



FACEBOOK AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: EFL LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES (A QUALITATIVE STUDY)

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Abstract:

The purpose of this quantitative 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 results were obtained from a survey of 144 undergraduate Jordanian EFL learners in the English and Translation Departments at Yarmouk University in Jordan. In the quantitative phase of the study, the research questions focused on the actual practices and strategies of EFL students on SNSs. This study was guided by the following research questions: To what extent do Jordanian EFL learners use Facebook as a tool for language learning? And what language learning practices do Jordanian EFL learners engage in on Facebook? 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. The results of the study brought to light some implications in the context of formal and informal language learning. 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

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pedagogical framework for the teaching and learning process that identifies the best practices and ways to avoid any harm in a SNS environment. Integrating SNSs in language teaching and learning is a topic that requires further study. Using SNSs inside and outside the classroom to practice different language skills is an important topic for future research.

Keywords: Facebook, English language learning, EFL learners' experiences

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; Al-Jarrah, Talafhah, & Al-Jarrah, 2019). 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) and Al-Jarrah et al. (2019) 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.

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; Al-Jarrah, Talafhah, & Al-Jarrah, 2019).

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; Al-Jarrah et al., 2019). 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 quantitative 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.

2.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify EFL learners' practices and understand their experiences with SNSs as a tool for English language learning. The study results were obtained from a survey of 144 undergraduate Jordanian EFL learners in the English and Translation Departments at Yarmouk University in Jordan. In the quantitative phase of the study, the research questions focused on the actual practices and strategies of EFL students on SNSs, Facebook in particular. This study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent do Jordanian EFL learners use Facebook as a tool for language learning?
- 2) What language learning practices do Jordanian EFL learners engage in on Facebook?

2.2 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, Krashen's second language acquisition theory and Vygotsky's social constructivism were 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).

3. Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory

Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition consists of five hypotheses: the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

3.1 Acquisition-learning hypothesis

Krashen (1981) distinguished between language acquisition and language learning. He stated that language acquisition is a subconscious absorption of the target language that requires meaningful and natural interaction in which speakers focus on the meaning rather than the form of utterances. Language learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process that usually occurs in formal settings (e.g., a classroom) and results in conscious knowledge about the language (e.g., grammar rules). According to Krashen, language learning is less important than language acquisition because performer fluency in language production is based on the system acquired through active communication rather than conscious learning, which only works as a monitor. Pasfield-Neofitou (2012) suggested that engaging in online interaction offers language learners ample opportunities for language acquisition because it provides them with an authentic context for meaningful communication. Accordingly, the present study sought to

explore how using SNSs, a form of online interaction, might influence an EFL learner's experiences.

3.2 Monitor hypothesis

The main claim of the Monitor hypothesis is that conscious learning plays the role of monitor or editor of the output of the acquired system. The use of the monitor helps performers or speakers correct their errors and improve their language accuracy. Krashen (1981) distinguished between three types of monitor users: overusers, underusers, and optimal users. Overusers are performers who feel that they must correct everything even minor errors. Overuse of the monitor may hinder communication and decrease the learner's fluency of language production out of a fear of making mistakes. Underusers, at the other extreme, are performers who do not use a monitor and rarely think about their grammar even when communication is negatively influenced by their errors. Optimal users are those performers who use a monitor appropriately without hindering communication or obstructing language fluency. In the present study, the monitor hypothesis was used to explain some language learner practices in SNSs. For instance, some language learners prefer online interaction, particularly asynchronous interaction, over face-to-face interaction because online interaction gives them more time to think about their grammar and correct their errors. Additionally, some language learners are reluctant to share any content or engage in any discussion for fear of making mistakes (Shafie, Yaacob, & Singh, 2016; Al-Jarrah, Talafhah, & Al-Jarrah, 2019).

3.3 Input hypothesis

According to Krashen (1981), the only way of acquiring the target language is receiving comprehensible input slightly beyond the learner's current level. In other words, if the learner's level in the target language is i , he or she should be exposed to comprehensible input containing $i + 1$ (Gitsaki, 1998). The best method to obtain comprehensible input is by engaging in natural interaction in low-anxiety situations (Krashen, 1981). Lomicka and Lord (2016) stated that engaging in online interaction and using social networking tools can provide language learners with more language input. The input provided by SNSs has different linguistic characteristics from other forms of input and might not be appropriate to a learner's level. However, learners can control the linguistic characteristics of the input by choosing who they interact with. The present study examined whether Jordanian EFL learners use SNSs as a language learning tool and as a source of comprehensible input. It also aimed to identify their practices on SNSs and determine how these practices influence their language learning experiences.

3.4 Natural order hypothesis

According to Krashen (1981), there is a natural predictable order of acquisition of the target language grammatical rules, regardless of the learner's native language, instruction, and exposure. In other words, some grammatical rules are acquired in early

stages of language acquisition while others are acquired later. For example, ESL learners tend to acquire the progressive marker *-ing* (as in “he is watching TV”) before the third person singular *s* (as in “He plays football”).

