



Su, Ziqiong (2020) *Social networking sites (SNS) in English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) teaching and learning: a literature review*. [MSc].

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Deposited: 12 November 2020



**SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNS) IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND OR
FOREIGN LANGUAGE (ESL\EFL) TEACHING AND LEARNING: A
LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Science (Educational Studies)

University of Glasgow

24th August, 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The study was completed during the COVID-19. First, I was grateful to my supervisor, Harry Blee, for his consistent persistence and enthusiasm. His guidance, discussion, words of encouragement and feedback helped me a lot during this period. Second, I would like to thank all the staff at the University of Glasgow, at the School of Education, for their commitment to our health and education. And finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, for mentally and physically supporting my academic studies.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the rapid development of social networking sites (SNS) has benefited the whole field of education, especially foreign language teaching. However, few studies have provided comprehensive evidence for whether SNS positively influence English as a second and foreign language (ESL\EFL) teaching and learning (L2TL). The main purpose of this paper is to synthesize the effectiveness of SNS in L2TL. Also, the perspectives of students and teachers on this educational purpose will be explored.

This paper critically analyzed 31 articles on effectiveness of SNS from 2011 to 2020. The findings revealed that SNS could improve ESL\EFL learners' Knowledge and abilities in all aspects of English, including vocabulary acquisition, writing skills, oral performance and intercultural competence.

Combining with the main characteristics of SNS, this study also produce evidence that most teachers and students hold a positive attitude towards the use of SNS in L2TL. SNS have the potential to provide a more authentic language communication environment and more interactive experience, as they can not only stimulate students' personal motivation to improve learning but also promote their participation.

The research gaps were identified in this review, including technical problems, individual privacy protection, task design and social anxiety. The results of this review would provide guidance for educators in the design and delivery of SNS-based L2TL.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The revolution and availability of social networks, multimedia and digital technology have remarkably changed our lifestyles in recent years. The whole field of education and foreign language teaching has also benefited from these improvements and progress. Appropriate use of innovative technologies increase learners' interest and confidence, facilitate students' access to target language input, offer more interactive opportunities and feedback to them, and provide teachers with the tools in term of designing teaching tasks (Favier *et al.*, 2007; Levy, 2009; Berlanga *et al.*, 2011; Ciampa, 2014; Golonka *et al.*, 2014). Today, the internet, technology, and media, as well as the use of English in virtual social platforms, offer language learners and teachers more meaningful and real language use opportunities and useful teaching tools than in the classroom (Chen, 2016; Huang and Chuang, 2016; Cynthia, 2017).

As an emerging technology, social media has been applied in various fields all over the world. Users can add to the network in a variety of ways, such as: posting videos, photos, or comments; responding to or liking comments, photos or videos from others; making friends with people in the industry by sending friend requests or getting subscribers and favorites (Alshenqeeti, 2018). The advent of social media during this period influenced how people around the world communicated and how they retrieved information. The growth of new virtual spaces and the increased number and types of social media platforms enable people to share and exchange messages, opinions, personal information, and other content on online communities through mobile and web-based devices without time or distance barriers (Carr and Hayes, 2015).

Social media encompasses a vast array of digital applications, including social networking sites (SNS), blogs, forums and podcasts. Nevertheless, some types of social media have richer features, allowing a higher level of communication and collaboration. Especially, popular SNS like Facebook and Twitter attract

hundreds of thousands of users worldwide with their unique functions (Phua *et al.*, 2017; Alhabash, 2017). Additionally, SNS not only recognizes content provided by users, content provided by other users, and data provided by the system but also realizes real-time communication and interaction among online users (Ellison, 2013). As a subfield of social media, SNS has many broad definitions. In this review, the term "social networking sites" refer to any web-based and mobile-based technology which can be used on many different platforms including picture and video sharing, podcasts, microblogs, wikis and google+, as they have more complex functions that has been thought to be more sensitive in influencing learning (Hattem and Lomicka, 2016; Manca and Ranieri, 2016; Snelson, 2016; Barrot, 2018).

Learning English is a rapidly increasing trend all over the world and the emergence of SNS brings adequate convenience and opportunities to English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners and teachers. It creates an open platform for learners, on which both students and working adults can flexibly access and share resources and experiences of learning English anytime and anywhere. Moreover, native speakers and non-native speakers or more proficient language learners can seek feedback for better development between them in the particular space provided by these SNS. Rational use of SNS characteristics can maximize the students' opportunities for knowledge acquisition and collaborative learning through autonomic learning, peer interaction and scaffolding (Liu *et al.*, 2015). Some studies have noted that SNS positively changes learners' attitude, learning motivation and academic performance compared with traditional learning methods (Nikbakht and Boshraadi, 2015; Dizon, 2016; Talakoub, 2018). Besides, SNS can serve as an auxiliary tool for instruction, e.g., pictures and videos in SNS help teachers present classroom teaching content in a more intuitive, clear, and concise way, making it easy for students to comprehend intricate knowledge. Simultaneously,

teachers can conduct out-of-class dialogues with students through SNS, and students can receive the teacher's message and feedback quickly through such online interaction. Although the initial purpose of SNS such as Twitter, YouTube, and MySpace is not education, they have been used in different fields of language instruction.

Other studies have found that SNS has a positive impact on the verbal ability of ESL\EFL learners (Qarajeh and Adbolmanafi-Rokni, 2015; Fouz-González, 2017). These learners living in non-English-speaking countries have weak oral expression due to insufficient listening and speaking practice (Yang and Chang, 2008) as well as being hesitant or anxious (Khan, 2015; Liu, 2018). The SNS-based ESL\EFL communication environment has a significant prospect for developing the oral skills of young English learners, who feel less pressure when communicating in this environment compared to regular face-to-face communication (Huang, 2015; Sun *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, Bicen (2015) argued that although students were learning foreign languages through social networks, they would still feel anxious when communicating with others. Thus, the effectiveness and feasibility of SNS in ESL\EFL should be verified by more educational practitioners and researchers.

SNS provide a common means for user groups to engage in meaningful learning and establish a bridge between formal and informal learning environments (Zourou, 2008). These sites not only can be used as a real way to get in touch with language and culture outside the classroom, but also it is believed that participating in SNS can become an ideal medium for language teaching and learning (Baralt, 2011). However, while these new means of communication appeal to ESL\EFL learners and teachers, and manufacturers of language learning materials, their usage in English learning and teaching continue to be controversial, e.g., social media ethics (Blyth, 2015). The comprehensive

research evidence on the effectiveness and feasibility of SNS integration into ESL\EFL teaching and learning (L2TL) remains scant.

