



SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AS A UBIQUITOUS LEARNING SPACE IN THE FIJIAN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION CLASSROOMS

Ravnil Narayanⁱ

Lecturer in Applied Linguistics,
School of Communications, Language and Literature,
Department of Communications and Media,
Fiji National University, Lautoka Campus,
Fiji

Abstract:

This paper sheds light on the roles of social networking sites (SNSs) in relation to English as a Second Language (ESL) in Fijian English language teaching and learning classrooms. Specifically, the paper delves into examining the potential applications of Facebook and YouTube on students and teachers at selected high schools in the western division, Fiji. A total of 30 students and 15 teachers were involved in this study, and the data was analysed through a qualitative approach. Further, the paper yonders upon the instructional and educational functions of social networking sites, including the drawbacks and challenges experienced by the teachers and students in the process of applying them. The findings revealed that the pedagogical consequences of integrating the latest features offered by SNSs towards bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary driven teaching and learning milieu enhances vocabulary acquisition. In brief, the study has allowed the researcher to analyse the differences in learning habits of ESL learners in typical Fijian classroom settings using innovations in social networking sites.

Keywords: social networking sites (SNSs), Fijian classrooms, English as a Second Language (ESL), pedagogy, sociolinguistics, acquisition

1. Introduction

Ever since it was incepted back in the year 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), the emergence of social networking sites (SNSs) has witnessed tremendous growth in terms of technological advancement. Equally, this has enabled millions of people throughout the world to connect with one another by means of web-based communities that prowess people to engage, exchange, entertain, trade, study, and many others. So much so, the

ⁱ Correspondence: email ravnil.narayan@fnu.ac.fj, ravnilnarayan@gmail.com

swift technological evolution has deeply impacted not just the individuals' day-to-day lives but at the same time, the educational settings the most. Teachers and learners are facing a herculean task of incorporating old-style pedagogical methodologies over online learning platforms. While there is much commotion concerning the drawbacks and limitations of applying SNSs as a replacement tool for old-style methods, learners have shown their keen interest and optimistic attitudes by incorporating SNSs in their daily lessons (Akçayır, 2017). In the pursuit of teaching the English language, it is highly pivotal to establish a conducive ambience that exposes educators and learners alike to use the repertoire of SNSs to enhance the effect of classroom teaching and learning. With an array of authentic content being shared on SNSs worldwide, many of these contents can be integrated into language teaching and learning practices.

In the last three decades, the internet has left a benchmark that is evidenced by the escalated growth in a variety of fields, including language teaching and learning, literacy studies, discourse analysis, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and computer-mediated communication (CMC). In particular, the field of computer-aided language learning (CALL) has addressed many potential uses of the internet towards learning a language, with many articles delving into this in the mid 1990s as discussed by (Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995). Today, CALL is spanning around diverse platforms such as digital gaming, online learning, computer-aided tests, corpus linguistics, and many more (Farr & Murray, 2016). So much so, the increasing interest in the social aspect of online platforms has contributed significantly towards second language acquisition that has made a 'social turn' in CALL (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Towards the beginning of the mid-2000s, innovations started to take place on worldwide platforms commonly known as 'social media'. This platform included blogs, Wikipedia, and emerging social networking sites. Amongst all of these, Facebook and YouTube have also made breakthroughs in the world of social networking websites.

Facebook, which has the highest number of users at the global level, is a networking site that connects friends, families, and acquaintances to engage in virtual conversation with each other. Today, Facebook is not just used to interact with each other; at the same time, it is used for content sharing and expressions, marketing and branding, customer engagement and support, and community building and activism. It is a platform that allows its users to interact openly with each other around the globe and share like-minded sentiments. More so, Facebook gives its users the liberty to communicate and interact with ease and convenience (Patel, 2013). In addition, users have an open opportunity to study words and use them the way they want them to be used. In Fiji, by default, many people tend to use English as a means of communication as it is the lingua franca of the country. Additionally, many people in Fiji use English as the means of communication to converse online while chatting on Facebook (Narayan, 2020).

On the other hand, YouTube plays a pivotal role in enhancing the vocabulary learning of ESL learners. In order to be fully conversant in an ESL language, YouTube assists learners in improving their vocabulary acquisition. Though acquiring a second

language is a daunting task, online platforms such as YouTube make it easier for learners to comprehend the language properly. It has the potential to enhance all four macro skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to Dudeney & Hockly (2009), innovations in technology pave the way for new ways of teaching second languages.

2. Literature Review

The world where we live in has transformed beyond our imagination and is continuing to be transformed. People can share their views and opinions at the global hub with the assistance of social networking sites regardless of their race, religion, culture, age, gender and ethnicity. With the inception of social media and its fast-growing popularity, second language acquisition has developed to a significant level. Social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook have gained high popularity amongst the public and continue to gain more. They ought to provide users from all over the globe a chance to communicate, share similar ideologies, and transfer knowledge about their culture and society. Also, the platforms allow people to upload their photos and videos and let others gain knowledge through them. As stated by McLuhan (2019), the world has transformed into a global village, and the medium of conversation is messages.

All around the globe, social networking sites are playing a crucial role as mediators reciprocating messages between users. People see it as an effective means of entertainment, social networking/interaction and, above all, a learning medium. Many are also seeing it as a platform where people from diverse linguistic backgrounds come together to promote and share their cultural values. Since the platform is full of diversity, people can learn and disseminate their knowledge about languages through mutual interaction. For example, L₂ speakers of the English language could learn English as a Global language by engaging in conversations with L₁ speakers of English.