3.5 Affective filter hypothesis

According to Krashen (1981), second language acquisition is influenced by certain emotional variables, including motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Performers with high motivation, high self-confidence, and low-anxiety tend to seek more input and usually do better in second language acquisition. On the other hand, performers with negative attitudes toward language acquisition tend to seek less input, and even when they understand the message, the affective filter prevents input from reaching the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition. According to Mondahl and Razmerita (2014), engaging in online interaction and using SNS tools might improve learners’ emotional variables, such as motivation and self-confidence. Many learners also consider SNSs to be a low-anxiety environment in which they can use language more effectively. However, learners’ practices on SNSs might negatively influence their emotional variables. For instance, when language learners compare themselves with more skillful users or native speakers of the target language, they might lose their self-confidence and develop a negative attitude toward language learning.

4. Literature Review

This chapter explored the current literature on the interaction between SNSs and language learning, the nature of informal language learning, and the importance of motivation, collaborative learning, self-confidence, and issues of identity.

4.1 SNSs and Language Learning

According to Blattner and Lomicka (2012), over the past three decades the Internet has had an enormous impact on language learning. Early online interactions (e.g., email) provided language learners with an opportunity to find and share information related to the target language. However, the emergence of Web 2.0, including SNSs, in recent years has offered more collaborative opportunities and allowed interactions with a larger number of people across the globe. According to Alm (2015) and Al-Jarrah et al. (2019), there are several innovative ways of using SNSs for language learning. First, SNSs offer numerous communication features (e.g., comments, replies to comments, synchronous chat, private messages, and collaborative groups). In addition, some offer non-verbal communication tools to their users, such as the “Like” button or “emoticons” on Facebook that are used to represent individual feelings and play a significant role in communication. Second, SNSs provide language learners with opportunities for personal or self-reflection writing (e.g., status updates on Facebook). According to Blattner and Lomicka (2012), writing in SNSs affects “*the production of language learners in a positive and constructive way*” because they feel that their writing is

more meaningful as they interact with a real audience (p. 15). SNSs also offer language learners a context in which they can link informal writing with academic writing. They can be a source of information and language input. Even silent participants, who do not contribute any content to SNSs ("lurkers"), could benefit from reading other participants' posts and discussions, follow pages related to the target language (educational, newspapers, or entertainment pages), and belong to groups that use the target language (Shafie et al., 2016).

According to Lam (2009), engaging in different online networks give learners opportunity to practice multiple languages and forms of communication. They also help users to keep or redesign their relationships with others in different contexts of communication. In addition, it provides them with multiple linguistic, cultural, and social resources that are efficient in their life. Many language learners consider SNSs to be a useful learning environment to enhance and improve their language learning. Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010) investigated whether Malaysian ESL students considered Facebook a meaningful environment for English language learning. The results indicated that most ESL students considered Facebook to be a useful tool that could improve their language skills, particularly reading, writing, and vocabulary. Some participants stated that Facebook provided them with an opportunity to learn new words, correct spelling errors, and learn sentence structures. In addition, they felt that Facebook increased their motivation, engagement, and positive attitude toward English language learning because it provided them with an authentic environment and different conversational contexts that students could not experience in traditional classrooms.

On the other hand, a few students saw Facebook as an unsuitable environment for language learning because the materials offered were considered to be without academic value. They also articulated some concerns about safety and potential abuse or misuse in a social networking environment. Kao and Craigie (2014) stated that using Facebook in language learning might distract students from focusing on academic tasks. According to Mondahl and Razmerita (2014), successful use of SNSs in language learning requires certain predetermined learning outcomes so that language learners can focus and avoid wasting time. Herrmann et al. (2000) stated that the integration of technology in the learning process affects "*either intentionally or unintentionally what happens: sometimes for better, sometimes for worse*" (as cited in Kabilan et al., 2010, p. 180). Learners and teachers should thus be aware of the learning outcomes that can help them take advantage of new technology.

According to Blattner and Lomicka (2012), using social networking tools (e.g., Facebook) in formal education can lead to a positive learning environment because it can strengthen student-student and student-teacher relationships. It can also support learners' autonomy and allow them more control over the learning process since they can find information and language resources on their own. Gamble and Wilkins (2014) investigated Japanese students' perceptions and attitudes about using SNSs in formal language learning. Although the results showed positive attitudes toward most

activities of language learning, the researchers expressed some concerns about using SNSs as a course-management system. They stated that some students had difficulty accessing classroom information and homework posts because students' participations and posts had buried them. Likewise, Blattner and Lomicka (2012) articulated some concerns about the evaluation process when SNSs were used as a course-management system in formal education. Although students might receive feedback not only from the teacher but also from their peers, evaluation can be especially difficult for teachers of large classes.

In brief, many studies have suggested that using SNSs in language learning has positively impacted learners' experiences because SNSs can increase learners' motivation, engagement, and attitudes toward language learning. This technology can also improve the language skills of learners, especially writing, reading, and vocabulary, because it provides them with an opportunity to use language in an authentic context, in different conversations, and with real audiences. However, using SNSs in learning has several limitations (e.g., misuse or abuse of SNSs, such as loss of privacy, time consumption, online predators, cyberbullying, and loss of social skills) that can be avoided through teacher guidance and setting clear goals.