The initial motivation for studying this topic was my curiosity about SNS and my experience as an ESL\EFL learner, which drives me to learn more systematically about the effectiveness of SNS in English learning and teaching. As a researcher preparing for education sectors, I think it is meaningful to do this research. It can not only help me correctly and objectively understand the advantages and disadvantages of SNS, but also serve as a guide for my future practice in traditional, online and blended teaching. The result of this study may provide valuable insight into how SNS plays a role in language learning and instruction, as well as a direction to the design and implementation of SNS educational interventions. Besides, the reason why this review did not focus on a particular educational stage or an educated population was aimed to finding more evidence about the effectiveness of SNS in ESL\EFL and its acceptance in practice. Thus, this study did not consider the intervention of individual factors such as age, gender and occupation of learners or teachers, nor did it limit the learning environment (formal or informal). Future studies will pay more attention to the effect of learning environment on the use of SNS in L2TL.

The primary aim of the study is to synthesize evidence on the effectiveness of social networking sites (SNS) in English as a second or foreign language (ESL\EFL) teaching and learning (L2TL). To broaden our investigation on the application of SNS in L2TL, this studies attempts to: (a) provide an overview of empirical studies of SNS in L2TL between 2011 and 2020; (b) explore the overall effectiveness of various types of SNS-based L2TL interventions; (c) explore learners' and teachers' attitudes of the application of SNS in L2TL.

The following two research questions were examined and discussed in the critical review:

(1) What are the effects of SNS on ESL\EFL teaching and learning(L2TL)?

(2) What are the perspectives of teachers and learners towards using SNS for this purpose?

To sum up, this dissertation has five chapters: (1) Introduction and Rationale; (2) Methodology; (3) Literature review (4) Discussion; and (5) Conclusion. In this chapter, the context, the aim and questions of research had been introduced and interpreted. How to obtain the research literature will be presented in the research methodology in the next chapter.

2. METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, the researcher stated and explained the definition of SNS, the context of using SNS in L2TL, the purpose and problems of the study, and the research value. In this chapter, the research methodology will be described in detail. A well-designed integrative research review comprises five steps (Cooper, 1986): (1) problem formulation (see Chapter 1) , (2) data collection or literature search, (3) data evaluation, (4) data analysis, and (5) interpretation and presentation of results. In the following, the researcher focused on the steps (2) to (4).

2.1 Data collection

The data collection phase or literature search involved two main procedures. The first step was to search for academic resources related to the topic using (1) online search engines, (2) relevant journals, (3) computerized bibliographic databases, (4) review articles, (5) online citation databases, (6) online reference databases, (7) the world-wide websites databases, and (8) conference papers. The second step aimed at formulating the inclusion and

exclusion criteria. In this stage, previous relevant studies were searched, gathered, sorted and evaluated. This was based on the criteria below.

The following steps were taken to seek for relevant studies.

Step 1: Identification of keywords and search terms

To access the initial batch of literature, the previous studies in Sulaiman (2017) and Reinhardt's (2019) literature reviews were retrieved. In the references of these two reviews, some potential keywords and subjects words or the combination of words were found, e.g., online collaboration, second language acquisition, which provided inspirations for identifying search terms. In addition, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and microblogs were served as keywords to facilitate a comprehensive literature search because of their high frequency of occurrence in the reference list.

The following were the key keywords in the different combinations used for the initial database search: (1) Social media + ESL\EFL teaching and learning, (2) Social networking sites (SNS) + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (3) Facebook + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (4) YouTube + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (5) Twitter + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (6) Instagram + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (7) Google+ + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (8) Wiki + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (9) microblogs + ESL\EFL learning\teaching, (10) Social media + ESL\EFL learners'\teachers' perceptions\attitudes, (11) SNS + ESL\EFL learners'\teachers' perceptions\attitudes, (12) Facebook + ESL\EFL learners'\teachers' perceptions\attitudes, (13) YouTube + ESL\EFL learners'\teachers' perceptions\attitudes, (14) Twitter + ESL\EFL learners'\teachers' perceptions\attitudes, (15) Instagram + ESL\EFL learners'\teachers' perceptions\attitudes, (16) Google+ + ESL\EFL learners'\teachers' perceptions\attitudes, (17) Wiki + ESL\EFL

learners\'teachers\' perceptions\attitudes, (18) microblogs + ESL\EFL learners\'teachers\' perceptions\attitudes.

Step 2: Computerize bibliographic databases

The keywords and combinations mentioned above were used to retrieve qualified preliminary studies from computerized bibliographic databases, which included (1) Educational Resources Center (ERIC), (2) ProQuest Academic, (3) Cambridge University Press, (4) ScienceDirect, (5) Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA), (6) Periodical Archive Online, (7) ProQuest Dissertations and Theses A and I, (8) ACM Digital Library. Additionally, some data files from universities, research institutions, national and regional statistical agencies (e.g., UNESCO, OECD) were also available for secondary data analysis. They were well-known databases that covered a wide range of research areas and provided recent thesis\papers.

Step 3: Authorative ESL\EFL academic journals

These prestigious academic journals (listed below) had been recognized as relevant sources of potential qualified research. Susan - recognized by whom? The following was the list of the academic journals: (1) Computer Assisted Language Learning, (2) International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching (IJCALLT), (3) Arab World English Journal, (4) Journal of Foreign Language Education and Technology (5) International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences, (6) Advances in Language and Literary Studies, (7) The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, (8) Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, (9) Teaching English with Technology, (10) Internet and Higher Education, (11) Theory and Practice in Language Studies, (12) Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, (13) CALL, (14) CALICO Journal, (15) ReCALL, (16) System, (17) TESOL Journal, (18) Language Learning and Technology, (19) Educational Technology Research and Development. Besides, the World Wide

Web was used to retrieve as many eligible studies as possible, including published and unpublished journals, dissertation\theses and conference papers that may have been deleted from the previous pages. However, the search only involved publicly accessible articles. Why? Sometimes it is helpful to the reader to state the obvious.

2.1.1 Inclusion criteria

(1) The scope of the literature review was limited to articles published from 2011 to 2020. The time period was chosen first because by 2011, according to Pew Research Center (2011), 65% of American adults used the SNS, a rise of nearly double since 2008, and on its way to roughly three-quarters (73%) of U.S. adults by 2019. Second, the literature in the year before 2011 was insufficient, given that SNS was a relatively new phenomenon. Since 2011, the research on SNS assisted EFL learning, and teaching has seen a continuous increase in publication in CALL, CALICO and other journals (e.g., Pellet, 2012), gradually ascending to a peak in 2018 based on the primary research findings (Alshenqeeti, 2018; Kessler, 2018).

(2) The full text of the article was available. This was to ensure that the data collected was open and valid.