As stated by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media is defined as the collection of internet websites, practices and services that harness support through collaboration, participation, sharing and community building. Clearly, this depicts that social networking sites could be considered as one of the major sources through which L₂ learners can learn the English language in an innovative and convenient way. According to Warschaur (1995), *“the more opportunities for real communication students might be exposed to when using the internet and the e-mail system in language learning.”* Moreover, Nader (1996), posits that *“the great challenge for teachers to design individual and group activities using the internet resources and also praised the benefits of the students searching for them and thus exploring different cultures more directly and effectively.”*

One of the pivotal concerns of this study is the roles played by various social networking sites, together with the applications towards improving vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners. As innovation in online platforms grows, the influence of online learning is growing equally, although the vast majority of people rely heavily on paper discussions in the education sector. For youngsters, online platforms have become an imperative feature of surfing for learning. According to the research

conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project in the year 2000, it was revealed that teens mainly use the internet by considering it as an essential tool outside the classroom and seeing it as an emerging innovative mechanism (Kamal, 2013). In line with the claim made by Kamal above, the same could be true for the use of social networking sites as well. Compared to Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc., the most highly popular social networking site is Facebook. People, particularly students, could learn so much from it. They could engage in academic assistance anytimes convenient to them from these social networking sites. By large, it is also observed that students' reading habits have also taken a turn from paper-based readings to online readings (Shen & Kou, 2015).

In addition, people with a repertoire of backgrounds and perspectives tend to also share their thought-provoking ideas and knowledge by uploading videos in the form of reels. As stated by Kamal (2013), *"communication is the best of all ways for teaching vocabulary, and we can easily understand that through the communication of social media students learn faster than paper-based learning."* He also highlights that vocabulary is the foundation of every skill related to English language teaching. *"It's much more than grammar because is the key to communicating successfully with other people. Knowing more words gives our mind more ways to think about things and more tools to plan or figure out about something"* (Kamal, 2013). Additionally, there are many students who are apprehensive about participating actively in the classroom but are actively involved in online blog writing (Brydolf, 2007). Likewise, Arina and Mirabela (2013) claim that learning via the assistance of social networking sites is not only beneficial for foreign language learners, but at the same time, it also builds self-confidence and learners' ability to express his/her opinions openly with minimal hesitation based on the interest of a given topic (Al-Samadi, 2013).

Additionally, it is also believed that learners ought to gain more exposure to vocabularies and improve their writing skills due to active participation on social networking sites (Al-Samadi, 2013). While being fully engaged with social networking sites, learners come across many new words. For example, a Spanish language teacher named Alessandro Cessarano at the University of Florida uses Facebook interactions for marking assignments and doing class discussions instead of resorting to using a chalkboard. He believes that *"the Facebook page is better than blackboard because students have more access to authentic cultural material and not to waste class time to teaching them to use a new program because many of them use Facebook already"*. New words are learnt by them every day along with their application in a repertoire of contexts. However, Kamal argues that building up learner's vocabularies is fine, but how well it is taught to master it is questionable. *"Facebook can be more effective if the student can interact with Facebook; this interaction includes activities that can expand the students' understanding of the words and the use of them in any language skill. In addition, Facebook can add a new dimension to learning allowing teachers to explain abstract concepts while accommodating all learning styles"*. That being said, it is totally different from the actual classroom setting and highly effective in that learners do not have to memorise words. In fact, learners learn the new vocabularies by applying them practically during sentence formulations (Kamal, 2013).

Furthermore, in an article written by Anankulladetch (2017), learners who resort to utilising social networking sites for their learning were not only found to be active and highly engaged, but they have also reported gaining higher in general education. In an experimental study conducted by Junco, Heiberger & Loken, (2011), using Facebook as a platform for various types of academic and non-academic discussions has indicated that Facebook could be used as an educational tool to enhance participation and collaboration. While doing microblogging, Facebook can be used as a tool to extend communication among learners, as it assists in increasing a sense of belongingness among themselves. Not only these, but social networking sites, such as Facebook, promote active learning and allow instructors to provide prompt feedback on learners' assignments.

By the means of effectively incorporating social networking sites as a vocabulary learning tool, teachers can expect to reach higher levels of learning and maintain effective classroom management (Revere & Kovach, 2011). Besides the fact that social networking sites enhance vocabulary learning in second language acquisition classrooms, there also lies an unyielding fact that many techno words or abbreviations are used on social networking sites that have become part and parcel of our daily lives. Some of the examples include, LOL, XOXO, BRB, TTYL, TBH, TC, ROFL and many others. It has been noticed that these abbreviations are more prevalent to be used among young learners. Besides, it has also come to our attention that many adults use short forms of words because it is a way to save time. For instance, cme, w8, wnt, grt8, nyt etc. Undeniably, social networking sites have not only provided opportunities for exposure to multilingual cultures but at the same time, have also, rather to some extent, deteriorated the use of language in second language acquisition classrooms.

Moreover, the application of social networking sites in academic courses can connect learners and help them progress towards creating virtual communities that could lead to better content learning. Many social networking sites provide an array of opportunities for learners to expand their horizons in the learning milieu through exploring innovative resources, and encouraging collaboration and communication. According to the research conducted by Al-Rahimi & Othman (2013) regarding the impact of the use of social media on academic performance amongst university students, it was revealed that the integration of social networking sites facilitates students' academic experiences, which relates to students' academic performance. The integration also increases the learner's relationship with their teachers, which in return increases active participation together with enhanced collaborative learning. Likewise, another study was carried out by Olaleke, Iroju, & Olajide (2015) in which it was revealed that, social networking sites can be used to enhance the relationship between learners and teachers. More so, online social networking sites facilitate students' academic experiences by creating an ambience for academic discussions, which improves learning motivation. Subsequently, allowing the learners to discuss content via the virtual community can build up ongoing conversations with multiple sources. This can further lead up to learners learning outside the traditional classrooms in innovative ways.