4.2 Informal Language Learning

According to Alm (2015), there are two types of learning: formal and informal. Formal learning refers to any type of planned and intentional learning, such as that occurring in regular classrooms or outside the classroom in alternative learning environments, such as online courses. Informal learning, on the other hand, refers to unplanned learning that occurs as a result of everyday activities, such as interacting with family members, friends, and colleagues. According to Taylor (2006), informal learning gives learners opportunities to engage in authentic valued tasks and benefit from more experienced members of a community. According to Sockett (2014), it also allows learners to "*assimilate values, attitudes, behaviors, skills and knowledge which occurs in everyday life*" (p. 10).

Schugurensky (2000) identified three types of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization. In self-directed learning, even though there is no assistance from a teacher or facilitator, the learner is conscious about the learning process and has a specific purpose for learning. For example, if language learners want to improve their English, they might watch English movies, interact with native English speakers, and engage in online activities in English. In incidental learning, the learners have no specific purpose for learning; but after the experience, they become conscious that some learning has occurred. For instance, an English language learner is at a party and accidentally engages in a conversation with a native English speaker. The learner finishes and realizes that he/she has acquired some new vocabulary. Socialization occurs when the learners have no previous intention to learn, and even after the experience is not aware that they learned something. Socialization refers to "*the internalization of values, attitudes, behaviors, skills, etc. that occur during*

everyday life" (Schugurensky, 2000, p. 4). For instance, small children acquire their first language without being conscious of the learning processes. According to Schugurensky (2000), all three types of informal learning can support and reinforce formal education because they can help learners add new knowledge, strengthen prior knowledge, improve skills, and develop values. However, formal and informal learning can also provide learners with contradictory values. For example, an individual can become more tolerant through formal learning and then less tolerant through socialization and vice-versa.

According to Alm (2015), Web 2.0 tools such as SNSs increase opportunities for informal language learning for language learners and provide them with naturalistic learning situations. Informal language learning via Web 2.0 tools can contribute to developing language skills and create a suitable environment for English language learners. As stated by Sockett and Toffoli (2012), "*Informal language use involves consistent and long-term contacts with resources in the target language, positioning these students as authentic English users and not only as students of the language*" (p. 148). Because SNSs are considered an important source of informal language learning (Alm, 2015; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012), this study examined informal EFL language learners' practices on SNSs and provided a description and evaluation of their experiences using SNSs as informal language learning tools.

4.3 Motivation

Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) stated that "*motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it*" (p. 617). According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, individual affective factors, such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety play a significant role in second language acquisition (Barrett, 2008).

According to Deci (1975), there are two types of motivations for individuals: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation (as cited in Lin & Lu, 2011). Extrinsic motivation refers to taking an action because of an expected external reward, such as praise, money, points, and tokens. Intrinsic motivation, on the other extreme, refers to acting out of personal interest in the action itself. According to Lin and Lu (2011), both types of motivation play a significant role in the learning process and are considered a key to learning success. Kabilan et al. (2010) pointed out that using social networks (e.g., Facebook) in language learning increases the motivation of language learners and improves their confidence and attitude toward language learning, because SNSs provide opportunities to engage in naturalistic and meaningful language use.

However, motivation in an educational setting is inconsistent and influenced by several elements. Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) illustrated this point when they stated that "*motivation does not remain constant, but is associated with a dynamically changing and evolving mental process, characterized by constant (re)appraisal and balancing of the various internal and external influences that the individual is exposed to*" (p. 617). For instance, language learners in social network environments are motivated by authentic

interaction and autonomous learning, but they are discouraged because of the lack of clear goals, the lack of synchronous chat, technology barriers, or the inability to handle cross-cultural or political conflicts (Barrett, 2008; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014).

5. Methodology

The purpose of quantitative study was to identify the EFL learners' practices and understand their experiences with SNSs as a tool for English language learning. The quantitative portion of this study involved an online survey of 144 participants that was used to identify EFL learners' practices in SNSs, particularly Facebook. Plano Clark and Creswell (2011) supported this when they stated, "*This design can also be used when the researcher wants [...] quantitative results about participant characteristics to guide purposeful sampling*" (p. 82).

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 quantitative design.

5.1 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.).

5.2 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 quantitative portion of this study, 230 EFL students were randomly chosen from the English Language Department and the Translation Department at Yarmouk University, a well-known university in the north of Jordan. I chose Yarmouk University for my sample because I have easy access to that institution. The sample consisted of both male and female students from different academic and social levels. My sample size is appropriate because a large sample size increases the power of statistical tests and the significance of the results (Howell, 2012). It also aligns with many studies in the field of social networking and second language learning (e.g., AlAmri, 2009; Hamedani, 2013; Lee & Ranta, 2014; Lin & Gan, 2014). However, a total of 147 students responded to the survey. Three were excluded because they skipped most of the survey questions. Therefore, the actual total in the quantitative portion was 144 students (38 male students and 106 female students) or a 63% return rate. The number of female participants greatly exceeded the number of male participants because women outnumbered men in the original population. Women are also more likely in general to participate in online surveys than men (Smith, 2008). The sample included students from different university years (freshman: 12.5%, sophomore: 19.4%, junior: 31.3%, and senior: 36.8%).

