool for English language learning. The study was conducted in richer information and a deeper insight was gained through a qualitative case study. In the qualitative phase, 12 participants were purposefully selected and interviewed in order to explain further the statistical results, develop a rich descriptive picture of their lived experiences using social networking to improve their English language learning, and identify the factors and barriers that influence their practices. This study was guided by the following research question: How do these Facebook practices affect their language learning experiences? The results revealed that most participants felt comfortable using Facebook in English language learning. However, less than half of them used Facebook on a regular basis to learn English. In addition, they tended to read and observe discussions in English rather than participate in them or produce language output. The results also revealed that learners' practices or behaviors in the SNS environment changed depending on certain factors, such as the context, audience, sense of belonging, self – confidence, and the learners' needs and interests.

Keywords: social networking, EFL, cognitive, constructivism, self-confidence

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade, social networking sites (SNSs) have played a significant role in our daily life. Millions of people all over the world use SNSs to share their ideas, stories, information, photos, and videos (Álvarez Valencia, 2014). For instance, on average there were 1.13 billion daily active Facebook users in June 2016 (Facebook Newsroom, 2016). It is difficult to provide an accurate definition of SNSs because they have exponentially grown over the last few years and have continually added new features and services for their users. According to Ellison (as cited in Cho, 2012), SNSs are defined as follows: *“web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”* (p. 5)

Cho (2012) stated that SNSs are *“online communities built by online users who want to share their interest, ideas, information, text messages, photographs, and audio tracks, and/ or videos”* (p. 6). Most SNSs share key characteristics, such as the ability to build a profile, upload and publish content, create conversations, chat with other users, and create pages related to certain themes.

Because of the tools and services that SNSs provide to their users, they have acquired widespread popularity and have become integrated in several domains. One such domain is language teaching and learning (Cho, 2012; Krueger, 2014). According to Lin (2012), several studies have suggested that integrating online SNSs in language learning and teaching is helpful because they provide language learners with an authentic context to express themselves and develop new forms of meaning. They also allow language learners to make social connections with different people around the world, contact native speakers of the target language, understand the target language culture, and gain insight into the ways people use language. Black (2009) suggested that language learners who participate in online interaction platforms develop different aspects of their linguistic, cultural, and social identities and shift their interest from focusing on form and structure to meaning and function.

However, integrating SNSs in English language learning and teaching is still an under-researched and controversial issue and little is known about learners' practices that take place on SNSs (Lamy & Zourou, 2013). Thus, this study attempted to contribute to the current literature by investigating Jordanian EFL learners' practices and experiences with SNSs in learning English as a foreign language.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the spread of English and the massive increase in the number of English learners in Jordan, English is only taught as a foreign language (EFL). In an EFL context, students learn English as any other school subject and have few opportunities to use English for communicative purposes (Drbseh, 2013). The body of research in language teaching and learning has historically distinguished between ESL and EFL contexts

(Shively, 2011). In an ESL context, non-native speakers learn English in an English-speaking environment (Dictionary.com, 2016), so ESL learners can gain exposure to authentic conversation and interact with native speakers using the target language. They also have a good opportunity to develop their language skills and understand the norms regarding the appropriateness of language use (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005).

On the other hand, in an EFL context, non-native speakers learn English in a non-English-speaking environment (Dictionary.com, 2016), so they lack the authentic social exposure that could make them more familiar with the target language. According to Ishihara (2010), the main source of language input in an EFL context is textbooks that mostly present non-authentic or oversimplified patterns of the target language. Many EFL textbooks also focus students' attention on grammatical structures and present language input in isolation and in absence of contextual information (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013; Kilickaya, 2004). Unfortunately, learners in EFL contexts often face major challenges, such as crowded classes, lack of practice, lack of comprehensible input, unqualified teachers, inadequate textbooks, and very limited hours of instruction (Akbari, 2015). These problems are likely to lead EFL learners to develop a negative attitude and lack of motivation toward language learning. Therefore, this study aimed to increase Jordanian EFL learners' awareness of SNSs as a resource and tool for English language learning in an EFL context.

With the ongoing growth of information and communication technology, some studies have suggested that using Web 2.0 tools in learning English can help EFL learners overcome the shortcomings of formal programs in EFL contexts (Ahmed, 2015). According to Hsieh (2012), using Web 2.0 tools, particularly SNSs, facilitates the informal self-directed learning of a foreign language because they provide access to authentic resources, support conversational practices with other EFL learners or native speakers of the target language, encourage social discussion, and improve learner motivations. Engaging in social networking activities also helps language learners construct new forms of discourse and identity (Cho, 2012).

However, using SNSs for language learning is still an emerging and somewhat controversial issue as little is known about the actual practices of EFL learners on SNSs (Lamy & Zourou, 2013). This mixed-methods study attempted to investigate to what extent Jordanian EFL learners use SNSs as a tool for language learning and understand their learning practices and experiences on SNSs.

3. Theoretical Framework

Theory is used in educational and social research in different ways. One way is to form a framework for the study and provide broad explanations of individuals' behavior and attitudes (Creswell, 2014). In this study, Vygotsky's social constructivism was used to provide broad explanations of EFL learners' practices and experiences using SNSs. These theories hold, and I would therefore expect, that the use of SNSs influences the

language acquisition process of EFL learners because it provides learners with natural interaction and input essential for language development (Zhang, 2009).

4. Constructivism

During the last three decades, educators and scholars have shifted their interest toward constructivism in education. Although scholars have provided different definitions and talked about different versions of constructivism, they have generally agreed upon certain underpinnings as summarized from Barrett (2008) below:

- Knowledge is socially or individually constructed and not transmitted.
- Prior knowledge and social interaction play a significant role in the learning process.
- Knowledge is subjective and individuals create their own reality on the basis of their prior knowledge and learning experiences.
- Learner is an active participant in the learning process not a passive recipient of transmitted knowledge.

However, the cognitive constructivism of Piaget and social constructivism of Vygotsky have gained increasing attention in constructivist literature (Hultgren, 2008).

4.1 Cognitive constructivism

According to Hultgren (2008), Piaget's cognitive constructivism suggests that knowledge is individually and internally constructed through interaction with the environment (e.g., objects or experience with others). It is also idiosyncratic, i.e., varies according to an individual's background knowledge and experience. Cobb stated that learners in cognitive constructivism "*actively construct their ways of knowing as they strive to be effective by restoring coherence to the worlds of their personal experience*" (as cited in Hultgren, 2008, p. 23). In other words, although Piaget emphasized the role of external environment and the sensory world in knowledge construction, he suggested that knowledge cannot be constructed independently of individual experiences. Hultgren (2008) stated, "*knowledge does not exist outside a person's mind, but is uniquely constructed inside of it*" (p. 18). According to Schrader (2015), the rapid progress of information technology and the emergence of SNSs have supported constructivist learning because this technology provides learners with the opportunity to find resources and individually construct their own knowledge without depending on the knowledge transmitted by teachers. One of the aims of the present study was to explore learners' practices in SNSs. Accordingly, it sought to reveal how SNSs contribute to or influence constructivist learning.

In Piaget's cognitive constructivism, knowledge cannot represent reality because it is internally constructed and varies according to personal experience. However, it has an adaptive function that allows individuals to survive and gradually advance in their environment. An essential concept associated with Piaget's work is "equilibration," which is related to constituting "*a balance between assimilation and accommodation as people*

interact with their environment" (Hultgren, 2008, p. 18). When new information aligns with personal prior knowledge or experiences, the person can fully understand and fit it within his/her mental structure. On the other hand, when information contradicts with personal mental structure, it causes disequilibrium. Then, the person needs accommodation *"comprised of reflective, integrative behavior that restores cognitive equilibrium"* (p. 18). Piaget discussed three types of accommodation that can help learners adapt and survive in their environment: rejecting contradictions and keeping the original construct, accepting the new construct in addition to the initial construct and using them alternately in different situations, and generating a new construct to overcome the contradiction. In this study, I determined how language learners respond to the conflict between the knowledge they acquire from SNSs and that which they acquire from formal education or their real life.

4.2 Social constructivism

Vygotsky's work has played a significant role in the development of constructivism. Although both Piaget and Vygotsky focused on the idea of knowledge construction, Vygotsky focused on the role of social interaction in knowledge construction more than Piaget (Barrett, 2008). According to Vygotsky, *"any higher mental function was external and social before it was internal. It was once a social relationship between two people"* (as cited in Hultgren, 2008, p. 19).