(3) The intervention needed to be either one type of SNS or a combination of SNS used for educational purposes. If a mix of interventions were used, results of SNS components had to be clearly recognizable. This review mainly focused on the field of computer-assisted or mobile-assisted language learning. Due to the diversity of SNS types and functions, the theme-related SNS(s) were chosen as the intervention objects in order to ensure the validity of the data.

(4) All types of studies design were included. The inclusion criteria aimed at searching a wide range of related research.

(5) The studies included in the quantitative analysis had to conform to the following criteria: (a) the dependent variables were a measure of the effectiveness of SNS in English learning and teaching; and (b) the independent variable referred to the usage of different SNS platforms, which were accurately defined and reported.

(6) The outcome(s) had to include a change in:

- a) learners' professional or personal knowledge or skills;
- b) the perspectives of learners, teachers, and practice staff towards learning with SNS.

This was because only these changes enabled them to prove and analyze the effectiveness of SNS in language learning.

(7) Participation in the studies had to be ESL\EFL learners or faculty. One thing to notice was that the participants' second or foreign language had to be English. It aimed at ensuring the consistency of the target language.

2.1.2 Exclusion criteria

(1) Qualitative studies about SNS in L2TL mainly focused on :(a) pedagogical recommendations for using SNS for L2TL; (b) materials or technologies development; and (c) theoretical formation or discussion papers. These findings were excluded as they could not provide evidence for the effectiveness of SNS in L2TL.

(2) Secondary sources such as (a) bibliographies; (b) biographical works; (c) literature reviews and review articles; (d) descriptive and critical articles; (e) commentaries; (f) articles from magazines, journals, and newspapers; (g) papers or theses and (h) textbooks did not provide accurate and reliable data for evaluating the effectiveness and were, therefore, excluded.

(3) Studies which surveyed the effectiveness of SNS on the learners' native language or first language. This was not consistent with the target language (English as a second or foreign language).

(4) Non-English or non-Chinese. Because the researcher's native language was Chinese, and the second language was English. The purpose of this exclusion was to avoid any misunderstanding when researchers read literature, which might lead to data analysis bias.

2.1.3 Data recording

This review utilized the qualitative method of data generate, as it mainly focused on the data analysis and did not involved data quantitative processing. In this section, the researcher recorded the process of generating the data. To identify studies, I searched for associated the combination of keywords above (See 2.1) in the 2011 to 2020 issues of the journals. In the initial search, I found that the literature in my study field was closely associated with computer-assisted learning and mobile learning, which gave me more direction for the next search. In addition, those literature mainly was based on the science facts, that was positivist. Then, I searched for both computerize bibliographic databases and authoritative ESL\EFL academic journals of the recent essays and chapters that might have been missed out. By this step, a total of 63 papers had been retrieved; most of them were positivist. Next, I browsed the part of abstract, discussion and conclusions of these 63 papers, and finally collected 31 papers based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

2.2 Data evaluation

In this stage, the eligible studies were put into two main categories based on the two research questions: (1) the effectiveness of SNS for L2TL, and (2) the perspectives of teachers and students towards using SNS for this purpose. Then, the information in these eligible studies, such as samples, research designs, and bibliographic references were encoded in the next stage, which would facilitate the researcher to locate the data.

2.2.1 Data encoding

The purpose of data encoding was to (1) determine the variables of interest in this study, (2) categorize studies according to variables, (3) classify the effectiveness of SNS in L2TL, (4) categorize students' or teachers' attitudes towards the application of SNS in L2TL, and (5) select appropriate data for inclusion.

This study chose one of Carnell and Daly's (2001) approaches to organizing the literature review chapter, dividing the literature into different themes and categories. Thematic analysis was an accessible qualitative method for understanding viewpoints of varying research participants and for highlighting similarities and differences and summarising key features. According to Nowell *et al.*'s (2017) approach for conducting a trustworthy thematic analysis, this stage began with: (a) familiarizing yourself with your data, i.e., looking through the data and reading or viewing it carefully to get familiar with it, (b) generating initial codes including words or short phrase, (c) searching for themes; similar codes (e.g., EFL learners' SNS-assisted learning outcome and the effectiveness of SNS as a EFL learning tool) would be combined, organized and collapsed until arriving at a list of themes, and (d) reviewing topics; these themes were carefully reviewed and revised to ensure they are meaningful.

Next, this study referred to and modified the coding manual from previous literature reviews developed by Plonsky (2011) and Taj *et al.* (2016). Some additional information was also included in the coding sheet, e.g., (1) the name of the author(s), (2) publication year, (3) country, (4) study aims, (5) the name of SNS, (6) methods, (7) participants, (8) setting, and (9) findings. Besides, learning outcomes and attitudes/perceptions were coded as being either positive, negative and neutral, or not specified respectively. The purpose of this step is to help researchers improve the efficiency of searching and retrieving auxiliary data and ensure the availability of data sets (Joop and Hennie, 2005). Meanwhile, in order to provide the quality and validity of data, researchers' credibility needed to be evaluated including personal or professional information and background characteristics. This might affected the data collection, analysis, research background, interpretation neither negative nor positive in the minds of users of findings and other relative questions (Patton, 1999).

Through constant comparison, the coding scheme was gradually refined and finally refined into five topics, closely related to the research purpose: (1) SNS in ESL\EFL learning, (2) SNS in ESL\EFL teaching, (3) ESL\EFL learners' views on SNS, and (4) teachers' attitudes towards using SNS in ESL\EFL pedagogy. These phases were specifically described in the literature review section below.

2.3 Data analysis

In analyzing each paper or set of papers, a checklist of quality assessment criteria (see below) was formulated to measure the research validity and reliability, which aimed at considering whether the data appropriated fit the research questions (Joop and Hennie, 2005). Cohen *et al.* (2011:572) have indicated that some documents may be “limited, selective, partial, biased,

non-neutral, and incomplete because they were intended for a different purpose other than that of research”. Thus, in term of analysing the qualitative data, a variety of means had been given by Cohen *et al.* (2011), e.g., researchers needed to know or be able to infer witting or unwitting evidence, the intention of the text and the causality of a particular situation.

The checklist of quality assessment criteria contained (1) Was intervention a social networking site or a specific social networking platform? (2) Have the professional or personal knowledge or skills of ESL\EFL learners been changed through the use of SNS (3) What were the attitudes\perspectives of learners towards using SNS in L2TL? (4) What were the teachers' attitudes\perspectives towards using SNS in ESL\EFL teaching? Followed by, papers covering any one of the four issues were incorporated into the next phase: (a) the papers were reassessed against inclusion, exclusion, and quality assessment criteria and (b) statistics were extracted and analyzed the included detailed results. All efforts were made to ensure that data was collected and analyzed truly and fairly.