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. Table 3 shows some background information of the interview participants.

Table 3: Background Information of Interview Participants

| Participant | Gender | Location | Year | Proficiency |
|-------------|--------|----------|-----------|--------------|
| LUR 1 | F | Rural | Freshman | Beginner |
| LUR 2 | F | Urban | Sophomore | Beginner |
| LUR 3 | M | Urban | Senior | Intermediate |
| LUR 4 | F | Rural | Junior | Intermediate |
| LUR 5 | F | Rural | Sophomore | Beginner |
| LUR 6 | F | Rural | Junior | Advanced |
| ACT 1 | F | Urban | Senior | Intermediate |
| ACT 2 | F | Urban | Senior | Intermediate |
| ACT 3 | F | Rural | Senior | Expert |
| ACT 4 | M | Urban | Junior | Advanced |
| ACT 5 | M | Rural | Junior | Intermediate |
| ACT 6 | F | Rural | Freshman | Beginner |

5.3 Data Collection Methods

5.3.1 The Survey of EFL Learners' practices in SNSs

The survey (Appendix A) consisted of 42 items based on previous studies that addressed intensity of SNS use among language learners and their practices on SNSs, particularly, Facebook. The survey consisted of three sections. The first section was designed to collect some general characteristics about the participants, such as gender, university year, and level of proficiency. The second section was designed to gather information about the intensity of SNS use and EFL learners' general practices on SNSs, particularly, Facebook. The last section was designed to identify EFL learners' practices on Facebook as a tool for English language learning. The majority of survey items were in the form of a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree).

To confirm the clarity of the survey language and the appropriateness of the items, the chair and members of my committee reviewed the survey. Based on their feedback, I modified, added, and deleted some of the survey items to better answer my research questions. To assess the reliability of the survey, I conducted a pilot test before the actual study, in which the survey was sent to 29 EFL students in one of the classes in the English Department. I used the test-retest design to assess the consistency and stability of the survey. I asked students to complete the survey and recomplete it after a week in two different sessions. Then, I calculated the correlation coefficient for the two datasets (data collected in the first and the second week). The test-retest reliability coefficient was 0 .91, which is considered excellent reliability (Gliner et al., 2009).

5.4 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 quantitative portion of this study, I used a computer program to randomly choose 230 participants using their ID information. Then, I asked the coordinator of the English Department to send an email solicitation to 230 students majoring in Translation and English Literature. The solicitation email included my name and affiliation with Southern Illinois University (SIU) and the English Department at Yarmouk University, a brief description of the purpose of the study, and information for students to contact me if they were interested in participating in my study. After hearing back from students, I sent the consent forms (Appendix D) to the students who were interested in participating, asked them to sign and return the consent forms, and provide their email to me if they agreed to be participants in the study. Then, I sent a code number to each participant to use when completing the online survey that they received via the emails they provided.

5.5 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data, I used SPSS software to conduct descriptive statistics. According to Howell (2012), descriptive statistics helps researchers summarize, organize, and compare a large amount of data in a manageable form for easy visualization.

5.6 Quantitative Results

The quantitative data were collected through an online survey of 144 undergraduate EFL students. The survey consisted of three main sections: demographics, general use of SNSs particularly Facebook, and using Facebook for English language learning. The data gathered from this section were used to answer the first and second research questions:

- 1) To what extent do Jordanian EFL learners use Facebook as a tool for language learning?
- 2) What language learning practices do Jordanian EFL learners engage in on Facebook?

5.7 Demographics

The survey was sent to 230 EFL students in the English Language Department and the Translation Department. A total of 147 students responded to the survey. Three students were excluded because they skipped most of the survey questions. Therefore, the following analysis included the results of 144 surveys (38 male students and 106 female students). The survey sample included students from different academic years. Table 4 shows the distribution of participants based on years of study at the university (freshman: 12.5%, sophomore: 19.4%, junior: 31.3%, and senior: 36.8%).

Table 4: Participant University Level

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Freshman | 18 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 12.5 |
| | Sophomore | 28 | 19.4 | 19.4 | 31.9 |
| | Junior | 45 | 31.3 | 31.3 | 63.2 |
| | Senior | 53 | 36.8 | 36.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | | 144 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

A total of 50% of participants described their proficiency level in English as intermediate while 29.9% described it as advanced. Figure 2 shows the distribution of participants based on their level of proficiency in English.