So much so, social networking sites such as YouTube also tend to provide an immense amount of information to learners. *“Although YouTube offers new possibilities for educators and teachers and training all over the world to practice and interact through creating personal and official channels which can upload and download many videos with many contents. These days, people upload videos on several different subjects”* (Derradji, 2016). As asserted above and restated by Gairns & Redman (1986), YouTube is a visual media that is considered as a valuable tool to introduce words which can later be used for word retention. It boosts learners’ zeal and modifies the pessimistic variables that affect the learning environment in an optimistic way. Together, it not only exemplify enunciation to English language learners but at the same time it also enhances the listening skills as well. Learners can pause and replay the videos which they wish to see, unlike in the traditional classroom, where many learners would not dare to open their mouths and engage in active classroom discussions for fear of giving wrong responses. Essentially, YouTube videos are considered the factor that bridges the gap between learners and their L₂ learning. *“YouTube videos can give a modern and attractive way to achieve this goal. YouTube, with its extensive and endless resources, offer large varieties of spoken language and different sorts and styles such as songs, poems, and conversation that serve language learning, and it will be very helpful for learners to memorize in an easy way and acquire vocabulary in a meaningful setting”* (Alimemaj, 2010).

Overall, social media does affect language learning skills. It is strongly observed that this is rather a more practical way to learn L₂ than the traditional way of learning. It is considered an excellent foundation for learning L₂ listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Equally, it is seen as a platform that is ever-expanding in the realm of education for students from all sectors, i.e. primary, secondary, and tertiary. Research conducted by Patel (2013) shows that social networking sites have optimistic effects on learning L₂ for educational purposes. When Facebook and YouTube are used in a positive way, they are seen as extraordinary tools for the betterment of the learner’s well-being (Brydolf, 2007). In its rightful capacity, it depends on the learners how they ought to utilise these networks towards enhancing their L₂ knowledge. When used in a proper way, there will be optimistic benefits.

3. Objectives of the Study

The two objectives of this study are:

- 1) Determine the roles of social networking sites, i.e. Facebook and YouTube, towards unleashing new horizons for vocabulary acquisition;
- 2) Examine the impact of social networking sites on vocabulary acquisition of Fijian ESL learners.

4. Research Question

The overarching research question of this study is; what is the extent of social networking sites, Facebook and YouTube to be used effectively as a tool of vocabulary acquisition for ESL learners in Fijian classrooms?

5. Significance of the Study

It is obvious that ESL learners are highly likely to experience vocabulary learning issues since teachers are given a limited timeframe to conduct each class. Hence, scant attention is paid to vocabulary learning. Learning is not just confined to the notion of reading something; in fact, it deals with other nuances such as listening, speaking, writing, and interacting. For instance, in my Applied Linguistics class, when I delve upon social networking sites, in particular watching YouTube videos and vocabulary development, students give me the feedback that whenever they listen/watch videos by a native speaker of a first language, they start to imitate them and pick up the words used them, in particular their accent. According to the students, it is highly convenient for them to pick up the words and enhance their enunciation ability while at the same time memorising them for future usage. It is not just ESL learners, but students from all works of life from their related fields can easily learn vocabulary acquisition from social networking sites, such as YouTube and Facebook. ESL learners can acquire the comprehension of unfamiliar and active words by watching different videos. Factually, they can resort to acquiring vocabulary easily at home or from anywhere by accessing social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook. Hence, it is with much precision that Facebook and YouTube play a pivotal role in the development of vocabulary acquisition in Fijian ESL classrooms.

6. Methodology

This study sought qualitative research in nature. To collate the data of this study, the researcher designed two research questionnaires, which were disseminated amongst the ESL students and English language teachers in schools selected randomly. The questionnaires were uploaded via Google Docs, and a notification was sent through Facebook Messenger for the respondents to attempt them. In totality, 30 ESL students and 15 English language teachers were approached to be part of this research. The questionnaires that were given to the ESL students were closed-ended, while the English language teachers were given 7 closed-ended and 8 open-ended questions. The questionnaire that was given to the students consisted of statements which required them to describe their experiences of learning English via social networking sites. In the same vein, the questionnaire that was designed to be given to the ESL teachers had questions which were meant to be analysed easily by seeking their opinion regarding the use of social networking sites in relation to vocabulary acquisition.

7. Data Analysis

The *foremost* question that was asked to the students was, till date, how many social networking sites have they joined? 80% of the respondents have stated that they have joined 3-4 sites, 12% said 1-2 sites, while the remaining 8% stated that they have joined 1 social networking site.

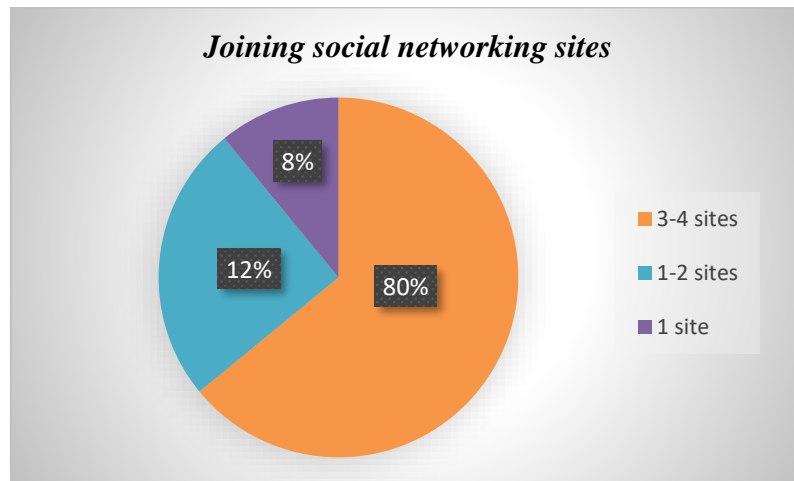


Figure 1: Students joining social networking sites

The *second* question that was posed to the students was, what are some of the reasons or purposes they have joined the social networking sites for? Some of the options that were provided to them included, education, entertainment, networking and all of the above. Of all, 67% have stated that they have joined for entertainment purposes, 22% have opted for education, 8% have joined for networking, while the remaining 3% chose all of the above options.