2.4 Research Ethics

Research integrity and ethics were still critically important in studies that did not involve collecting data from individuals. According to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018), this study explained and expounded the ethical issues involved. First, this review utilized qualitative analysis to survey and synthesize the findings of primary studies. It did not involve human participants. All datasets were obtained from identifiable and publicly available digital libraries or websites (Houston, 2019). Second, the researcher kept clear and accurate records of the procedures followed and of the results obtained and all data files were stored on the researcher's private computer with a password. Once the study was finished, the researcher deleted the electronic records, using secure removal software. Third, the whole writing process of the dissertation was carried out indoors due to the COVID-19. If

there were any potential risks of personal safety (e.g., nervousness or anxiety), I would contact my supervisor and administrators. Fourth, the only dissemination of the research results was as the postgraduate dissertation.

2.5 Summary

In this section, through searching quality databases and websites, developing inclusion and exclusion criteria, data coding, data evaluation, and data analysis, the researcher finally obtained 31 useful papers. In the following chapter, the findings of the studies were critically interpreted and elaborated. The first part of the literature review was the application of SNS in L2TL, and the second phase was concerned with the attitude of learners and teachers towards using SNS for educational purposes.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review interpreted and discussed the literature on the usage of SNS in L2TL. It was aimed at audiences who are unfamiliar with this topic. When information technology and mobile media could change the content, time and place of people's learning, the focus on SNS as a field of research flourished as a consequence of the influence of SNS on educational and instructional effects. In this paper, there was a large amount of extensive evidence summarized and explained by exploring the characteristics of SNS and its relationship with English language learning. It was shown how SNS plays a role in L2TL.

Is SNS effective for ESL\EFL teaching and learning? How do teachers and students view SNS being used for this purpose? Foreign language teachers have

frequently asked these questions since social networking platforms had been applied continuously for English education. It was when some educators (e.g., Lantz-Andersson *et al.*, 2013; Manca and Ranieri, 2013) associated the application of SNS with students' learning performance that a mass of relevant research started to emerge (Thapa, 2017). However, the usage of SNS in foreign language learning was not a new topic, as computer-assisted language learning have become as a new way of language acquisition and instruction since the 1980s\ the early 1990s (Carrier, 1985; Chapelle and Jamieson, 1986; Beauvois, 1992; Swann, 1992). There were a large number of articles on SNS, which reflected a series of views on the causes and results of SNS affecting ESL\EFL learners' knowledge and abilities. As discussed below, these diverse viewpoints agreed that SNS was a feasible tool for language learning and teaching, but there was disagreement on the effectiveness of SNS in practice and the attitude of teachers or students towards SNS. This article aimed to review the literature on these issues and synthesized evidence on the effects of SNS.

The mixed-use of qualitative and quantitative literature in this study had little impact on the structure of the review. This was because the focus of this review was to find relevant and key topics based on the commonality of literature results and summarize the effectiveness of SNS. Also, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative literature helped researchers determine the difference between data and descriptive results and helped them to judge whether or not the evidence is persuasive.

This literature review selected a total of 31 articles that met the above methodology (see 2. Methodology). These would be critically analyzed in the following chapters according to different topics. It began by introducing several SNS-assisted learning outcomes, namely knowledge and skills. Then, it went on to explore the relationship between the characteristics of SNS and English learning or teaching by synthesizing the views of learners and teachers

on SNS for educational purposes.

3.1 SNS in ESL\EFL teaching and learning

Since 2011, research on SNS-assisted English as a second and foreign language teaching and learning (L2TL) followed several intertwined strands:

- a. SNS enhancement of the student's writing skills;
- b. SNS as media for improving oral skills;
- c. SNS as a tool for vocabulary acquisition;
- d. SNS as a space for intercultural communication.

3.1.1 SNS enhancement of the student's writing skills

An important strand of research demonstrated that SNS could enhance students' learning achievements including their writing skills, but there were some limitations in this literature.

Teacher intervention was a potential factor affecting students' learning achievements not least re their writing skills. In Savran and Aydin's (2016) Wiki-based writing instruction project, 42 pre-service English teachers majoring in advanced English were placed in different learning environments (e.g., wiki-based writing environment and traditional pen-paper writing environment) to practice writing taught by the same instructor. After analyzing the writing achievements, the researcher discovered that compared to the traditional pen-paper model, learning in the wiki-based online environment enabled the increase of EFL learners' writing performance regarding content. Meanwhile, Dizon (2016) conducted a similar comparative study between Facebook and paper-and-pencil. Thirty-six first-and-second years EFL students in a Japan university participated in a free-writing task. The comparison showed a significant difference by the experimental group re progress, with the

biggest differences in writing fluency. In contrast to Savran and Aydin, the courses in Dizon's (2016) research were taught by different teachers, a factor which could have influenced the results. Several researchers supported this view that teachers' intervention affected EFL learners' learning motivation and, thus, their academic performance (Alrabai, 2016; Amiryousefi and Geld, 2019).

Besides, a general limitation of the literature discussed above was the small study population. This was also evident elsewhere, for example, Vurdien (2013) had 11 Spanish university EFL learners created personal blogs to read and share their opinions and comment on their peers' postings. The result showed that blogs-based tasks taught them the proper way to effectively plan specific writing tasks, thus improving their writing skills. Bring together different sources, Razak *et al.* (2013) organized a particular Facebook group for 24 EFL learners from different Arab countries, where participants were allowed to interact in weekly writing activities and answer open online questions posted by teachers. Based on the mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis, Razak *et al.* demonstrated that most learners hold a positive attitude on the effectiveness of Facebook in enhancing their writing skills.

A recent article was written by Albashtawi and AlBataineh (2020) also covered the parallel findings. Once again, this was relatively small-scale research. In their study, 26 EFL diploma students from Luminus Technical University College in Jordan were organized to attend an innovative online course learning through Google Classroom. The quantitative analysis proved that Google classroom was an effective platform for enhancing the learners' writing achievements. However, the general problem with these studies was that the number of participants is few, limiting the generalizability of the results. Few people were selected as subjects albeit that it offered benefits such as small groups which were easy to control and conducive to experimental operation.

Despite the limitation, these findings were meaningful and applicable to this study since the research objects were the representative EFL learners.

Another limitation in this research area was the mixed variables, including technical problems and task settings. First, technical difficulties and lack of experience might affect the result of SNS improving learners' writing ability. Vurdien (2013) argued that some students had difficulties in completing tasks independently because they lacked editing ability. Kitchakarn (2014) had 35 participants who worked together to produce six pieces of writing assignments by providing comments, editing, and revising in a blogging group. The results revealed that blogging could contribute to support students' learning in the classroom and made their writing abilities enhanced. Nevertheless, the computer's technical difficulties (e.g., hardware failure and system instability) caused great interference to learners, as it was not convenient for some learners to work through social networking platforms.