Barrett (2008) stated that Vygotsky has used the concept of the *"zone of proximal development"* (ZPD) in order to stress the role of social interaction and collaboration in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, there are two levels of development. The first is the actual development that the learner can reach autonomously. In contrast, the second refers to the level of development that the learner can reach with others' support and assistance, such as instruction and peer tutoring. In recent years, as the ZPD concept has been used in educational contexts, it has been modified and changed by new concepts, such as *"scaffolding."* According to Hultgren (2008), scaffolding is an instructional strategy that refers to the support or assistance that the teacher or the more capable peers provide to struggling learners.

Although Piaget and Vygotsky's constructivism was created before online services, it has been fundamental in online education and research (Hultgren, 2008). According to Ahmed (2015), online platforms such as SNSs are providing learners with opportunities for social interaction considered essential to learning and knowledge construction. They provide different opportunities and authentic resources unavailable in real life.

5. Literature Review

This chapter explored self-confidence and issues of identity.

5.1 Self-Confidence

According to Tunçel (2015), self-confidence is a feeling of self-competence or self-assurance required to cope with problems in life and fulfill basic human requirements like happiness and success. Self-confidence plays a significant role in all aspects of our lives (personal, social, and academic). According to Bong (2002), self-confident people are more enthusiastic and motivated to achieve their goals and overcome the difficulties they encounter. In language learning, several studies have suggested a correlation between self-confidence and success in language learning (Rubio, 2007; Tunçel, 2015). According to Rubio (2007), language learners with low self-confidence most probably have negative feelings toward language learning, such as anxiety, fear of failure, and a hesitation to use the target language. On the other hand, language learners with high self-confidence tend to be more successful than learners with low self-confidence. They also have greater motivation and more positive feelings to use and socialize with the target language.

The significant role of self-confidence in language learning has encouraged educators and researchers to focus on the factors that can promote self-confidence among language learners. According to Tunçel (2015), language learners need a comfortable environment in which they can answer questions and express themselves without fear of making errors or suffering humiliation from others. They must also be encouraged and receive positive feedback without comparing them with others. Many studies have suggested that using SNSs and Internet-based resources can promote self-confidence among foreign language learners (Abu Bakar, Latif, & Ya'acob, 2010; Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; Shams, 2014). According to Abu Bakar et al. (2010), most EFL learners feel more confident in expressing themselves and interacting with others in English through Internet-based tools, such as blogging and chatting rather than face-to-face communication. Additionally, participation in online discussion and communication in English can improve learners' confidence in their vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.

However, some language learners, particularly those with low language proficiency, lack the confidence to contribute any content to SNSs or participate in online discussion because they feel that SNSs and online platforms are like public places where many people around the world may witness their failure or language inadequacy. In addition, the self-confidence of language learners might decrease as they compare themselves with more proficient users (Shafie et al., 2016).

5.2 Identity

According to Norton (2016), language is a complex system with many different aspects, including linguistic, social, and cultural aspects. When people learn a language, they do not only learn its words and structures but also engage in a social practice that reframes their identities and relationships with others. According to Marley (2013), language is inevitably connected with identity because language is the main tool through which people express their own identity and obtain insight into others' identities.

Norton (2013) defined identity as *“the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future”* (p. 4). Norton's definition of identity suggests that identity is not static but rather changes with time, position, and context. Norton and Toohey (2011) illustrated this point when they stated, *“identity is theorized as multiple, changing, and a site of struggle”* (p. 414). According to Álvarez Valencia (2014), the complex and changing nature of identity can create rich opportunities for language learning and social interaction. For instance, when a language learner interacts with native speakers of the target language or uses the target language outside the classroom, he/she has an opportunity to practice the role of second language (L2) user (focus on meaning) and free him/herself from the role of language learner (focusing on form).

Changing identity is connected with a sociological construct that Norton (2016) called *“investment.”* According to Norton, investment is *“a learner's commitment to learn a language, given their hopes for the future and their imagined identities”* (p. 476). In other words, the desire of learners to be part of an L2 community and their future imagined identity cause them to invest in the target language and literacy practices that provide the social power to join and participate in the community. However, classroom or community language practices should be appropriate, effective, and enjoyable in order to support learners' investment (Álvarez Valencia, 2014). Norton (2016) stated that if the classroom practices contradict with learners' beliefs and encourage unethical acts, *“the learner may have little investment in the language practices of the classroom, and demonstrate little progress in learning”* (p. 477).

The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, particularly SNSs, not only impact the way learners engage in the learning process and interact with others, but also the way learners construct and reframe their identities. According to Warschauer (2010), online interaction via web tools provides people with an opportunity to develop new forms of meaning. It also allows learner with different races, classes, languages, and cultures interact and exchange their ideas, beliefs, and modes. Then, combining these different modes helps learners shape new forms of identity and agency. According to Álvarez Valencia (2014), language learners use SNSs to present a variety of roles and identities, such as an L2 user, an L2 learner, a member of the community, and as teacher or tutor (when they teach L2 learners with a lower proficiency level or teach other users their native language). According to Klimanova and Dembovskaya (2013), language learners' online activities provide them with good opportunities for identity construction through interaction with L2 native speakers and non-native speakers. In addition, the learners' identity varies based on the types of online environments they engage in. Reinhardt and Chen (2013) examined the Facebook post of a Chinese student studying in USA. The results of the study indicated that the student used Facebook *“to present a variety of identities, in traditional roles like student and teacher and as participant in several layered cultures and communities”* (p. 28).

In summary, the complex nature and interactive practices offered by SNSs, such as building profiles, posting images, adding texts, synchronic or asynchronous chatting, and engaging in discussion with others, allow SNS users to socialize in different identities, communities, and affiliations (Álvarez Valencia, 2014; Dembovskaya, 2013; Jones, 2014; Klimanova & Marley, 2013). These different identities help language learners express themselves and build relationships with both L1 and L2 communities (Jones, 2015). Despite the increasing interest in SNSs and language learning, little attention has been paid to identity construction (Álvarez Valencia, 2014). Thus, this study sheds light on the issue of identity construction in a social networking environment.

6. Methodology

I describe the research methodology, sampling, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. Based on the related literature and my research questions, I provided a rational justification for this research design and methodology.

The purpose of this study was to identify the EFL learners' practices and understand their experiences with SNSs as a tool for English language learning. A qualitative approach was effective for this study for several reasons. The qualitative approach also helps researchers acquire a deeper understanding of the problem of the study and avoid the shortcomings of each method. I collected qualitative data through a case study design. Merriam-Webster defined a case study as "*An intensive analysis of an individual unit (as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment*" (as cited in Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). The intensive analysis of an individual supports the strength of the case study because it provides richer details and helps create a more complete picture. However, the case study has some weakness, such as an inability to answer how widespread the phenomenon is in the population. Thus, if the researcher wants to understand a phenomenon in depth and its occurrence in the population, it is advisable to combine both statistical analyses and case studies in a mixed-methods design.

In this study, I collected qualitative data through in-depth interviews with 12 EFL students. The in-depth interviews gave participants the chance to reflect on their responses and provided more details about their practices and experiences on SNSs. They also gave me the opportunity to ask open-ended questions and gain more complex responses (Creswell, 2014). According to Ragin and Amoroso (2011), qualitative methods enhance the data to offer complex description and more in-depth knowledge.

6.1 The Setting of the Study

The present study took place in the English and Translation Departments at Yarmouk University in Jordan. The English Department was established in 1976 and offers a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature and a master's in Literature and

Criticism as well as in Language and Linguistics. There are approximately 180 MA students in the two programs and 400 BA students. The English department offers courses in language, literature, linguistics, and writing, and allows free access to electronic programs that focus on reading, writing, listening, speaking, pronunciation, and cultural studies that help students understand other cultures through the medium of English. On the other hand, the Translation Department was established in 2008 and offers a bachelor's and a master's in Translation. There are currently approximately 200 MA students and 300 BA students in the department. The program offers many courses in language skills in English and Arabic as well as courses in linguistics, semantics, and computer-assisted translation.