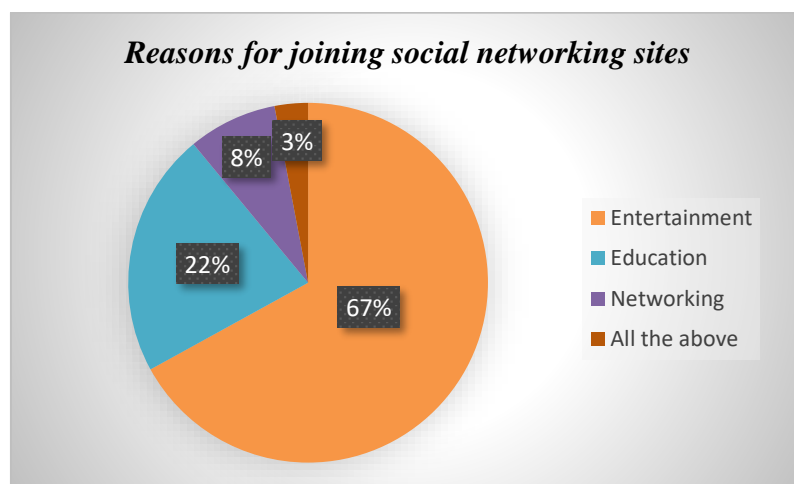


Figure 2: Reasons for joining social networking sites

The *third* question that required responses was based on acquiring vocabulary through the use of social networking sites, whether it was really beneficial towards

enhancing vocabulary or otherwise. 60% of the respondents claimed that social networking sites really assisted them to interact with others and know new things from them almost every day. Those who said that it was not beneficial tallied 15%, while the final 25% mentioned that sometimes they learnt new words, while sometimes it was not so beneficial.

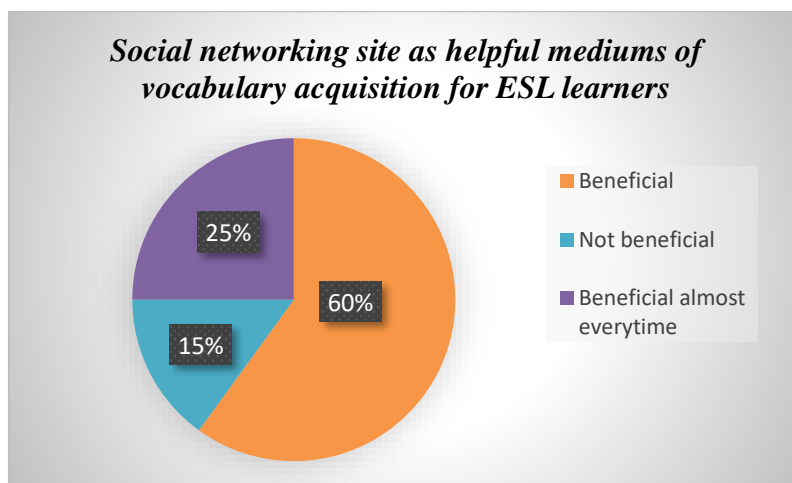


Figure 3: Vocabulary learning through social networking sites

The *fourth* question that was asked of the students was, what is the language of communication they are using while on social networking sites? 66% have confirmed that they use Fiji Hindi and English language, 24% have stated that they use the English language, while the remaining 10% use Hindi language only. This clearly reveals that most of the students preferred and gave high regard to social networking sites for learning new vocabularies and at the same time, using it as an aid to comprehend complex nuances in their learning.

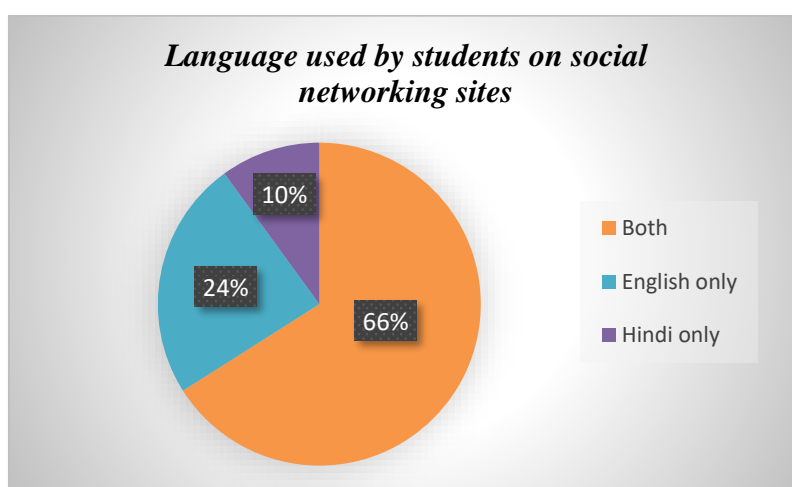


Figure 4: Use of language on social networking sites

The *fifth* question enquired about what kind of language is preferred mostly on social networking site? 53% mentioned that they preferred to communicate using both,

formal and female language in view of the people whom they interact with. 28% said they interacted using formal language, while the remaining 19% said that they used informal language. It is apparent that many students preferred to perform code-switching while selecting L₂ and resorting to their L₁. This is triggered by the high acceptance of using both languages in any works of life of the students.