The same problems were also found by Suadah (2014) in an exploratory case study, where 14 young participants who came from a high school in Turkey were asked to post two blogs each week in a term. Through blog posts, interviews and systematic observation, Suadah observed that blogging enhanced the students' writing skills, especially in terms of vocabulary enhancement and syntactic accuracy. However, some students expressed a negative perspective on the difficulty of posting blogs and the cost of time.

After comparison, it was found that the above three groups of experiments did not give learners any guidance on how to use the social networking website platforms before the test, among which some of the participants in Kitchakarn (2014) and Suadah's (2014) study had not used the specified SNS prior to study. Although the researchers controlled the variables of learners' experience (e.g., proficiency in using target SNS), learners without technical experience were

impeded in learning a language by using SNS, making acceptance of the research results unreliable.

Second, different task settings were likely to influence the EFL learners' writing abilities assisted by SNS. Saad *et al.* (2015) collected data through a research diary and focus group interviews with 22 students from the Lebanon target university. The findings reported that students learning EFL or ESL strengthened their writing abilities in the target language through social networking platforms. Saad *et al.* interpreted that blogs facilitated active participation and language practice, which could be the key point to improve learners' writing performance. In contrast, Vurdien (2013) believed that frequent writing did not necessarily improve writing skills. No matter how often they write, if students did not invest enough time in serious planning and writing, their progress might not always be noticed. This conflict arose from the setting of the research task. While the latter participants were asked to ensure accuracy when writing, learners in the former group did not have to face the pressure of writing accuracy, final scores and other people's comments, so they were able to complete the learning task easily.

To sum up, despite the limitations of a small number of population and mixed variables (technical problems, teacher intervention and task settings), the above literature review proved that SNS generally improved EFL learners' writing ability.

3.1.2 SNS as media for improving oral skills

Another strand of research on SNS-assisted L2TL argued that SNS could be the medium for improving EFL learners' oral skills but the intervention of individual differences (see below) needed to be noticed. Yen *et al.* (2015) conducted a role-playing instructional course for 42 EFL learners by integrating Facebook

and Skype as platforms. The evidence showed that both of the Facebook and Skype part of the teaching activity were a major factor in improving the spoken language. Similarly, Mompean and Fouz-González (2016) found the positive association between SNS and learners' oral ability. The researchers had 16 Spanish EFL students in Murcia (Spain) completed the Twitter-based teaching/learning task, which was designed for practicing pronouncing difficult words. They proved that twitter-based instruction improved the students' pronunciation of the target words.

Nevertheless, the individual gain rate between participants from pre-test to post-test showed a sizeable gap. The inconsistent effect of instruction meant that not everyone benefits equally. The authors interpreted that these individual variabilities in performance might depend on the student's ability, individual interests, learning environments (formal or informal), the size of the task and the involvement of the researcher. In other words, individual differences of student and researcher probably impacted the effects on EFL learners' oral skills.

Given this, the relationship between learners' participation and their pronunciation improvement was explored by Fouz-González (2017) in a similar work, where 121 Spanish students daily received a video or audio recording to illustrate how the target word sounds in the real context. However, Fouz-González (2017) stated that learners' engagement had little effect on their pronunciation improvement, although a positive correlation existed. Specifically, individual differences did not necessarily influence the results of SNS on learners' abilities, especially oral ability. One reason proposed by the researchers was the differences in the nature of participation in the two studies, with the latter participants having less incentive to learn spontaneously because of rewards.

Besides, the later work provided more concrete evidence for SNS to improve learners' oral ability with the support of experience. For example, in Sun's (2017) mobile SNS-based instruction program, 72 primary school students were allowed to complete and record the oral assignments with their parents' help by using a Chinese-based SNS focused on online audio. They indicated that both the control and experimental groups improved the oral abilities in terms of accuracy, fluency and pronunciation. However, the parental intervention could be a potential intervention, which might change students' learning environment, thus affecting the results of students' oral homework. Although not covered, Sun had begun to be aware of other personal differences, such as motivation among participants, access to English learning materials, and cognitive processes, which might be responsible for the differences in performance. Besides, Awada and Diab (2018) also reported their findings by doing Wiki and Google Earth-based instruction research. They asserted that Wiki and Google Earth was effective to enhance the learners' oral presentation skills when presenting their project.

In a word, the above studies provided evidence that SNS enhanced EFL\ESL learners' oral proficiency albeit that it should be stated that there were individual differences re levels of success among learners.

3.1.3 SNS as a tool for vocabulary acquisition

Another strand of research on SNS-assisted L2TL supported that SNS were effective tools for vocabulary acquisition. There was, however, some controversy. Mayumi (2013) did a Facebook project for Japanese University Students connecting with American university students. Mayumi found that students made progress on vocabulary knowledge in SNS-assisted learning, mainly supported by correction of errors by teachers. Although the finding is

not the primary focus of Mayumi's research, it meant that the improvement of students' learning ability in SNS environment might be mediated by external factors (such as teachers). Therefore, it seems that students' success cannot be entirely attributed to SNS.

Subsequently, some studies provided relevant learning theories to support the effectiveness of SNS in vocabulary acquisition. Nikbakht and Boshraadi (2015) used situated-learning theory to support the research results of learners' vocabulary knowledge improvement through SNS. In their analysis of students' work, they found that SNS allowed students to retain new words in an interactive environment as well as cultivate, understand and improve their learning in real situations. In the Saudi EFL classrooms with 100 female students, Raniah and Tariq (2018) presented evidence that YouTube technology enables improvement of learners' vocabulary comprehension and retention. This improvement could be explained by the cognitive theory of multimedia learning that YouTube videos provided a way of delivering information that catered to visual and auditory senses, which was more effective than a teacher's instruction. Specifically, SNS such as YouTube transformed the complex text into a concise map using images, symbols and highlights, which helped EFL learners more easily obtain and understand the key concepts and content of the teaching.