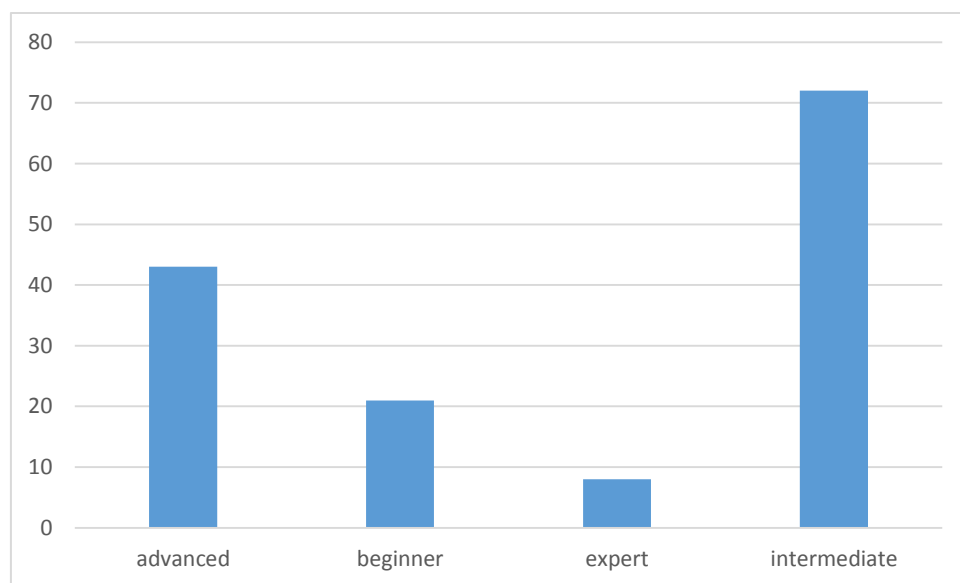


Figure 2: Level of proficiency in English

The results also showed that 61.9% of participants reported that they used English to create most of their accounts on SNSs, 13.9% used Arabic, 24.3% used a mix of both, and 0.7% used other languages. In contrast, 23.5% reported that they used Arabic in most of their SNS activities and 14.7% used English. However, 28.8% reported that they used a mix of both languages simultaneously, while 29.4% reported that they switched between the two languages based on the situation. In addition, 2.9% of participants reported that they used the Arabic chat alphabet (Arabizi), and only one participant (0.6%) reported that she used Turkish in most of her SNS activities.

5.8 Intensity of SNS Use

Seventy five percent of participants reported that they have used SNSs for more than four years and almost 80% used SNSs on a daily basis. Likewise, 50% of participants reported that they felt part of SNS communities. Figure 3 shows the distribution of participants in terms of the intensity of SNS use per day. The figure shows that more than 50% of participants reported that they used SNSs for four hours or more per day, and 28.5% reported that they used SNSs between two and three hours per day.

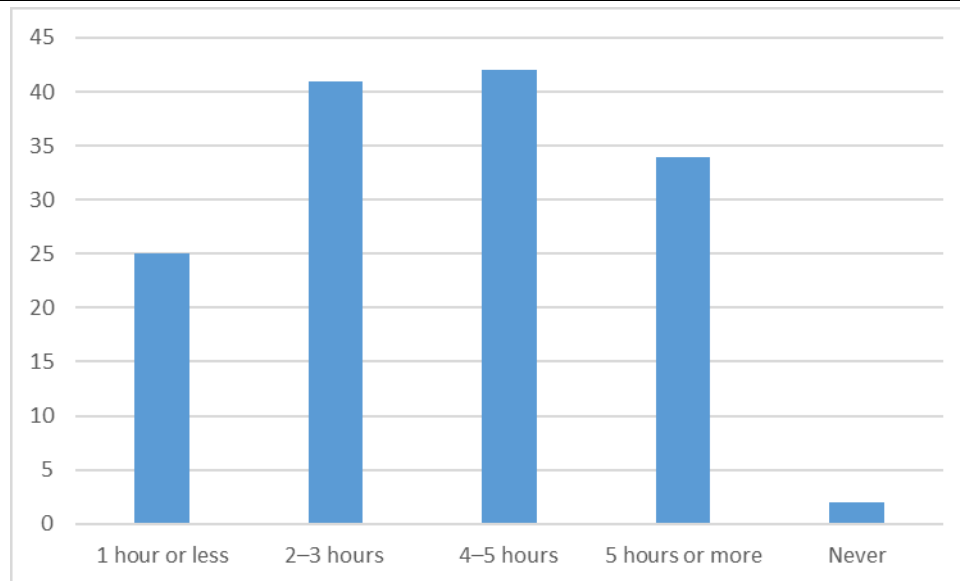


Figure 3: Intensity of SNS use per day

The results showed that the most common SNS among participants was Facebook, as 92.4% of respondents reported that they used Facebook regularly. Instagram was the second most common (52.1%), followed by Google+ (19%), Twitter (14.6%), WhatsApp (12.5%), and Snapchat (9.7%). More than half of participants reported that they have used SNSs as a classroom requirement (see Table 5).

Table 5: SNSs as a Classroom Requirement

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Never | 27 | 18.8 | 18.8 | 18.8 |
| | Rarely | 34 | 23.6 | 23.6 | 42.4 |
| | Sometimes | 61 | 42.4 | 42.4 | 84.7 |
| | Often | 15 | 10.4 | 10.4 | 95.1 |
| | Very often | 7 | 4.9 | 4.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | | 144 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

5.9 Privacy in SNSs

Privacy is an important issue in SNSs because they can contain a great amount of data about people's personal and social lives (Álvarez Valencia, 2014). Participants reported that they shared different information via SNSs, including their real names (89.6%), birthday (73.6%), education and work information (71.5%), personal activities and interests (55.6%), and email address (52.1%). However, fewer participants reported sharing photos of themselves (45.8%) or phone numbers (30.6%).