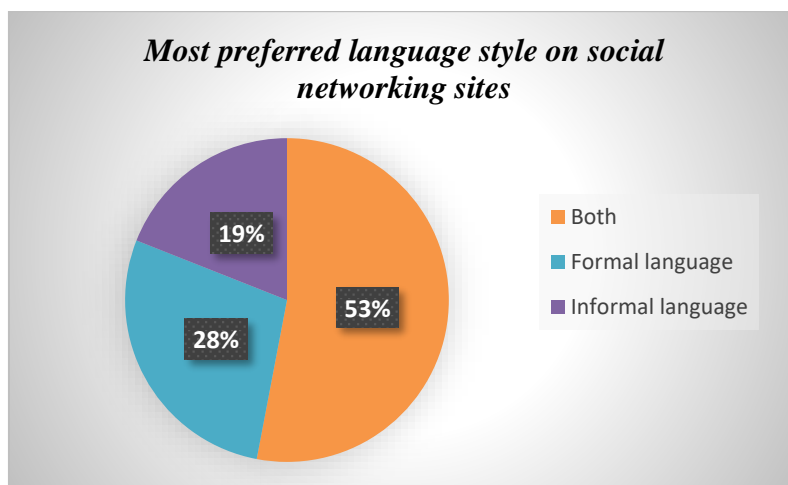


Figure 5: Preferred language style on social networking sites

The *sixth* question that was posed to the students was to enquire whether they try to acquire vocabulary implicitly or explicitly on social networking sites. 56% opted for learning through both ways, while 24% said that they learnt explicitly, and the remaining 20% reported by stating implicitly. Learning of complex nuances in an unintentional manner, without much awareness is known as implicit learning, while explicit learning takes place through articulation, conceptualisation, codification and formalised learning.

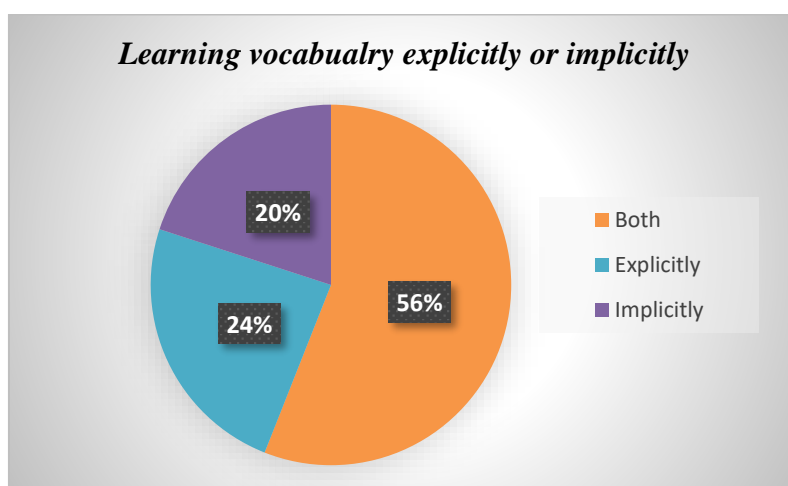


Figure 6: Learning vocabulary explicitly or implicitly on social networking sites

The *seventh* question that was asked to the students was whether social networking sites were more effective than classroom teaching when learning vocabulary. Of all the respondents, 24% said social networking sites were more effective, 32% of students said

that social networking sites were ineffective, while the rest of the 44% students, said maybe. The vast majority said 'maybe' because they have varied reasons and see social networking sites from various perspectives. Specifically, many resort to social networking sites for virtual socialisation and making new virtual friends.

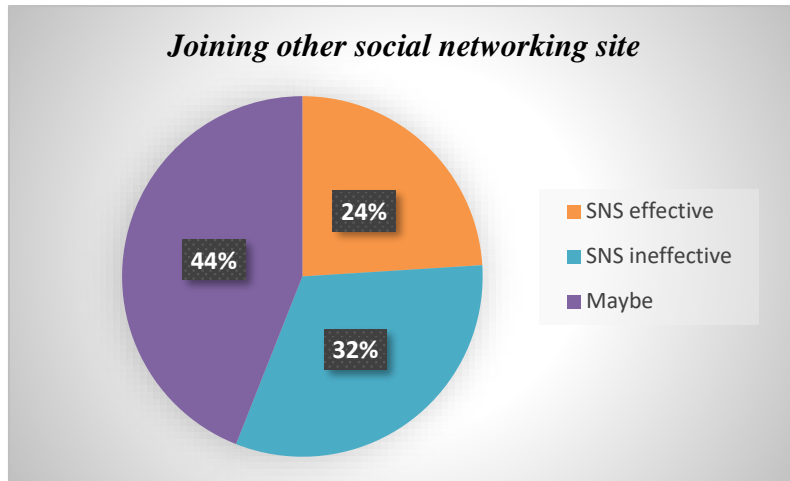


Figure 7: Comparison between social networking sites or traditional classroom teaching

The *eighth* question posed to the students was, besides Facebook and YouTube, have you joined any other social networking site or vocabulary learning page? To a surprise, 56% of the students stated yes, while the remaining 44% said no. Therefore, it could be noted that students are dependent on social networking sites to acquire vocabulary. All those who joined other social networking sites included, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp, to name a few. According to the respondents, many students claimed that if they happen to miss certain imperative information on one social networking site, then the same information could be known from the other.

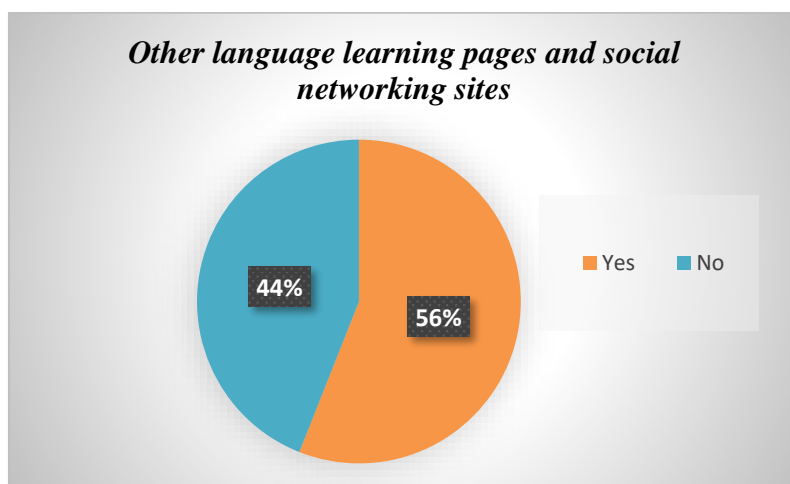


Figure 8: Joining of other language learning pages for vocabulary acquisition

Question number *nine* that was asked to the students was, do you use newly acquired vocabulary through social networking sites every day or not? 43% of the