Except for the theoretical support (situated-learning theory and cognitive theory), follow-up studies used more sophisticated methods to demonstrate the role of SNS in promoting vocabulary acquisition and, as a consequence, made important recommendations. For instance, Cetinkaya and Sutcu (2018) conducted a comparative experiment where students were required to receive information and learn vocabulary regularly in three separate environments (Facebook, WhatsApp and traditional). They presented that although all the three learning environments had different effects on the increase of students'

vocabulary acquisition, the WhatsApp group was more effective. However, the difference between the Facebook group and the control group was not significant. Cetinkaya and Sutcu argued that this might be caused by some uncontrolled variables, e.g., the words might have been remembered to some extent, or the questions might have been remembered. Besides, some students hold a negative attitude towards untimely and unnecessary information as this were likely to distract their attention, affecting their grades. Simultaneously, Raniah and Tariq (2018) also noted the importance of the rational application of SNS. They suggested that teachers selected appropriate teaching materials and contents in the process of implementation, achieving maximum effectiveness in terms of improving students' abilities to learn the target language.

Although these facts were methodologically rigorous, there were still many obvious limitations. For example, Raniah and Tariq's research (2018) focused on a single-sex population and had as short a treatment period as Nikbakht and Boshrabadi (2015). Mayumi (2013) studied a small number of subjects. Nevertheless, they were quite rigorous in their approach and provide information for practice in relevant situations. Equally important, although this was not the focus of this study, there was a general implication that successful SNS-assisted L2TL might rely on complex interactions between vocabulary acquisition and learner variables. In other words, the most successful SNS-assisted instruction encouraged rapid acquisition, repeated practice, and long-term retention of words, but variables such as learner proficiency, cultural background, and course objectives may influence outcomes.

3.1.4 SNS as a space for intercultural communication

Another focus of SNS-assisted L2TL research recognized that SNS could enhance the learners' intercultural competence but present some challenges. For

instance, Jin (2015) used Facebook for a telecollaboration project connecting Korean EFL learners with American undergraduate students. Based on Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence (IC) and his (2000) assessment criteria, Jin (2015) found that Facebook provided EFL students with an online environment for cross-cultural communication with speakers of the target culture and offered more opportunities to learners in terms of discussing several intercultural topics with native speakers. Nevertheless, Jin discovered several challenges, including that learners reported not obtaining the correct knowledge, that some students were reluctant to change their perspectives to that of another culture, and that some learners misunderstood each other's words when learning different ways of communication between two cultures.

In a similar project, Hsu and Beasley (2019) also reported the challenges in his intercultural computer-media communication project where EFL learners in southern Taiwan interacted with native speakers in the US in small groups through emails and Skype. They found that although students had a positive attitude towards cross-cultural learning using SNS as part of the project, some students felt very uncomfortable meeting and chatting with strangers via Skype originally through shyness or fear. It was a common phenomenon that non-English users show a lack of confidence in their language skills when talking to native speakers. In the previous study, Özdemir (2017) has discovered this aspect on his Facebook and in-class discussion groups. Hsu and Beasley (2019) also found that individuals from different cultures discussing through SNS (Facebook) was more effective than group discussion in class in promoting learners' cross-cultural development.

Another point that could not be ignored was that some EFL learners could hold negative stereotypes towards their counterparts and culture because of the potential cultural conflicts between countries. Aligning with Hsu and Beasley's (2019) finding in learners' unwillingness to communicate with Americans, Wang

et al. (2017) stated that the fear of negative evaluation and prejudices (e.g., arrogance and sense of superiority) from Americans might be one of the main causes to non-English learners cross-cultural communication concerns. Thus, the new learning experience was quite challenging for EFL learners.

In brief, Jin (2015), Hsu (2019) and Ozdemir's (2017) research proved the positive effect of SNS on the intercultural competence of EFL learners. However, some limiting effects, such as anxiety and cultural conflicts, might affect the effectiveness of SNS-assisted learning, to some extent. Hsu (2019) argues that whether or not the communication features of SNS could significantly improve learners' IC might not be the focus, because SNS had been recognized as a feasible communication space where learners could conduct effective language training and cross-cultural communication.

3.1.5 Summary

In this chapter, the improvements in L2TL assisted by SNS were discussed in terms of knowledge and skills. To summarize, four key findings may have beneficial implications for pedagogical practice. First, SNS integrating into L2TL improved ESL\EFL learners' writing abilities in general, although it may be affected by teacher's intervention, technical problems and task setting. Second, SNS as a teaching medium enhanced ESL\EFL learners' oral skills despite the individual differences in learning effects. Third, SNS as an auxiliary tool had a positive effect on ESL\EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition, although variables such as learner proficiency, cultural background, and course objectives may influence outcomes. Fourth, SNS provided ESL\EFL learners with space for cross-cultural communication although anxiety and cultural conflicts may exist. While the early literature focused on researching the application of

computer technology or social media in education, these findings could benefit for recommending appropriate strategies to guide the ESL\EFL learners.

3.2 Two perspectives on using SNS for educational purposes

In the following chapters, academic literature which would analyze and interpret the characteristics of SNS and its relationship with learning and teaching from the perspectives of students and teachers would be reviewed. It mainly included seven aspects: (1) flexible access; (2) ease of use; (3) intrinsic motivation; (4) participation; (5) authentic language practice; (6) collaborative and communicative competence; (7) reduction of anxiety.

3.2.1 The perspectives of ESL\EFL learners on SNS

3.2.1.1 Flexible access

Numerous studies stated that ESL\EFL learners had a positive attitude towards flexible access to social networking sites when learning a language. As one of the distinctive features of SNS, it provided much convenience for learners both in study and at work.

The greatest advantage of SNS accessibility was that it was not limited by time and space. This meant that EFL learners could study more flexibly when supported by social networking platforms. Kitchakarn (2014) proved this view in his blogging groups. He stated that students felt more relaxed as they had more time to share and comment on the blog. Saad *et al.* (2015) added that SNS gave them extra time to study at their own pace and review knowledge endlessly. Meanwhile, a wiki project conducted by Aydin and Yildiz (2014) also presented similar findings, where 34 intermediate college students in English as a foreign language were asked to complete three wiki-based collaborative

writing tasks in groups of four. After analyzing the students' responses in the focus-group interview, Aydin and Yildiz (2014) demonstrated that the participants enjoyed the collaborative work on the wiki-pages in which they were allowed to contribute to the assignments without any time or space restrictions.

Besides, SNS satisfied learners' desire to learn in an informal environment. For example, Erarslan (2019) explored the impact of Instagram as a supplement to formal courses on students' language learning process and college students' views on their educational purpose. In Erarslan's analysis, it was evidenced that Instagram increased students' exposure to language and other language learners out of the classroom. In other words, SNS provided additional opportunities for EFL learners to extend knowledge outside the classroom and offered an alternative way to do extra practice. Also, SNS created many virtual platforms for language learners worldwide, allowing them to achieve dialogues across time and space

Furthermore, the flexible accessibility of SNS was also reflected in support of online mobile learning. Aldukhayel (2019) had 389 EFL university students practicing listening through YouTube inside and outside the classroom. The mixed analysis revealed that students were willing to using YouTube in their learning process because it was public, and users had absolute control over the playback speed or the subtitles of videos. In addition, students could log in to their accounts from mobile devices, such as a phone, tablet or iPad, for seamless learning. This common point of view was found by Albashtawi and Al Bataineh's (2020) in the Google Classroom-based instruction program. The descriptive analysis of the students' perspectives on SNS showed that they were satisfied in terms of accessibility, as some students could log into Google Classroom on their mobile phones and quickly answered questions on this kind of SNS.