Both departments are part of the College of Art at Yarmouk University, one of the largest prestigious public educational institutions in the north of Jordan. Yarmouk University currently has roughly 27,800 students, 940 faculty members, and 1,700 administrative staff members. It has 13 faculties that provide 56 bachelor's degree programs, 63 master's degree programs, and 19 PhD programs in different majors. The main aim of the University is to produce responsible productive citizens with tolerance and a sense of purpose (Yarmouk University, n.d.).

6.2 Researcher Position and Role

Researcher positionality has a great impact on the research process and methodology. According to Foote and Bartell (2011), "*The positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes*" (p. 46). Based on this statement, I discuss three concepts of my positionality – researcher identity, professional identity, and personal identity – that could play a role in the research process, including data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and data presentation.

As a researcher, I am a doctoral student interested in understanding the process of teaching English to learners whose first language is not English. At the beginning of my graduate studies, I was interested in developing and evaluating programs for EFL students and analyzing the content of EFL textbooks to determine their strengths and weaknesses, and I published research in that area. Between 2014 and 2015, I studied courses that focused on multiliteracies and computer-assisted learning; and as a result, I changed my research interest to Web 2.0 tools and language learning. In the present research, I focused on the practices and experiences of Jordanian EFL learners using SNSs in English language learning.

Regarding my professional identity, I have experience teaching English as a foreign language. Between 2006 and 2008, I worked as an EFL teacher of primary and secondary students in Jordan. After I completed my master's in teaching English as a foreign language in 2008, I worked for two years as an EFL lecturer at an institute for health professions, then four years in Taibah University, a well-known university in the western region of Saudi Arabia. My experience as an EFL teacher of different learning

stages and at different institutions in two different countries shaped some of my assumptions and impressions about the EFL context in Arab countries. For instance, I think that many students in Arab countries have problems learning English, particularly where English is not taught in lower levels at elementary schools. In addition, most institutions, especially governmental ones, lack facilities and resources that can support language learning. As a teacher, I encountered several challenges, such as crowded classrooms, ineffective textbooks, and a lack of tools and materials. However, I did my best to overcome these challenges in the language teaching process.

Being an EFL teacher helped me recognize that language teaching is different from teaching other school subjects as the purpose is to teach students communication rather than facts. Communication requires students to interact with each other and with the teacher using the target language, so I built a small community in the classroom by asking students to work together and share their experiences to construct new forms of meaning. I also used authentic tasks and materials to motivate students. I asked students, for example, to e-mail each other using the second language and to write other documents in the target language, such as a complaint to a restaurant manager or a CV to get a job. This type of task gave students the opportunity to use the language in a semi-real context and increased their motivation to learn.

Although I describe myself as a constructivist, I believe that there is no ideal theory or approach for instruction that is appropriate for any context. *“Trying to tie your instructional design to one particular theory is like school vs. the real world. What we learn in a school environment does not always match what is out there in the real world, just as the prescriptions of theory do not always apply in practice”* (Mergel, 1998, p. 25). In other words, I believe that teachers should not be stuck on one theory and should consider other variables, such as students' characteristics and needs, time, materials, resources, and class size. Thus, I used an eclectic approach that combined several strategies and techniques depending on the context of instruction, the aim of the lesson, and the characteristics of the students.

With regard to integrating technology in the EFL classroom, I did not have the opportunity to use technology effectively in my classrooms because of the limited resources offered by the institutions where I worked. Only one of them offered a computer lab and a learning management system (Dokeos LMS), but at that time (2008-2010), integrating technology was challenging. In addition to poor Internet connectivity, fewer students were familiar with technology and I did not have adequate professional training to effectively integrate technology in the classroom.

With respect to my personal identity, I was born in 1984 in a big family in a small village in the north of Jordan. I am not sure to which generation I belong, the traditional or digital generation. Growing up in an isolated village in a lower-middle class family placed me a little behind with new technology. In the first 17 years of my life, I was only familiar with television and landline phones. The first time I used a computer was in 2001, the first time I used a cellphone was 2008, and I opened my first account on an SNS in 2009.

After obtaining a scholarship to pursue a PhD, moving to the United States and being an international student was a big challenge, particularly in the first six months. Although I studied English in Jordan for more than 12 years and worked as an English teacher for 6 years, I found it difficult to communicate effectively with others, especially in social contexts, so I relied on my cousin in many of my life affairs, such as registering children at school, scheduling doctor appointments, and buying car or health insurance. During that time, I realized that EFL textbooks and classrooms could never have taught language without allowing real situations to play a greater role in language development. Unfortunately, learners in EFL contexts often lack the opportunity to use English for authentic purposes or to communicate face-to-face with native speakers or other language learners. As a result, I thought about using SNSs as a tool to facilitate interaction and contribute to language development, due to my personal experiences with them.

I joined Facebook in 2009 while I was working in Saudi Arabia and mostly used it to interact with my family and friends in Jordan because it allows free services in comparison with expensive international calls. I had never thought about Facebook as a tool for language learning until I started to add some of my classmates as friends on Facebook and follow pages or groups that used English (e.g., news pages and university pages). Then, I started to feel that Facebook offered me opportunities for authentic interaction that I previously lacked because of my responsibilities as a doctoral student and mother of four. Thus, in the last three years, I started to be conscious about the learning process in SNSs and to use them for the purpose of learning. My extensive experience as a learner and active user of SNSs could help me better understand the problem of the study, but it might affect the research process and my interpretation of the results. Although it is impossible to avoid a researcher's bias completely, I did my best to reduce it in each step of the research process, particularly in soliciting, transcribing, and interpreting interview data by asking myself whether this part of the study truly reflected the informants' actual experiences or my personal convenience.

6.3 Population and Sample

For this study, my target population included all undergraduate EFL learners who were studying English as a primary major in English language programs in Jordan, including English Language and Literature, Translation, and Applied Linguistics programs. According to Gliner Morgan, and Leech (2009), the target population "*includes all of the participants of theoretical interest to the researcher and to which he or she would like to generalize*" (p. 117). Students in these programs study English more and are more likely to use it in the future compared to students in other programs who only study two or three primary English courses.

For the qualitative portion, I used purposive sampling to choose 12 participants in order to collect qualitative data through in-depth interviews. According to Creswell (2014), purposive sampling helps the researcher select participants with particular

characteristics to best understand the research problem and answer the research questions. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), the qualitative design allows the researcher to select participants with specific characteristics for the qualitative portion, e.g., selecting the upper or lower 10% of the scores.

In this study, I identified 12 participants based on their scores on the survey to participate in the interview sessions. Six of them were identified as active participants on SNSs, and the other six were identified as passive participants on SNSs (lurkers). According to Shafie et al. (2016), active participants are social networking users who contribute content to online discussion or language-learning groups. On the other hand, lurkers are social networking users who observe online activities or discussion without contributing content and never or rarely participating in online discussion. Five items in the survey were used to identify active participants and lurkers: *"I participate in discussion in English," "I leave my own comments in English," "I use English to write my status updates," "I practice English by posting things on Facebook,"* and *"I use English to respond to other people and to start conversations."* Participants who chose "agree" or "strongly agree" to answer at least three items were identified as "active participants" and participants who chose "disagree," "neutral," or "strongly disagree" were identified as "lurkers." After that step, I randomly chose six from each group to interview. Another student from the same group replaced any student who was not interested in participating in the interview sessions.

7. Data Collection Methods

7.1 The Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview aimed to understand EFL learners' experiences on SNSs. The interview questions were created from previous studies in the field. The interview protocol consisted of three sections. The first was designed to build rapport with participants. According to Ryan and Dundon (2008), building rapport puts participants at ease and facilitates meaningful communication between the researcher and participants, so they might feel more comfortable providing deeper and richer information about their experiences. Ragin and Amerson (2011) stated, *"The better a researcher's rapport with an individual, the greater will be the access to the underlying meanings the individual attributes to his or her ideas and actions"* (p. 102). The second section involved some questions and probes that address EFL learners' experiences on SNSs. The probes helped clarify the interview questions and solicited more details from participants. The last section involved thanking the participants for taking part in the study.