5.10 Participants' General Practices on Facebook

Participants used Facebook for different purposes, such as meeting new people, learning about other cultures, keeping in touch with friends, and inviting friends to events. Table 6 shows the general practices of participants on Facebook. Table 6 shows that the most common practice among participants was keeping in touch with friends;

70.8% reported using Facebook to keep in touch with friends from their home country, while 63.2% reported doing so to keep in touch with friends from other countries. Learning about other cultures came in second place (63.2%), followed by following local and international news (58%), and learning more about people they had met socially (57.6%). Far fewer participants reported using Facebook to invite friends to events (36.1%) or to meet new people (29.1%). In each statement of the below subscale, at least 19.4% of participants reported having no opinion about the issue addressed in the statement.

Table 6: The General Practices of Participants on Facebook

| | Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | | Strongly Agree | |
|--|--|------|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|----------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % |
| | I have used Facebook to learn more about someone I met socially. | 6 | 4.2 | 19 | 13.2 | 36 | 25.0 | 66 | 45.8 | 17 |
| I use Facebook to learn more about people from other cultures. | 4 | 2.8 | 15 | 10.4 | 37 | 25.7 | 65 | 45.1 | 23 | 16.0 |
| I use Facebook to keep in touch with friends from my home country. | 5 | 3.5 | 9 | 6.3 | 28 | 19.4 | 67 | 46.5 | 35 | 24.3 |
| I use Facebook to keep in touch with friends from other countries. | 6 | 4.2 | 15 | 10.4 | 32 | 22.2 | 67 | 46.5 | 24 | 16.7 |
| I use Facebook to meet new people. | 13 | 9.0 | 50 | 34.7 | 39 | 27.1 | 30 | 20.8 | 12 | 8.3 |
| I use Facebook to follow local and international news. | 15 | 10.4 | 17 | 11.8 | 26 | 19.8 | 43 | 28.2 | 43 | 29.8 |
| I use Facebook to invite friends to events. | 11 | 7.6 | 30 | 20.8 | 51 | 35.4 | 47 | 32.6 | 5 | 3.5 |

5.11 Using Facebook to Learn English

The results showed two types of language learners using Facebook: 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 without contributing any content to discussions. Table 7 summarizes the practices of EFL learners on Facebook.

Table 7: EFL Learners' Practices on Facebook

| | Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | | Strongly Agree | |
|--|---|-----|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|----------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % |
| | I read discussions and comments written in English. | 6 | 4.2 | 13 | 9.0 | 20 | 13.9 | 69 | 47.9 | 36 |
| I follow people / groups / pages that use English. | 7 | 4.9 | 8 | 5.6 | 25 | 17.4 | 53 | 36.8 | 51 | 35.4 |
| I follow people / groups / pages that are interested in teaching and/or learning English. | 4 | 2.8 | 12 | 8.3 | 26 | 18.1 | 54 | 37.5 | 48 | 33.3 |
| I use Facebook to connect with native English speakers. | 5 | 3.5 | 31 | 21.5 | 38 | 26.4 | 49 | 34.0 | 21 | 14.6 |
| I use Facebook to connect with other English language learners. | 4 | 2.8 | 27 | 18.8 | 35 | 24.3 | 61 | 42.4 | 17 | 11.8 |
| I use Facebook to join English practical lessons or courses in different aspects of English language learning. | 6 | 4.2 | 16 | 11.1 | 46 | 31.9 | 59 | 41.0 | 17 | 11.8 |
| I practice English by reading other people's posts and comments. | 9 | 6.3 | 9 | 6.3 | 27 | 18.8 | 73 | 50.7 | 26 | 18.1 |

Over 70% of participants tended to follow people, groups, and webpages that used English or were interested in teaching and learning English. In addition, 72.9% were interested in reading discussions in English, and 69.5% reported practicing their English by reading other peoples' posts and comments on Facebook. Over half (52.8%) of participants reported using Facebook to join practical lessons or courses in English, and about half reported using Facebook to connect with other English language learners and English native speakers. Fewer participants were willing to maximize their learning experience by actively participating in discussions and interacting with others in English. In other words, they not only observed discussions but also contributed content to those discussions. Table 8 shows some of the active practices of EFL learners on Facebook.