However, none of the studies mentioned the possible risks in accessing the SNS, such as incomplete access, unreliable websites, and personal information leakage, which should be taken seriously by instructors and administrators. Hence, teachers should test and ensure the safety and reliability of target learning social websites in advance and assist students in implementing them smoothly in practice.

Although previous research reports pointed out that integrating modern scientific and technological activities into language classrooms was not a magic bullet for effective teaching and learning (Simpson, 2012), it was undeniable that SNS did bring convenience to learners. It broke the shackles of time and space and achieved synchronous learning for learners in formal and informal environments.

3.2.1.2 Ease of use

The development of new technology has opened up endless possibilities for social network innovation. Most social networking sites have applied filters to process completely irrelevant social data (Nagulendra and Vassileva, 2015), presenting a concise and humanized interface for learners, especially children and the elderly. Besides, many social networking sites have attracted the attention of users with their personalized functionality, such as photo sharing in Facebook, the video-sharing Service in YouTube and Instant Messaging in Myspace, and they have integrated multiple functions with the reform of technology.

In addition to the functions of SNS itself, using SNS via mobile devices provided an easy way for learners to practice their English skills. Sun *et al.* (2017), for example, examined how mobile social networking enhances the young learners' English-speaking skills and found that this mobile-SNS' usefulness and ease of

use greatly reduce the technical difficulty for young children. Similar effectiveness of SNS was revealed by Albashtawi and AlBataineh (2020). They supported that Google classroom also had the above features and contributed to learners' reading and writing ability.

However, there were still a few technical questions raised in these experimental groups, mainly related to the stability of SNS or the students' mobile device hardware (Sun *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, teachers should ensure the availability of the network and equipment when applying SNS in foreign language teaching, and parents should be encouraged to offer technical guidance to young students when they study in informal learning environments.

3.2.1.3 Participation

Some academic studies agreed that the integration of SNS in foreign language learning can increase learners' participation and motivation. In the Facebook writing group organized by Razak *et al.* (2013), a sharp rise in participation of EFL learners' posted exchanges and comments revealed that SNS fostered interactive communities and students' engagement and helped them to improve writing skills. Razak *et al.* (2013) subsequently interpreted that this could be a sign of increasing interest and motivation of EFL learners to complete these writing activities. This was supported by Taskiran *et al.* (2018) in their program. 90 EFL learners from Anadolu University responded to the questionnaire asking their opinions on Twitter activity. In their analysis, the majority of students were actively involved in Twitter, which might give clues about their motivation to participate in extracurricular activities. Mompean and Fouz-González (2016), as proponents of SNS, noted that using Twitter for pronunciation instruction encouraged EFL learners' involvement out of intrinsic motivation, i.e., without rewards. There was also less pressure on them when

learning. However, one possible limitation of the study was that some of the researchers' interventions prevented learners from engaging more spontaneously because they were asked to "confirm" reading tweets during the activity. Although Mompean and Fouz-González's research confirmed that Twitter-based instruction assisted students' pronunciation of the target language, it was less convincing in terms of increasing participants' participation in SNS.

Although most EFL students in the above study admitted that the use of SNS in foreign language learning could enhance their participation, it did not mean that the increase in participation has a positive effect on learning. For instance, Yen *et al.* (2015) conducted role-playing activities about Facebook and Skype as learning tools in enhancing learners' writing and speaking skills. The results showed that even if Skype promoted learning, the high level of Skype participation did not lead to better oral learning effects. An explanation is given by Yen *et al.* (2015) that due to the need for immediate response in the speaking activities on Skype, participants who responded quickly paid attention to the fluency of language expression but neglected the accuracy of grammar and pronunciation.

In a word, integrating SNS in EFL learning and teaching fostered learners' participation and advanced the learners' interest or motivation. More details between SNS and learners' motivation would be specifically analyzed in the next section (2.1.4 Intrinsic motivation). However, learners' positive participation did not result in their improvements of knowledge or skills in SNS-assisted learning.

3.2.1.4 Intrinsic motivation

What was the definition of motivation? And how did it arise? Motivation referred to encourage and sustain the process of goal-directed activity, and motivational processes were “personal/internal factors that led to outcomes such as choice, effort, persistence, achievement, and environmental regulation” (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2020:1). Motivation was divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the former was defined as doing an activity for inner satisfaction (e.g., curiosity, interest and demand) (Ryan and Deci, 2000), while the latter referred to doing activities that were stimulated by external circumstances (e.g., parents' encouragement, teachers' criticism). Generally, intrinsic motivation was seen as a natural source of learning and achievement. It was not the only shape of motivation, but a universal and important form. Although intrinsic motivation existed within individuals, Ryan and Deci (2000) believed that intrinsic motivation existed in the relationship between individuals and activities, because certain activities probably stimulated people's internal motivation. Oudeyer *et al.* gave another explanation for the intrinsic motivation. Based on psychology, neuroscience and computational learning theory, Oudeyer *et al.* (2016) found that brain neural circuits regarded information as an intrinsic reward, and therefore actively seek out novel, complex and predictive errors. They regarded this conclusion as an important basis for educational practice and educational technology design and strongly recommended that students should be offered learning materials with attractive information when fostering their memory retention.

Because of the informative, novel, and challenging features of SNS, this computer technology has been successfully used in foreign language learning to attract the attention of users, especially young learners. Many studies presented that computer-assisted learning could enhance students' motivation (Nachoua, 2012; Anwaruddin and Sardar 2013; Tavakoli *et al.*, 2019), and

motivation played a key role in improving language acquisition and performance in other subjects (Kavita, 2014; Cerasoli *et al.*, 2014).

In this study, three reasons for SNS in promoting the personal motivation of EFL learners were found. Firstly, SNS created an interesting learning atmosphere and stimulates their learning interest as well as curiosity. Raniah and Tariq (2018) explored the effectiveness of YouTube in multimedia instruction for vocabulary learning. It stated that integrating YouTube videos into the traditional classroom provided an attractive and interesting learning environment and raised their interest and motivated them to study faster. Mayumi (2013) agreed with Raniah and Tariq's opinion and presented that using Facebook in an exchange project inspired Japanese EFL learners' curiosity to learn more about an English speaking country's culture, history and lifestyles. These researchers reached a consensus that in the enjoyable and entertaining atmosphere created by SNS, learners were naturally motivated to access novel learning materials and interact with real native speakers.