7.2 Data Collection Procedures

Before the data collection process, a permission form was obtained from the Southern Illinois University Human Subjects Committee and the heads of the English departments at Yarmouk University from which the participants were recruited. For the

qualitative portion, I identified 12 participants based on their scores on the survey to participate in the interview sessions. Six of them were identified as active participants on SNSs, and the other six were identified as passive participants on SNSs (lurkers), based on the procedure outlined above. After selecting six students from each group, I sent emails to the participants with the interview consent form. Participants who agreed to participate, sign, and return the consent form to my email were asked to suggest a suitable day and time for the interview, which was conducted via Skype. Each interview was approximately 50-60 minutes, and all interviews were digitally audio-recorded.

7.3 Data Analysis

I conducted a thematic analysis to provide a rich and detailed account of the qualitative data by using both inductive and deductive data analysis for theme development. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the inductive analysis of qualitative data helps researchers condense and reduce raw data and produce more reliable and valid results. Creswell (2014) stated, *"Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information"* (p. 186). To conduct the inductive analysis, I used open coding which involved several steps. First, I carefully read the transcribed data line-by-line in order to organize and categorize them into topics and sub-topics. Second, I created a list of codes and categories. Next, I condensed the list of codes by grouping similar or overlapping categories together in order to establish a set of comprehensive themes.

In the deductive data analysis, I used the themes that emerged from the data and the predetermined themes derived from related literature to look back at the data and gather evidence to support each theme. Later, I connected and interrelated the themes together as *"sophisticated qualitative studies go beyond description and theme identification and form complex theme connection"* (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). These connections contributed to give more sense to the research results and helped me answer my research questions.

7.4 Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, I used different strategies that address the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Shenton (2004), credibility is related to the agreement between the findings of the study and reality. To ensure credibility in this study, I used to gather data individual in-depth interviews. Additionally, I reduced bias in the selection of participants; in the interview sessions, informants were randomly selected from the group of lurkers and the group of active participants that were classified based on predetermined criteria. Shenton (2004) stated, *"Although much qualitative research involves the use of purposive sampling, a random approach may negate charges of researcher bias in the selection of participants"* (p. 63). Also, I evaluated the project through a reflective commentary after each step by asking myself this question: *"Does this part of the study truly reflect informants' actual experiences or*

my personal convenience?" Furthermore, I allowed participants to read interview transcripts to check if their words matched their actual intention and to avoid misrepresentation. In addition, I used different tactics to encourage honesty in participants. For instance, I told them that participating in the study was voluntary, they could withdraw at any time without penalty, and they could refuse to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. I also established a rapport at the beginning of each interview, so they felt more comfortable sharing their ideas and talking honestly about their experiences.

The second aspect of trustworthiness is transferability, which *"is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations"* (Merriam, as cited in Shenton, 2004, p. 69). In order to address the issue of transferability, I provided sufficient information about the participants, setting, and the context of the study, so the reader can transfer the findings to similar situations.

The third aspect of trustworthiness is dependability, which concerns the stability of the inquiry processes over time. In order to ensure dependability in this study, I provided a precise description of the processes and procedures within the study, so that future researchers can repeat the study.

The last aspect of trustworthiness is confirmability, which is concerned with the extent to which the study findings are *"the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher"* (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). To ensure confirmability, I used reflective commentary and member checks. I also provided a detailed description of the research methodology.

8. Results

The qualitative study sought to interpret and refine data. Integrating both types of data could provide a deeper understanding of the research problem and answer the third research question: "How do Facebook practices affect language learning experiences of Jordanian EFL learners?"

The qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 undergraduate EFL learners. Six of them were identified as active participants in SNSs, and the other six were identified as "lurkers" or passive participants. Active participants were coded as ACT 1, ACT 2, ACT 3, ACT 4, ACT 5, and ACT 6, and passive participants (lurkers) were coded as LUR 1, LUR 2, LUR 3, LUR4, LUR 5, and LUR 6. The analysis of the interview transcripts identified five main themes:

- Facebook is a source of authentic language input;
- Facebook provides opportunities to produce language;
- Facebook supports a motivation to learn English;
- Facebook supports social interaction and collaboration among EFL learners;
- Facebook provides opportunities to negotiate identities and relationships with others.

8.1 Facebook is a Source of Authentic Language Input

All 12 participants indicated that formal classrooms were not enough for language learning. LUR 5 said, *"Most of the university courses focus on old English language, epics, and poems. I feel they are useless in my daily life."* ACT 4 stated, *"I study syntax, semantics, morphology, and phonetics, but they do not relate to our actual use of language."* Therefore, all of them indicated that they used alternative sources to increase language input. LUR 1 illustrated this point when she said, *"I try to improve my English language and my vocabulary outside the classroom by watching movies or TV programs and using mobile applications and Internet."* All participants also considered SNSs, particularly Facebook, as a source of authentic language input. LUR 1 commented, *"I like to read conversations on Facebook [...] they are more natural and related to real situations and real people."* They also indicated that Facebook gave them an opportunity to learn new vocabulary in different topics. LUR 2 said, *"I learn a lot of words and utterances from Facebook that I have never heard in school or college."* ACT 6 made the following comment:

"I followed and joined many pages and groups that are interested in different topics, so I learned words related to cooking, music, health, diets, and several more [...] I also learned what I should say in different social situations, such as weddings, recovery, graduation, greetings, and invitations, and so many situations that are impossible to find in university textbooks."

However, some participants indicated that some Facebook input was incomprehensible and ambiguous, particularly discussions between native speakers. LUR 4 reported, *"I read posts and comments in language learning groups and pages more than those in native speaker pages because most of the time I do not understand what they mean."* LUR 5 said, *"They are making jokes I don't know what the funny things in their words."* In addition, some language learners felt displeased with Facebook materials and input in both Arabic and English because they included unpleasant content. ACT 1 said, *"Sometimes I feel disgusting about some comments specially in political issues [...] some comments encourage hate, violence, and racism."* ACT 5 also stated, *"They spread gossip and lies. I do not trust them as a source of information."* The results indicated that language learners used Facebook as a source of language input, particularly for vocabulary and social situational utterances. However, they reported some barriers related to their limited language proficiency and unpleasant content.

8.2 Facebook Provides Opportunities to Produce Language

Most of the participants indicated that Facebook gave them an opportunity for English language production. ACT 1 stated, *"I do not have any friends or family members who speak English, so I can only speak English in classrooms and Facebook."* She also added, *"Even university courses focus on academic stuff not social uses. Facebook is the only place where I can practice social language."* Participants also indicated that Facebook offered different features that encouraged language production, such as individual or group chat, status

updates, comments, replying to comments, and sharing live videos. Almost all participants identified as active participants indicated that they felt less anxious and nervous when producing language on SNSs than in face-to-face communication. ACT 4 said, *"I feel more relaxed when I talk on Facebook because I have more time to think about what I want to say."*

However, participants identified as lurkers reported feeling reluctant to produce language on Facebook for different reasons, such as limited English proficiency and a lack of confidence. LUR 2 stated, *"I commented and replied to comments in Arabic, but I am not good enough to use English in my Facebook activities [...] I do not know what to say and how to say."* LUR 5 also commented, *"My English is poor, I do not feel confident to comment in English [...] I only use English when I chat with my classmates. I never chat with English native speakers."* One of the lurkers indicated that she did not participate in discussions in Arabic or English because of critical people. LUR 6 stated, *"I do not comment on public post. I feel some of my Facebook friends are watching me particularly my relatives, and my comments will appear in their newsfeeds [...] thinking they are taking screenshots of my comments and will use them to criticize or embarrass me in front of my family."*

The fourth reason for the lack of language production on Facebook was related to a lack of acceptance. This reason was not limited to lurkers but was also reported by two of the active participants. Some participants reported hesitating to participate on Facebook, particularly regarding political and religious issues, because they feared others' offensive reactions. ACT 3 stated, *"I fear to be offended by others because of my different opinion."* LUR 6 commented, *"I do not participate to avoid conflict with others."*

The fifth reason was related to social considerations. LUR 4 commented, *"I feel it is disrespectful to post and comment in English when most of your friends do not know English well."* The last reason was related to the learner's individual personality. One lurker indicated that she was unwilling to post or comment on SNSs because she preferred face-to-face communication and telephone calls over synchronous or asynchronous chatting. LUR 3 said, *"It takes too much time to explain my ideas in a chat or post [...] people might understand my words wrongly."*