students said no, 24% said yes, while the other 33% said, most of the time, they use it in the given contexts. Those students who stated, “most of the time”, used the newly learnt vocabulary on a need basis. Whichever context they felt that they needed to use it, they used it. Furthermore, those who said “yes”, typically used newly learnt vocabularies in almost all the contexts.

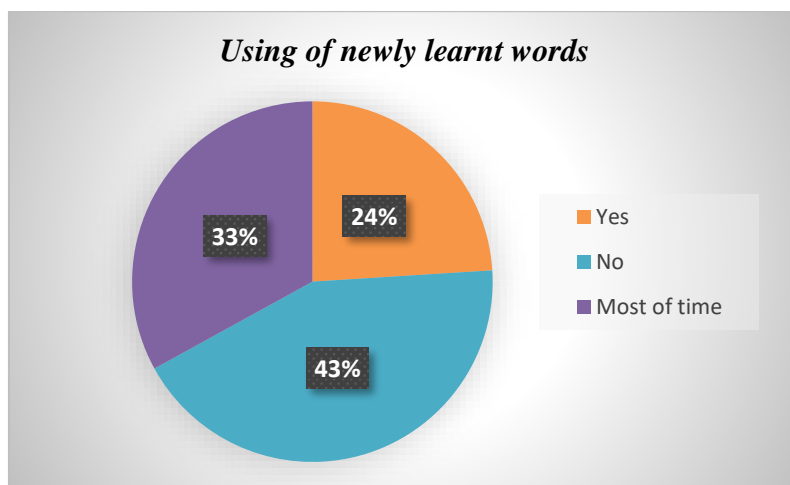


Figure 9: Using of newly learnt vocabulary through the social networking site

The *tenth* question that was asked to the students was, are social networking sites harmful to their spelling enhancement? Of all the respondents, 18% of students said yes, 57% stated that it does not affect their spelling enhancement, while the rest of the 25% respondents had mixed thoughts. According to the teachers, those students who stated “yes” gave some justified reasons as to why social networking sites affect their vocabulary. They said that it affects their pronunciation, spelling, grammar and, in many cases, their spoken communication. Further, they said that they have to take precautionary measures to avoid all these.

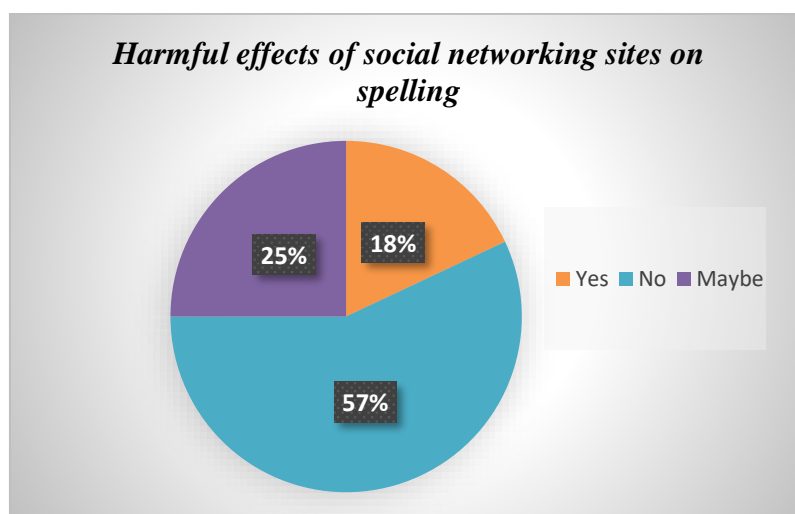


Figure 10: Effects of social networking sites on spelling

The *final* question that was asked to the students was, are social networking sites more interesting than books towards vocabulary learning processes. Interestingly, 56% of the students said yes, 28% said no, while 16% stated that both means are as interesting as each other. Those who said “yes” are mainly active on more than two social networking sites. Hence, in order to be fully abreast with what is going around in the world, and in this case, language learning, they need to be active on social networking sites. And those 16% who are not that active on social networking sites had their own reservations, such as that they mainly enhance their vocabulary by resorting to reading books only.