Table 8: Active Practices of EFL learners on Facebook

| | Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | | Strongly Agree | |
|--|---|-----|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|----------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % |
| | I use English to communicate on Facebook. | 6 | 4.2 | 14 | 9.7 | 61 | 42.4 | 52 | 36.1 | 11 |
| I use the chat function on Facebook to talk with friends in English. | 4 | 2.8 | 30 | 20.8 | 55 | 38.2 | 50 | 34.7 | 5 | 3.5 |
| I participate in discussions in English. | 5 | 3.5 | 16 | 11.1 | 52 | 36.1 | 53 | 36.8 | 18 | 12.5 |
| I participate in discussions in Arabic. | 2 | 1.4 | 6 | 4.2 | 46 | 31.9 | 61 | 42.4 | 29 | 20.1 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|-----|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|
| I leave my own comments in English. | 7 | 4.9 | 32 | 22.2 | 63 | 43.8 | 35 | 24.3 | 7 | 4.9 |
| I use English to write my status updates. | 3 | 2.1 | 20 | 13.9 | 62 | 43.1 | 48 | 33.3 | 11 | 7.6 |
| I practice English by posting things on Facebook. | 10 | 6.9 | 22 | 15.3 | 41 | 28.5 | 53 | 36.8 | 18 | 12.5 |
| I use my own words when I am posting or commenting in English. | 6 | 4.2 | 14 | 9.7 | 29 | 20.1 | 73 | 50.7 | 22 | 15.3 |
| I feel comfortable about using Facebook for the purpose of learning English | 6 | 4.2 | 15 | 10.4 | 24 | 16.7 | 59 | 41.0 | 40 | 27.8 |

Table 8 shows that participants were more willing to participate in discussions in Arabic than in English, as 62.3% reported participating in discussions in Arabic, while 49.3% reported doing so in English and practicing their English by posting on Facebook. Approximately forty one percent of participants reported using English to write their status updates, 38.2% reported using the chat function on Facebook to talk with friends in English, and only 29.2% left comments in English. Although 68.8% of participants reported feeling comfortable using Facebook to learn English, Tables 6 and 7 show that participants tended to read and observe discussions in English rather than actively participate in those discussions, i.e., they focused on receiving language from SNSs rather than producing language. Passive participation in online discussions may be related to a lack of confidence using English. Figures 4 and 5 show participants' ratings for their self-confidence using English in synchronous or asynchronous discussions, respectively.

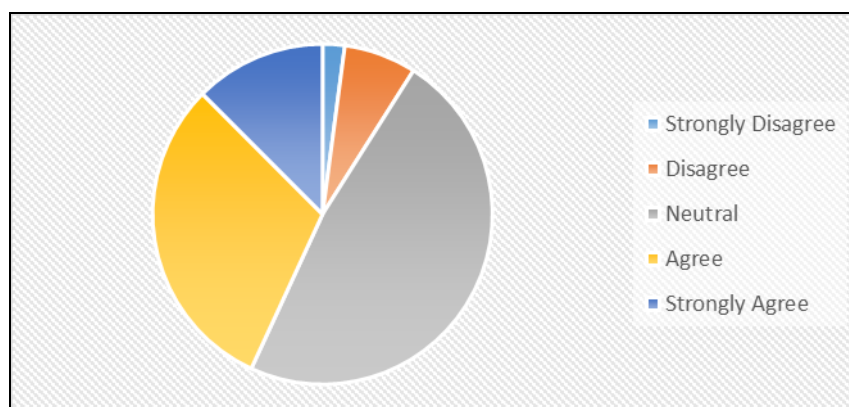


Figure 4: Participants' rating of their confidence using English in synchronous discussions.

Figure 5 shows that 48% of participants chose a neutral option when asked if they felt confident about their English when engaging in synchronous discussion, thus showing a lack of confidence, as only 43% reported feeling confident using English in synchronous discussion. Similarly, Figure 5 shows that over half of participants chose a neutral option when asked if they felt confident about their English when engaging in

asynchronous discussion, and only 35.4% felt confident using English in asynchronous discussion.

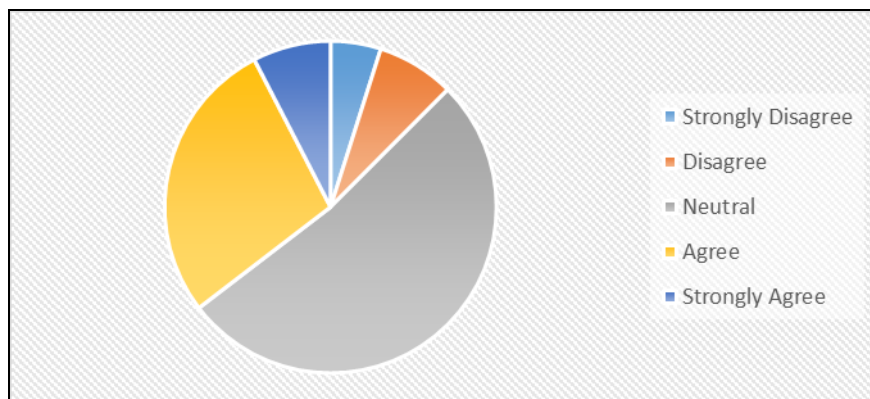


Figure 5: Participants' rating of their confidence using English in asynchronous discussions

Finally, Figure 6 shows that 39.6% of participants chose the neutral option to answer the last of the survey: "I generally use Facebook on a regular basis to learn English." Approximately 44 % reported that they generally used Facebook on a regular basis to learn English, and only 16.7% reported not using Facebook on regular basis for this purpose.