8.3 Facebook Supports a Motivation to Learn English

Generally, most participants reported that they enjoyed using Facebook for language learning. As ACT 4 stated, *"I do not feel I learn; I just enjoy,"* explaining that *"there are many options and different tasks that make learning fun, such as writing posts, adding comments, chatting, creating videos, and interacting with others."* Participants also agreed that learning English through Facebook tools was more motivating than traditional textbooks and classrooms. LUR 6 stated, *"I enjoy using Facebook in language learning because it includes different topics that relate to real life."* ACT 5 also stated, *"Interacting with real people for language learning is very interesting."* Some participants agreed that using Facebook in language learning supported their creativity. ACT 1 commented, *"I feel that I have many ideas to write and share with others rather than writing for exams and grades."* In addition, most participants reported that participating in discussions, asking questions,

and replying to others' questions increased their enthusiasm to learn. ACT 4 said, *"I enjoy learning when I teach other students in language study group or learners with low proficiency level."* Most participants also reported that practicing language through Facebook was more convenient. LUR 4 stated, *"They provide easy access to materials and you can share them on your page or save them, so you can check them when you need them."* Furthermore, the results indicated that using Facebook for English language learning improved learner motivation because it supported autonomous learning. As ACT 2 explained, *"I think it is interesting because I have the choice to select what I want to learn, when, and how without teacher and exam pressure."*

Learner motivations were influenced by different factors. The first was Internet connection. As LUR 6 commented, *"Sometimes, I feel discouraged because the Internet becomes too slow."* The second factor was the availability of a conversation partner. ACT 2 said the following:

"It is difficult to trust people whom I met online and most of my friends whom I met socially prefer to use Arabic in our conversations. Even when they agree to use English, they use very simple language. I feel disappointed because I don't learn new things."

The third factor was related to self-confidence about language level. Two lurker participants stated that they felt frustrated when they compared themselves with more proficient learners. LUR 1 stated, *"I feel frustrated because I am unable to use English as well as my classmates."* The last factor was related to the contradiction between the language used on SNSs and that used in academic fields. ACT 4 commented, *"Sometimes, I feel it is useless because it is completely different from what we take at the university courses."*

8.4 Facebook Supports Social Interaction and Collaborative Learning

All participants reported that Facebook offered several ways for people to interact with each other. They stated that Facebook groups were the most helpful and convenient method of collaborative learning because they allowed a large number of users who were not already friends to interact with each other and share content attached to their personal profile. They also preferred Facebook groups over webpages because groups allowed for more privacy since the group administrator could control who participated and who could see the content.

Participants belonged to different types of Facebook groups including the following:

- Groups dedicated to people who shared common interests (in different languages), such as health, beauty, cooking, or sports.
- Groups dedicated to English language learners from all over the world.
- Groups dedicated to students in English departments or Yarmouk University.
- Study groups created by students and dedicated to a particular course.
- Groups created by teachers as a learning management system (LMS).

However, most participants also stated that they became displeased because they were added to many groups without their permission. As LUR 2 said, *"I know that I can leave the group any time, but it is too annoying."* ACT 5 also stated, *"It violates my privacy."* Some participants stated that they joined Facebook groups created by English native speakers even if they did not share the same interests as other group members because they liked to observe authentic native-speaker conversations. As LUR 3 commented, *"I joined tens of groups just to observe native speakers' conversations."* In addition, some participants reported that Facebook groups helped them make new Facebook friends. ACT 3 stated, *"I replied to posts in the groups and started conversations with the people who post. Doing that several times with the same people gave me or them courage to send friend requests."* They also stated that Facebook groups gave them an opportunity to learn about other cultures. As LUR 4 stated, *"I learn about people's values, beliefs, characteristics, customs, and food."*

Some participants reported different practices when participating in different groups. For instance, LUR 2 stated, *"I use Arabic to write posts and comments in Arabic groups but I fear to post or leave comments in groups that use English [...] I am not confident about my English language."* Similarly, ACT 1 said, *"I do not participate in groups of English native speakers. I feel I am stranger."* ACT 5 echoed this sentiment, stating, *"I do not participate in such group because I am not interested."* In other words, the same person might be identified as an active participant in one group and as a lurker in a different group.

In addition, some participants indicated that the groups dedicated to English learners gave them an opportunity to share their language learning experiences and benefit from other learners' experiences. ACT 3 stated, *"We share advice related to language learning strategies, techniques, and challenges."* They also reported sharing language learning resources. As ACT 4 stated, *"I sometimes share useful videos or website in language learning groups."* In addition, they reported that this type of group gave them an opportunity to find a conversation partner or language exchange partner. As ACT 1 stated, *"Last week, a Turkish girl asked me to teach her Arabic and she wanted to teach me Turkish, and we agree to practice English on some days."*

All 12 participants reported that they belonged to study groups on Facebook. This type of group was created by students and dedicated to particular courses. Participants reported that using study groups on Facebook was highly convenient. As LUR 3 commented, *"It saves time, effort, and money."* ACT 6 also stated, *"It is difficult to find an appropriate time and place to get together [...] Facebook groups make that easy."* Participants stated that study groups on Facebook likewise helped them work together, share ideas, and get varied perspectives that could help them reach their own conclusions. As ACT 3 stated, *"When I do not understand something, I post it on the group wall and my classmates share their viewpoints and bring different information that helps me come to my own conclusion."*

Some participants also stated that study groups on Facebook allowed them to get feedback on their writing. LUR 3 stated, *"Some students post their writing assignments and*

ask members to review the grammar and give suggestions to improve their writing." Even lurker participants who rarely participated in discussions stated that reading members' feedback taught them to pay attention to details in their writing and others' writing. As LUR 6 commented, *"Reading members' comments on writing makes me pay attention to small mistakes in grammar and forms in my assignment and other friends' assignments."*

The last type of Facebook group was a learning management system (LMS) set up by teachers. Four of the participants stated that they had joined a Facebook group as a classroom requirement. LUR 3 explained, at the beginning of the course, the instructor created a closed group and asked us to join it. Then, she used the group to share resources, summaries, and announcements. Each week, she posted two or more discussion activities and each student should participate on the discussion with at least one comment.

Participants stated that this type of Facebook group helped them build good relationships with the instructor and other students in the classroom. ACT 2 commented, *"I feel less anxious to participate in online discussion in the Facebook group than face-to-face classroom discussion."* They also indicated that using Facebook groups as a learning management system was convenient for them. As LUR 3 stated, *"It is easy to find the weekly assignment because it is pinned at the top of the page ... important dates and deadlines are also organized in 'Events'."* However, participants articulated some concern about using Facebook groups as a learning management system. ACT 5 stated, *"I do not like following links to reach the resources or files."* LUR 3 similarly stated, *"I am forced to participate because of grades [...] I feel worried because all of my classmates will see my performance."* They also indicated that they sometimes found it difficult to reach a particular post because posts were not chronologically ordered. As ACT 5 commented, *"When someone commented, the post goes to the top of the page [...] sometimes it takes too long to find what I want."*

In conclusion, participants indicated that SNS tools, particularly Facebook groups, supported collaborative learning and gave them opportunities to share resources and information, ask questions, gain feedback, and engage in discussions in the target language. They also stated that they benefited from members' different perspectives, which helped them draw their own conclusions about the issue under discussion. In addition, language learners tended to change their Facebook practices depending on the people they interacted with, the feeling of belonging, or the topic of interest.