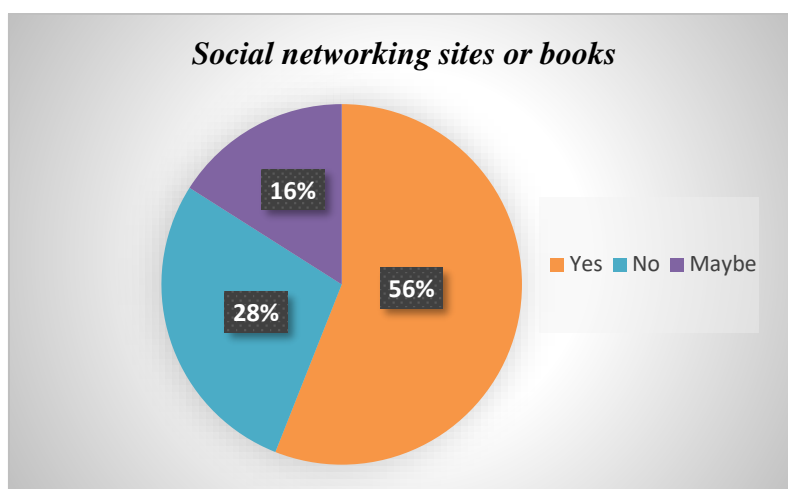


Figure 11: Option between social networking sites or books

The first question that was posed to the teachers was to comment on the students’s interest in activities such as sports, reading books, gaming, and social networking sites. 88% of the respondents stated that the student’s main interest was in social networking sites, while the remaining 12% mentioned gaming. The second question asked the teachers to choose any one of the options mentioned in the questionnaire regarding students who like to use dictionaries, while looking for meanings. Sadly, 80% of the teacher’s responses indicated that most of the students did not like to use a dictionary. The next question that was asked to the teachers was, how often did the students learn L₂ through the practical use of language? 80% of the teachers agreed with the option “mostly”, 10% stated “seldom”, 7% opted by stating “rarely”, and the rest of them settled with 3% by choosing “never”.

A further probing question that was asked to the teachers was, do students learn from YouTube? 75% of the respondents chose “quite often”, while the remaining opted for “sometimes”. The next question required respondents to name the sources to which students can relate. 68% of the respondents said that the students mostly relate to the “words from social networking sites”, 21% mentioned that they mostly relate to the words from the classroom, while the rest of the respondents stated that 11% of sources were “words from the books”.

Question numbers 6-10 were given in the open-ended form, which required the respondents to give detailed responses. Question no. 6 enquired about the effects of social networking sites on the vocabulary acquisition of ESL students. 80% of the respondents stated that it has a positive impact on language learning. The remaining 20% had a varied opinion of both positive and negative effects on language learning, as students learn wrong spelling, together with the ungrammatical structure of the target language. Respondents were also asked whether the effectiveness of social networking sites allowed students to learn new vocabulary items or not. 85% of the respondents mentioned that social networking sites do provide aid towards students' consciousness about the use of vocabulary items, which assists them to advance their language competency by learning more words. However, 15% of the respondents claimed that while using social networking sites, students tend to ignore formal language usage, as it is an informal and unauthentic source of acquiring and enhancing vocabulary. The next question that was asked of the respondents was whether social networking sites provided an effective learning milieu for the students. 66% of the respondents claimed that social networking sites provided an effective learning milieu for the students, which drew attention of the students and promoted a healthy learning environment. On the other hand, 34% of the respondents showed unfavourable responses towards the use of social networking sites.