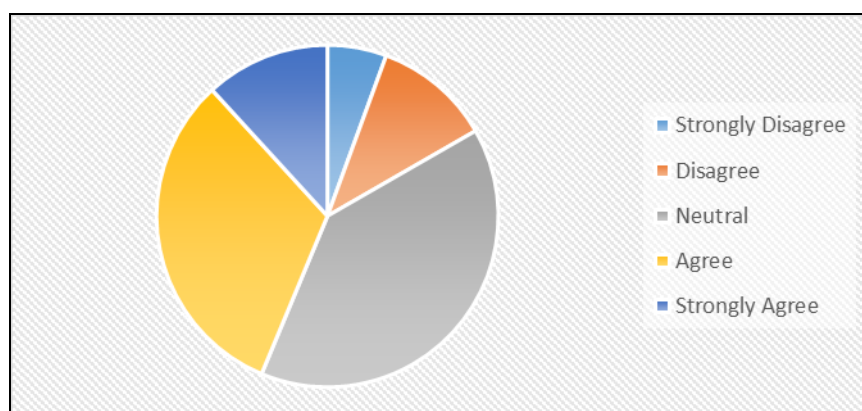


Figure 6: Facebook used on a regular basis to learn English

6. Conclusion of the Survey Results

Close to a majority of participants indicated that they used SNSs and that SNSs had become part of their daily routine, particularly Facebook. They also indicated that they used Facebook for different purposes, including keeping in touch with friends, learning about other cultures, following local and international news, meeting new people, and inviting others to events. Most participants reported feeling comfortable using Facebook in English language learning. However, less than half of them (43.7%) used it on a regular basis to learn English. In addition, most participants tended to read and observe discussions in English rather than participate in them or produce language output.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter discusses and interprets 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 quantitative 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 questions:

- 1) To what extent do Jordanian EFL learners use Facebook as a tool for language learning?
- 2) What language learning practices do Jordanian EFL learners engage in on Facebook?

7.1 Intensity of SNS Use and General Practices

The results of the study showed that the majority of undergraduate EFL students used SNSs on a daily basis and almost half of them used SNSs for four hours or more per day. This result was comparable to previous research that has suggested that undergraduate students spend great amounts of their time using SNSs (e.g., Bicen & Cavus, 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). In addition, the results showed that the most common SNS among EFL students was Facebook, while Instagram was the second most common, followed by Google+, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. This result was consistent with Ellison et al. (2011), who suggested that Facebook was the most popular SNS because it had many characteristics unavailable in other SNSs, such as being more flexible, dynamic, and easier to use. In comparison with Twitter that limits posts (tweets) to 140 characters, Facebook allows much longer status updates. It also offers more options for connectivity, entertainment, and privacy control.

With respect to general practices on Facebook, the results showed that the most common practice among undergraduate Jordanian EFL students was keeping in touch with friends from their home country and from other countries. Far fewer participants reported using SNSs to meet new people. These results were comparable to Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009), which suggested that college students most often used SNSs for social interactions particularly with friends or people they met socially, and they rarely communicated with strangers on SNSs. Learning about other cultures, came in second place followed by following local and international news. According to Marley (2013), SNSs, particularly Facebook, are considered a powerful tool to represent the cultural identity of community and a useful source of information to understand other cultures. However, some Jordanian EFL students reported concerns about the credibility of news in SNSs. This result was supported by Flanagin and Metzger (2007), which suggested that people's perceptions about the credibility of web-based news differed according to the source of the news. For example, people tended to trust the

information from news organizations (e.g., CNN) more than individual or personal pages.

7.2 Conclusions and Implications

This quantitative study examined Jordanian EFL learners' practices and experiences on SNSs, particularly Facebook as a tool of English language learning. The study was guided by three main questions: 1) To what extent do Jordanian EFL learners use Facebook as a tool for language learning? 2) What language learning practices do Jordanian EFL learners engage in on Facebook? 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.

With respect to the second question, the results identified two different groups of learners: active participants and lurkers. Active participants are social networking users who contribute content to online discussions or language learning groups. On the other hand, lurkers are social networking users who observe online activities or discussions without contributing any content to those discussions. The results revealed that learners' practices or behaviors changed depending on certain factors, such as the context, audience, sense of belonging, and the learners' needs and interests.

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.

In addition, the results showed that context and environment significantly impacted learners' behavior and practices on SNSs. For that reason, when using SNSs in language teaching and learning, teachers or those responsible need to offer a more welcoming learning environment with fewer restrictions (e.g., tolerance of learners' grammatical errors). Moreover, although the study mostly focused on language learning in an informal setting, the results revealed very interesting issues about using SNSs in formal settings. For instance, the use of Facebook groups as a learning management system (LMS) in EFL might strengthen the relationship between students and teachers and positively impact the learning process.

Finally, learners presented different identities in different social contexts (e.g., a user of the language, a tutor, and an expert in a specific field). Multiple roles and

identities might be good opportunities to promote learner language development. For that reason, teachers should not only focus on academic knowledge or skills, but also on other aspects of students as members of society. In other words, teachers should adopt the whole student (the holistic development) approach to improve language learning and produce good citizens who can take on their personal and social responsibilities.

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