8.5 Facebook Provides Opportunities to Negotiate Identities and Relationships with Others

Most participants reported that personal profiles on Facebook revealed some information about individuals' identities and shaped their first impressions about others. As LUR 6 stated, *"It is easy to know from their profile if they are real or fake ... pictures, name, gender, education, position, address, and other information shape my impression about the person."* ACT 3 also commented, *"I share some information related to my religion,*

my beliefs, and my political views [...] I think people can know much about me from my profile." Even lurker participants who rarely participated in SNS activities stated that they used Facebook profiles to represent their identities and beliefs. As LUR 5 stated, *"I change my Facebook profile picture to show support to a social or political issue."* However, some participants stated that individuals' online identities were somewhat different from their real identities. LUR 1 said, *"I think some profiles do not reflect individual real identities [...] they change their behavior and beliefs to get more 'likes' or 'comments'."*

Some participants tried to show a sense of belonging to their culture via their SNS profiles. As LUR 2 stated, *"I use Arabic in my profile information and most of my activities to show others that I am proud of my language and culture."* In addition, some participants stated that SNSs were the ideal medium to represent their cultural identity and alter the negative portrayal in the media of Arabs and Muslims. As ACT 3 commented, *"I think that Facebook is good way to let others know who we are."*

However, the results indicated that participants' social identities varied across different online contexts and environments. In other words, participants played different roles depending on the situation or people they interacted with. For instance, participants adopted the role of language user when they used English for real purposes when interacting with native speakers or commenting in groups or on webpages of interest. As ACT 1 said, *"I join the group because I am interested in 'makeup art' I comment and ask questions as any member of the group not for language learning."* Participants also played the role of learner as they observed native speakers' or language learners' conversations or interacted with others to improve their language skills. As LUR 2 said, *"I read conversations to learn new words and utterances."* ACT 2 also stated, *"I practice language through chatting with my friends in English."* In addition, participants played the role of teacher or tutor when they helped learners with low proficiency levels, as ACT 4 stated, *"I enjoy learning when I teach other students in language study group or learners with low proficiency level."* This is also the case when they review the writing of other learners, as ACT 5 stated, *"I gave them advice to improve their writing."* In one case, a participant mentioned teaching Arabic to people interested in learning it, as ACT 3 stated, *"Last week, a Turkish girl asked me to teach her Arabic and she wants to teach me Turkish, and we agree to practice English on some days."* Finally, participants presented other roles related to their lives, such as a the role of mother or friend. As ACT 3 stated, *"I joined a new moms group [...] It helps me contact with other moms and exchange our experiences."*

9. Conclusion

The results suggested that English learners used Facebook as a source of authentic language input and an optimal environment to practice language. They also indicated that Facebook improved their language learning motivation and supported collaborative learning practices among English language learners. However, the results indicated that learners' practices on Facebook varied depending on different factors,

such as language proficiency, self-confidence, sense of belonging, feeling secure, and individual personality. In addition, Facebook provided language learners with different opportunities to practice language through managing multiple identities, such as a user of the target language, a collaborator, a teacher or tutor, and other roles related to their everyday lives, such as mother, sister, or friend.

10. Discussion and Conclusions

I discuss and interpret the findings of the study in light of previous research as well as theoretical trends in second and foreign language learning. It also discusses the limitations that might have constrained the generalizability or trustworthiness of the results. It concludes with implications for practice and future research.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the EFL learners' practices and experiences with Facebook as a tool for English language learning. The study sought to answer the following research question: How do these Facebook practices affect their language learning experiences?

The study was conducted in richer information and a deeper insight was gained through a qualitative case study. 12 participants were purposefully selected and interviewed in order to explain further the statistical results of the first phase, develop a rich descriptive picture of their lived experiences using social networking to improve their English language learning, and identify the factors and barriers that influence their practices. The results were discussed under certain themes including those in the following sections.

10.1 Using Facebook to Learn English

Most participants felt comfortable using Facebook to learn English, but far fewer reported generally using Facebook on a regular basis to learn English. This result was supported by Alm (2015), who suggested that language students used SNSs for entertainment rather than language learning. In addition, the results showed that EFL students tended to read and observe discussions in English rather than participate in them or produce language output. However, EFL students were also more willing to participate in discussions or contribute content in Arabic than in English. Some previous studies, such as Alm (2015), Shafie et al. (2016), and Tunçel (2015), suggested a strong relationship between language learners' willingness to produce the target language and their self-confidence in their language proficiency; i.e., learners with high self-confidence tend to produce more language output than learners with low self-confidence.

In this study, most EFL students reported feeling reluctant about their ability to use English in discussions on Facebook. However, they felt more confident participating in synchronous discussions (e.g., instant private chat) than in asynchronous discussions (e.g., comments). According to Shafie et al. (2016), some language learners hesitate to participate in asynchronous discussions because most of

them are public; i.e., many people around the world may witness their failure or language inadequacy. This result was confirmed by Alm (2015), who suggested that some language learners felt more comfortable about private interactions because they were afraid to make errors in front of others.

Based on the results, two groups of EFL learners were identified: active learners and passive learners (lurkers). Active learners practiced English by contributing content to online discussions, commenting and replying on other people's posts or comments, using chat tools to interact with others in English, and using their own words to write their status updates. Passive learners, on the other extreme, practiced English by reading discussions in English, following English native speakers, or following people, groups, or pages interested in English language learning but hardly contributing content to discussions. Six participants were chosen from each group to gain a more in-depth view of their language learning practices on SNSs. The analysis of the interview transcripts identified five main themes:

- Facebook is a source of authentic language input
- Facebook provides opportunities to produce language
- Facebook supports a motivation to learn English
- Facebook supports social interaction and collaboration among EFL learners
- Facebook provides opportunities to negotiate identities and relationships with others

10.2 Facebook is a source of authentic language input

Some EFL students believed that formal education was not sufficiently effective for language learning because it introduces language that is not related to real-life contexts and focuses on language forms and grammar more than meaningful purposes of language. Therefore, some EFL learners used additional resources to support their language learning and increase their language input outside the formal classroom setting, such as through movies, TV programs, and web-based resources (e.g., blogs, websites, and SNSs). This result was supported by Diepenbroek and Derwing (2013), who conducted a content analysis of 12 integrated skills EFL textbook series that ranged from beginner to advanced levels of proficiency. The findings of their analysis revealed that most EFL textbooks focused students' attention on grammatical structures and presented language input in isolation without contextual information. Eisenchlas (2011) suggested that web-based resources might help overcome the shortcomings of EFL textbooks: *"Online conversations and interaction may not be able to substitute for foreign language textbooks, but should surely be used to supplement them"* (p. 59).

All interviewees considered SNSs, particularly Facebook, as a source of authentic language input because they were connected to real situations and real people. This result was supported by Blattner and Lomicka (2012), who suggested that Facebook gave language learners the opportunity to engage in meaningful and authentic exchanges that contributed to improving communicative competence that cannot be obtained by focusing on language forms and structures. The results of the current study

also revealed that Jordanian EFL learners considered Facebook to be a rich resource for learning new words in different fields. This result was comparable to Thurairaj, Hoon, Roy, and Fong (2015) and Lee and Ranta (2014), who suggested that using Facebook helped language learners, improve vocabulary acquisition and retention as they engaged in meaningful interaction with native speakers or other language learners.

However, the results showed that language learners did not always take advantage of Facebook inputs because those inputs were either too simple or incomprehensible to them. This result was supported by Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis, which suggested that exclusive exposure to second language input is not enough for language acquisition. For successful language acquisition, learners need exposure to comprehensible inputs, i.e., inputs that are a little beyond the learner's current level (Krashen, 1981). Although language learners in this study did not have control over the language inputs presented in Facebook, they had the choice to follow or interact with people, pages, or groups that presented input that was comprehensible to them. In addition, the results showed that EFL learners might be negatively influenced by inputs presented in Facebook because they included unpleasant content. This result supported Norton's work on language investment. According to Norton (2016), learners' desires to learn the language, to be a part of the target language community, or to achieve future goals (e.g., getting a job) motivate learners to invest in language practices and keep progressing in language learning. However, these desires may be reduced or vanished when language inputs or practices are ethically inappropriate (e.g., racist, sexist, or hateful) or when they contradict with learners' beliefs or personal experiences: *"the learner may have little investment in the language practices of the classroom, and demonstrate little progress in learning"* (p. 477). Responding to new knowledge that either aligns or contradicts with learner's experiences plays a significant role in the learning process. Consistent with this, Piaget suggested an essential concept in learning process called *"equilibration,"* which is related to constituting *"a balance between assimilation and accommodation as people interact with their environment"* (Hultgren, 2008, p. 18). When new information aligns with personal prior knowledge or experiences, the person can fully understand and fit it within his/her mental structure.

On the other hand, when information contradicts with personal mental structure, it causes disequilibrium. Then, the person needs accommodation *"comprised of reflective, integrative behavior that restores cognitive equilibrium"* (p. 18). Piaget discussed three types of accommodation that can help learners adapt and survive in their environment: rejecting contradictions and keeping the original construct, accepting the new construct in addition to the initial construct and using them alternately in different situations, and generating a new construct to overcome the contradiction. According to Hultgren (2008), successful assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge protects learners' motivation and keeps them making progress in their learning.