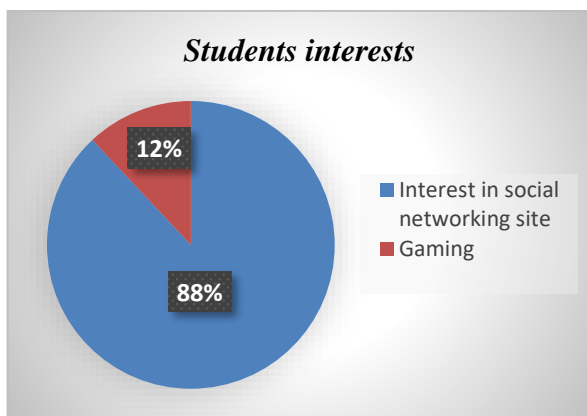


Figure 12: Students interest in social networking sites

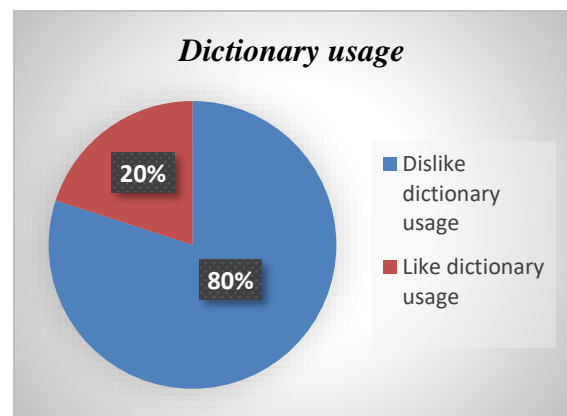


Figure 13: Dictionary usage by students

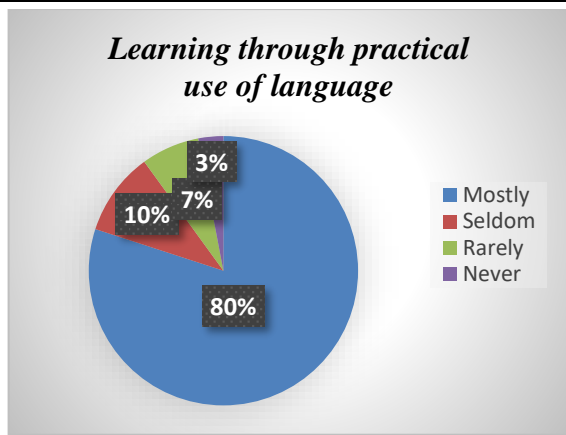


Figure 14: Practical use of language

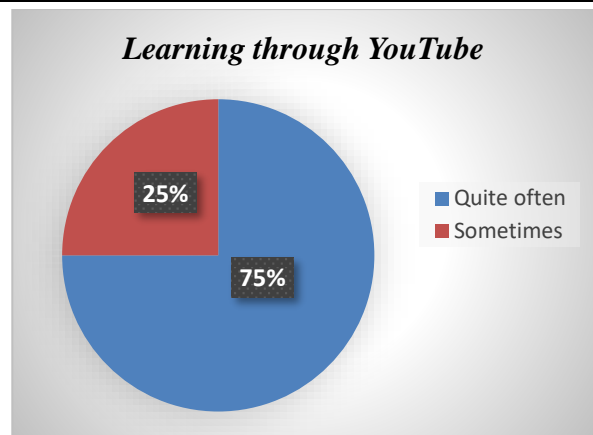


Figure 15: Language learning via YouTube

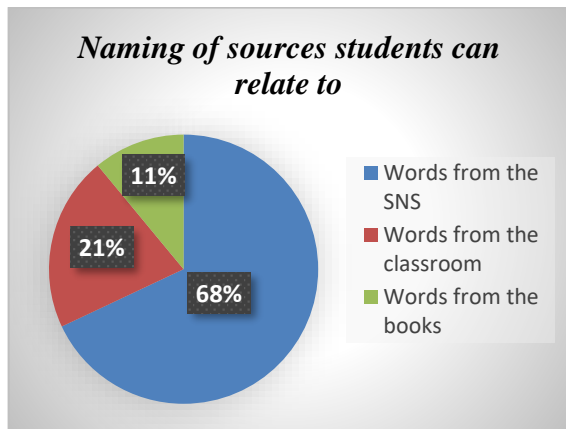


Figure 16: Naming of sources

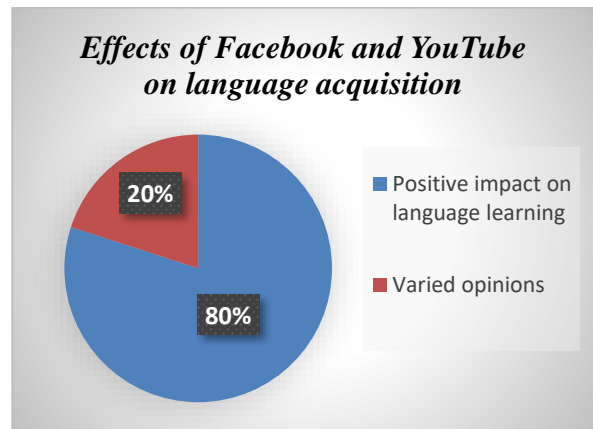


Figure 17: Effects of Facebook and YouTube

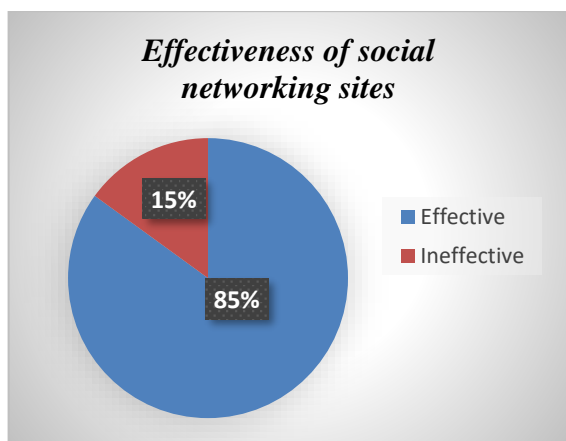


Figure 18: Effectiveness of social media

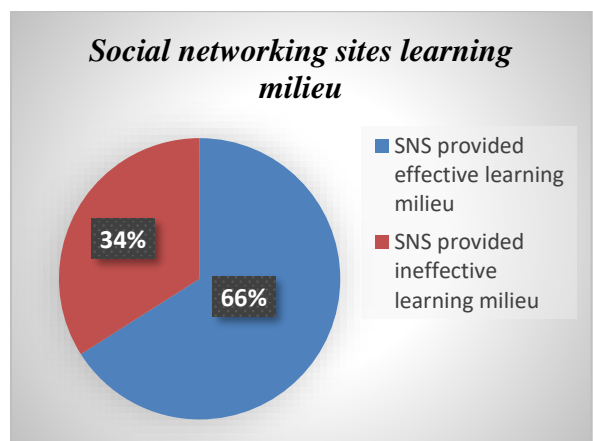


Figure 19: Social networking sites and milieu

8. Conclusions and Implications

Looking at the overall results of the respondents, it can be inferred that social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube are highly popular among students. According to the data that has been analysed, social networking sites provide rapid and easy access to the outside world, which is cost-effective. It gives the students a source of entertainment and helps them gain educational knowledge. As far as the roles of social networking sites are concerned with language acquisition, a smaller portion of the students stated that they did not find social networking sites useful for enhancing their vocabulary. However, a greater portion of the students said that social networking sites do assist them in enhancing their vocabulary acquisition. They experience this when they interact with people online by gathering new information on various subject matters. Additionally, the students pointed out that social networking sites are more interesting than books for vocabulary acquisition.

It was also envisaged that students find it easier and entertaining, while referring to social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube for academic purposes. This form of learning entertainment is also enhanced by accessing these platforms from anywhere in the comfort zone. Students can download and replay vocabulary learning videos on social networking sites and later save it too for future reference. Therefore, it has been discovered that vocabulary learning via social networking sites is highly effective for L₂ acquisition students. Also, it was found out that teachers find social networking sites more useful and a quick medium of learning that supports the enhancement of vocabulary expansion for students. Briefly, it can be posited that social networking sites are considered an effective mode of learning and enhancing the vocabulary of ESL students and for teachers, it is considered as effective tools for teaching vocabulary.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author



Ravnil Narayan is a Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the College of Humanities and Education; School of Communications, Language and Literature at the Fiji National University's, Lautoka Campus. As a former high school English language teacher, Narayan's area of interest lies in the fields of sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, corpus linguistics, pragmatism, semiotics, second language acquisition and *e-language* learning education. He holds a MATESL, PGDTESL, BEd, DSE, DPVL and DHL qualifications. Also, as the former ad hoc translator with AQEP AusAid (Fiji), Narayan is a columnist with The Fiji Times and has published articles in ranked journals before. He is on the editorial board of reviewers for *Journal of International Linguistics Research*, *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics Journal* and *Canadian Journal of*

English Language Teaching. He hails from the beautiful islands of Fiji in the South Pacific and can be contacted at ravnil.narayan@fnu.ac.fj or ravnilnarayan@gmail.com

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