10.3 Facebook provides opportunities to produce language

While Krashen argued that comprehensible input is the key factor for language acquisition, Long (1996) claimed that interaction has a positive effect on second language acquisition and production: *"interaction facilitates acquisition because of the conversational and linguistic modifications that occur in such discourse, which provide learners with the input they need"* (as cited in MacKey & Philp, 1998, p. 339). In other words, language input and output complement each other for successful language acquisition. Consistent with this, most of the participants in the present study indicated that Facebook gave them an opportunity for English language production that could not be obtained in formal classrooms or in their surrounding environment. Participants indicated that SNSs, particularly Facebook, offered different features that encouraged interaction and language production, such as individual or group chat, status updates, comments, replying to comments, and sharing live videos.

The results also showed that most participants who were identified as active participants felt less anxious or nervous when producing language on SNSs than in face-to-face communication because SNSs gave them more time to think about what they wanted to say. This result supported Krashen's monitor hypothesis, which confirms the role of time in the successful use of monitor. According to Krashen (1981), conscious learning (i.e., formal learning of language forms and grammar) plays the role of monitor or editor of the output of the acquired system. The use of the monitor helps performers or speakers correct the deviations in their utterances and improve their language accuracy. However, the grammatical knowledge is not adequate for effective use of monitor. Language learners, particularly at a beginner level, need sufficient time to plan, edit, and correct their output to be more precise and polished; i.e., they need to know the rule and have time to apply the rule in their speech. This skill becomes more automatic as they move forward in language acquisition. The effective use of monitor contributes to reducing learners' anxiety and improves their self-confidence in their language output. According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, higher self-confidence and low anxiety positively impact the language acquisition process.

On the other hand, participants identified as lurkers reported feeling reluctant to produce language on SNSs for different reasons, such as limited English proficiency, lack of confidence, fear of criticism, lack of acceptance, some social considerations, and individual personality. Some of these reasons were consistent with Alm (2015) and Shafie et al. (2016), who suggested that language learners in advanced levels and learners with high levels of self-confidence tended to actively participate in discussions on SNSs more than learners with low proficiency levels or with lower self-confidence. The lack of production in early stages of language acquisition in SNSs was supported by what Krashen and Terrell (1983) called *"the silent period or the preproduction stage"* (Brown, 2007, p. 31). According to Brown (2007), Krashen and Terrell claimed that learners in early stages of language learning tend to observe the interaction of native speakers or other learners in the target language and delay language production until

they have adequate comprehensible input and feel ready and comfortable to produce language and express their thoughts in the target language.

The fear of criticism, lack of acceptance, and social considerations are not exclusively associated with language learners. Many SNS users were willing to lurk to avoid criticism or rejection by others. This result was in agreement with Neelen and Fetter (2010), who suggested that some people decide to lurk and not to contribute any content because they are afraid of having their posts or comments neglected, mocked, or teased by others. Neelen and Fetter used four categories to identify the barriers to individuals sharing content in online communities or platforms: interpersonal, procedural, technological, and cultural barriers. Interpersonal barriers relate to uncomfortable feelings derived from relationships with people (e.g., fears of criticism and negative community experiences). Procedural barriers relate to insufficient understanding of the best ways to share knowledge (e.g., not understanding the benefits of sharing). Technological barriers relate to the lack of technological efficiency or acceptance to use technological tools for communication. Lastly, cultural barriers refer to cross-cultural differences (e.g., individual, political, social, and religious beliefs). The results also showed that lurking might be related to the learner's individual personality. For instance, some learners preferred face-to-face communication rather than using SNS tools. However, lurking is a common habit among SNS communities and it should not be described as a shame or challenge. Several studies (e.g., Neelen & Fetter 2010; Shafie et al., 2016) have stated that lurking is a learning strategy and a fruitful opportunity to take advantage of online communities.

10.4 Facebook supports a motivation to learn English

The results showed that Facebook increased EFL learners' motivation to learn English because it offered many options and different tasks that made learning fun, such as writing posts, adding comments, chatting, creating videos, and interacting with others. In addition, all interviewees stated that learning English through Facebook tools was more motivating than traditional textbooks and classrooms. These results were consistent with several previous studies, such as Klimanova and Dembovska (2013), Lee and Ranta (2014), and Álvarez Valencia (2014), which indicated that SNSs promote language learning motivations because they provide multiple opportunities for authentic interactivity and participation in real discussions. The results of the present study also showed that using Facebook tools in language learning increased learners' creativity and enthusiasm, particularly in writing. This result was supported by several previous studies, such as Alias, Ab Manan, Yusof, and Pandian (2012), Black (2009), Thurairaj et al. (2015), and Yunus, Salehi, and Chenzi (2012), which suggested that engaging in meaningful writing tasks in SNSs or blogs helps learners shift their interest from focusing on language forms to creating meaning; i.e., they tend to overlook minor grammatical errors and focus on delivering their intended messages.

In addition, collaborative learning opportunities provided by Facebook improved learners' motivation because some learners enjoyed working with others or

helping other learners achieve their goals. According to Bradley (2010), web-based resources give language learners opportunities to exchange information, ideas, and peer feedback that contribute to improving the quality of learning and increase learners' motivation. These results were consistent with Quinn (2006), who suggested that collaborative learning plays a significant role in increasing learners' motivation, which is considered a key factor in effective learning. This corresponds with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which claims that second language acquisition is influenced by certain emotional variables, including motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Learners with higher motivation toward language learning tend to seek more language inputs and take advantage of those inputs to understand and deliver messages.

However, motivation in educational settings is inconsistent and influenced by several factors. According to Mondahl and Razmerita (2014), motivation is not stable and dynamically changes as a result of various internal and external factors. Consistent with this, the results of this study revealed that language learners' motivations were influenced by different factors, such as Internet connection, the availability of a conversation partner, self-confidence about the learner's language level, and contradictions between the language used on SNSs and that used in academic fields. These results were comparable to Alm (2015), who suggested that there are some barriers to using SNSs as a tool of language learning that negatively influence learners' motivation. These barriers include a lack of native speakers that the learner can contact directly and an insufficient proficiency level to interact and communicate effectively with others.

10.5 Facebook supports social interaction and collaborative learning

The results showed that Facebook offered several opportunities for learners to interact with each other. Participants stated that Facebook groups were the most helpful and convenient method for online social interaction and collaborative learning because they allowed a large number of learners who were not already friends to interact with each other and share content attached to their personal profiles. They also preferred Facebook groups over webpages because groups allowed for more privacy since the group admin could control who could participate and see the content. These results were comparable with several studies, such as Alm (2015), Blattner and Lomicka (2012), Ekoç (2014), and Peeters (2015), which suggested that Facebook groups facilitate meaningful interaction and support collaborative learning practices among language learners. Peeters (2015) analyzed the out-of-class communication practices of 119 EFL undergraduate students in a closed Facebook group for a writing course. Although the teacher was excluded from the group, students effectively collaborated with each other. For instance, they discussed the writing assignments, exchanged information about the course, and engaged in peer feedback; i.e., they worked together toward the same goal. Peeters stated that when using Facebook groups in the language learning process, *"the learners are able to experience a language to a fuller extent and are motivated to take part in the productive process of foreign language learning by communicating with their peers"* (p. 178).

According to Alm (2015) and Peeters (2015), using out-of-class Facebook groups supported self-regulated collaboration among language learners; learners had complete control over their collaborative practices and strategies. They were also responsible for setting their own learning goals and taking the initiative in the learning process.

The results also showed that EFL learners belonged to different types of Facebook groups for different purposes and their behavior varied from group to group. Participants tended to change their practices depending on the context they interacted in, their feeling of belonging, or the topic of interest. For example, the same learner might be identified as an active participant in one group and as a lurker in a different group. These results were consistent with some previous studies, such as Blattner and Lomicka (2012), Peeters (2015), and Shafie et al. (2016). According to Blattner and Lomicka (2012), learners with a stronger feeling of belonging to a certain community or group tended to be more active in that community (e.g., share information, interact, and work cooperatively with other learners) than learners with less of a feeling of belonging. Shafie et al. (2016) stated that the lack of belonging and emotional attachment to a certain group or community in an SNS environment or the lack of interest negatively impacted learners' willingness to interact or contribute to the discussions in that group. Consistent with this, some participants in the present study stated that they actively interacted in some groups (study groups, language learning groups, groups with an Arabic speaker majority) but felt reluctant to interact or share content in groups with an English native speaker majority because they felt they were not a part of these groups or their English was not good enough to communicate with English native speakers.

In addition, EFL learners tended to join Facebook groups for different purposes. For instance, they joined language learning groups to take advantage of the experiences and resources shared by other learners. They also joined "study groups" and "the department groups" to discuss the requirements for courses or general academic issues in their department. On the other hand, they joined groups dedicated to people who shared common interests, including groups with English native speaker majorities either because they had the same interest or they liked to observe authentic native-speaker conversations.

The results of this study showed that integrating Facebook tools in language learning supported Vygotsky's constructivist view of learning, which stresses the role of learner participation and social interaction in the learning process. According to Hulstijn (2008), online interaction with different people in a social context helps learners construct meaningful knowledge within a social environment. Vygotsky (1986) stressed the role of social interaction in the learning process and knowledge construction as he stated, "*any higher mental function was external and social before it was internal. It was once a social relationship between two people*" (as cited in Hultgren, 2008, p. 18). Consistent with this, the present study revealed that SNSs, particularly Facebook groups, facilitated interaction between language learners and English native speakers and supported collaboration among language learners. Engaging in discussions with

people from different social or cultural groups helped learners build and create new forms of meaning. According to Mondahl and Razmerita (2014), observing or interacting with native speakers or language learners in online communities helps improve learners' social language and promotes learners' meaning-making.

The support provided from more knowledgeable or more proficient learners in study groups or language learning groups (e.g., peer correction, assignment discussion, and additional resources) contributed to the cognitive and language development of less knowledgeable learners. This result supported Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Hultgren (2008) explained the ZPD as "*the difference (or zone) between a learner's actual development and potential for development as evidenced by problem solving with guidance from, or in collaboration with, more knowledgeable others*" (p. 19). In other words, each learner has two levels of development: what the learner can do individually and what he/she can do with others' support. However, the zone of proximal development has rarely appeared in the recent literature and has been replaced with the term "scaffolding," which has been used as an umbrella term for the support strategies or tools offered to less proficient learners until they can learn or work independently.

In brief, Facebook tools, particularly Facebook groups, facilitate social interaction and collaboration among language learners that Vygotsky considered essential to the learning process. Facebook groups also gave learners opportunities to interact with more proficient learners or English native speakers, and that interaction promoted the cognitive development of language learners. However, lurking in Facebook groups contradicted the constructivist view of learning that considers active participation and interaction a key component of the learning process and knowledge construction; as Hultgren (2008) stated from the constructivist view, "*learners engage in the active formation or modification of knowledge structures or schemata, rather than passively absorbing knowledge*" (p. 21).

10.6 Facebook provides opportunities to negotiate identities and relationships with others

The results of the study showed that most interviewees used their profiles on Facebook to represent their individual identities and shape their first impressions about others. Interviewees stated that there are different components in Facebook that can be used to reveal information about the owner of the account, such as profile and cover pictures, background information, friendship, and the wall. Some of these components are mostly static, such as background information (e.g., name, gender, hometown, education, address), while others are more dynamic and frequently updated, such as information on the user's wall where most of the interaction takes place. Even lurker participants who rarely participated in Facebook activities stated that they presented some of their beliefs by changing their Facebook profile or cover pictures to show support or opposition to social or political issues. These results were consistent with Farquhar (2009), who examined identity representation on Facebook. His study design

included two phases: gathering observations from 346 Facebook profiles of college students followed by 48 interviews. Farquhar suggested that *"Facebook profiles can be thought of as an online embodiment of real persons using the site"* (p. 15). The term *"online embodiment"* refers to the *"individual's representative in a computer-mediated interaction"* (p. 15).

However, some participants stated that online identities were somewhat different from real identities. This result supported what Goffman (1967) called *"front stage and back stage"*; according to Farquhar (2009), Goffman used the term *"front stage"* to refer to environments with many restrictions and *"back stage"* to refer to environments with fewer restrictions. Goffman believed people have different identity performance between the two stages. In the front stage, people tend to represent themselves in the best way to get more acceptances while in the back stage, identity performance is more authentic. Farquhar (2009) stated that Facebook is considered a front stage unless the user adjusts the privacy setting. Consistent with this, the results of this study showed that participants changed their online behavior based on the environment they engaged in. For example, they stated that they preferred Facebook groups over webpages because groups allowed for more privacy since the group admin could control who could participate and see the content. They also felt more comfortable participating in secret or closed groups of classmates rather than groups with a majority of native speakers because they felt fewer social, cultural, and language restrictions.

Guerrero, Andersen, and Afifi (2013) suggested that identity representation varied across different online environments accordingly to the audience being targeted, expectations of its reactions, and the context where the person performed. Consistent with this, the results showed that interviewee participants played different roles depending on the situation or people they interacted with in an SNS environment. For instance, participants adopted the role of language user when they used English for real purposes when interacting with native speakers or commenting in groups or on webpages of interest. Participants played the role of learner as they observed native speakers' or language learners' conversations or interacted with others to improve their language skills. In addition, participants played the role of teacher or tutor when they helped learners with low proficiency levels. This was also the case when they reviewed the writing of other learners or taught Arabic to people interested in learning it. They also presented other roles related to their daily lives. For instance, they presented the role of mother as they joined a group of mothers or the role of makeup expert in a makeup artist group.

Drawing on the concept of affordance in language learning, Álvarez Valencia (2014) stated that presenting different roles or identities in SNSs is one of the novel affordances that might greatly contribute to improving language learning as well as serve as an effective method for vocabulary-building and meaning-making. According to Menezes (2011), the concept of affordance originally comes from the field of ecology, which studies the relationships between organisms and the other components in an

ecosystem. Gibson (1986) defined affordance as what environment “offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill and refers to both the environment and the animal” (as cited in Menezes, 2011, p. 2). In applied linguistics, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991, p. 2003) defined affordances as “opportunities for interaction that things in the environment possess relative to sensorimotor capacities of the animal” (as cited in Menezes, 2011, p. 2). Animals include humans and in the present study referred to “language learners.” In other words, affordance not only refers to what the environment offers but also to what the learner can do (learner capacity). Consistent with this, the results of the present study showed that SNS environment offered language learners different opportunities to present multiple roles or identities. The learners’ ability to position or reposition themselves to take advantage of these roles contributed to their language development. On the other hand, failure to present these roles (e.g., lack of interaction or lurking) imposed limitations on language development. Also, opportunities to present and experience different cultures in SNSs are considered a type of affordance. Learners’ ability to present their cultures in the best light possible and their ability to show acceptance and respect to other cultures, including the culture of the target language, increased language affordance and consequently language development.

In brief, SNSs, particularly Facebook, offer language learners several novel affordances and interaction opportunities to improve their language. SNS affordances include learners’ abilities to present multiple identities and experience different cultures. Successful investment of these opportunities through interaction and varied language practices contribute to language development.

10.7 Conclusions and Implications

This qualitative study examined Jordanian EFL learners’ practices and experiences on SNSs, particularly Facebook as a tool of English language learning. The study was guided by the following question: How do Facebook practices affect language learning experiences of Jordanian EFL learners? The results revealed that most participants felt comfortable using Facebook in English language learning. However, less than half of them used Facebook on a regular basis to learn English. In addition, they tended to read and observe discussions in English rather than participate in them or produce language output.

Regarding the question, I used various theories of learning and language acquisition to explain how learners’ practices on Facebook impacted their language learning (receiving and producing language, motivation, collaboration, and identity negotiation). Theories included Krashen’s second language acquisition hypotheses, Norton’s model of investment in language learning, Long’s interaction theory, Piaget’s equilibration, Vygotsky’s constructivist view of learning, and the theory of affordance. The results of the study brought to light some implications in the context of formal and informal language learning. First, the study might raise learner, teacher, and educator awareness about SNSs as a tool for language learning, particularly for countries with limited resources. The results also showed the need for a theoretical and pedagogical

framework for the teaching and learning process that identifies the best practices and ways to avoid any harm in an SNS environment.

Second, identifying the reasons for lurking might help future scholars seeking ways to help learners actively participate in online discussion. However, the results could help change people's views about lurkers in SNSs, showing them that lurking is a legitimate learning strategy and opportunity to take advantage of others' contributions. Thus, the learning experiences of both active participants and lurkers should be valued.

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