The second strand for SNS in developing the personal motivation of EFL learners was that SNS provided a risk-free learning environment that allowed learners to practice more freely. For instance, Rodliyah (2016) had 15 EFL students from a university in Bandung writing daily journals in a Facebook group. After analysis of their journals and responses to peers, Rodliyah (2016) demonstrated that keeping a diary through a closed group on Facebook increased students' motivation to write, as Facebook provides a fun and non-threatening environment where students were free to express their thoughts and feelings. Hence, they felt safe and motivated when posting their work. These findings were in line with previous research by Kitchakarn (2014) that EFL learners were enthusiastic when commenting on a blog because they were more focused on writing fluency rather than accuracy, thus writing more freely. However, Saad (2015) disagreed with the opinion of Rodliyah and Kitchakarn that learners

could practice the language more easily in such an environment. The researcher interpreted that blogs developed students' critical thinking to a certain extent, and students ought to provide clear and logical support in the face of different perspectives offered by peers in order to make peers convinced (Saad, 2015). Even if blogs did offer a non-threatening environment to learners to practice their target language, they still needed to be careful about responding to peers.

The third explanation about SNS enhancing EFL learners' motivation was that practicing a foreign language through SNS achieved the real purpose of communication. Habul-Šabanović (2015) conducted a blog out-of-class project where 52 female bachelor level students were encouraged to do some individual research at home for further discussion through blogs, based on what they did in class. After analyzing a post-project questionnaire, the researcher indicated that students were more motivated and interested in learning when having a real, rich, and regular communication with classmates. Nevertheless, the results of this study could only partially prove that SNS stimulated EFL learners' motivation, as it was only limited to female users. The participants in Zou's (2016) wiki-based writing collaboration program also hold similar perspectives that they are highly motivated to work with British university students on the Wiki, where they achieved the goal of communicating with native speakers in using the target language. Bandura's social cognitive theory could serve as the theoretical support for this statement, in which goals were considered to be an important factor affecting one's motivation. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020:2) stated that "a goal was a mental representation of what one was attempting to attain." Specifically, when learners observed and assessed their progress towards goals, the difference between goals and perceived progress led to the necessary effort and persistence. Thus, when EFL learners found that SNS helped them communicate in the target language,

this mental representation drove them to use SNS in foreign language training to achieve their purpose.

Using SNS in foreign language learning stimulated EFL learners' internal motivation in terms of satisfying curiosity and interests and achieving learning goals, thereby realizing real language interaction.

3.2.1.5 Authentic language practice

Another positive characteristic of EFL learners was that they were willing to use social networking sites in their foreign language learning because it allowed them to practice English in a real context. For example, in Saad *et al.* (2015) assisted Intensive English Program, he pointed out that blogs, as a supplemental tool, provided a real language communication environment for students to practice in. This was consistent with what Zou *et al.* (2016) found in their study that working on Wiki was an effective way for students to achieve authentic language practice.

The way of practicing a foreign language through SNS accorded with the theory of situated learning. The disadvantages of traditional foreign language learning was shown in several ways, including focusing on one aspect of the language, acquiring indirect and abstract knowledge which was sometimes irrelevant for the learner, and experiencing language practice in the classroom (Jakubiak, 2016). However, situated learning allowed students to make full use of the context and “to pay attention to the right thing in a myriad of situated experiences”(Gee, 2004:106), and encouraged them to generalize and form their own views. Computers and mobile technologies provided learners with more access to real context and facilitated interaction between groups (Comas-Quinn, 2009). In Zou's experiment, 32 EFL students from China took writing training on the Wiki and received feedback from their language

partners (the UK students) about their essays. When correcting the errors, students on both sides kept communicating with each other, and the learning process has expanded from the classroom to real life.

Saad *et al.*'s findings confirmed other researchers' perspectives regarding the authentic context for foreign language learning. Early research published by Razak *et al.* (2013) stated that Facebook groups could empower students to link with their personal experience to use it in an authentic and personalized context, thus improving their skills in English. In Sun's mobile-SNS learning project, children enjoyed learning through Papa because they could find something familiar and favorite that assisted them in deepening the impression of the target word. Sun *et al.* (2017) suggested that SNS integrate into ESL\EFL teaching allowed the participation in real situations and made learning fun. A current research conducted by Aldukhayel (2019) also echoed those studies, and stated that vlog-assisted listening program offered an authentic L2 aural input context in which learners enhanced listening abilities.

In brief, opposed to traditional language pedagogy, SNS provided personalized and contextualized access to learning resources, making it possible to learn language scenes in real life.

3.2.1.6 Collaborative and communicative competence

Another theme of this research showed that SNS a social community for learners to improve their social and collaborative skills through communication.

Among them, the main characteristics of SNS were to provide EFL learners with opportunities in information sharing and self-expression. For example, Mayumi (2013) observed much interaction between Japanese students and American learners in a Facebook exchange project. They stated that these social

networking platforms established a space in which English learners shared their thoughts and understand cultural differences through publishing articles as well as comments. At the same time, Razak *et al.* (2013) hold a similar view that learning in such online communities did contribute to communicating, socializing, sharing information and developing a sense of belonging to the community. Moreover, research implemented by Rodliyah (2016) stated that having frequent conversations in the Facebook group helped EFL students to get familiar with partners and learn from each other. Taskiran *et al.* (2018) further suggested that Twitter as an extracurricular activity allowed learners to use casual language, promoting social interaction between peers, and thus aiding communicative competence. These researchers agreed that exchanging feelings and opinions in SNS helped EFL learners establish a good relationship and realized a more meaningful interaction between learner-learner and learner-teacher.

Secondly, the technology and characteristics of SNS promoted and produced effective English learning communications. AbuSa'aleek (2015) did a questionnaire for 65 participants to explore their attitude towards learning English in the Facebook context. The quantitative study indicated that the specialized English learning groups in Facebook supported exchange, synchronous and asynchronous communication, and social interaction since they offered regular updates of grammar, vocabulary, and new information to their members. A study from the same period also reported relevant conclusions that these social networking sites, especially Facebook, allowed EFL students repetitive exposure to the target words in a collaborative learning context, consequently promoting their communicative performance (Nikbakht and Boshrabadi, 2015).

However, several researchers had different views on how SNS improves communication skills. Chao and Lo (2011) conducted a questionnaire to

investigate students' perceptions of Wiki-based collaborative writing. The researchers found that although Wiki facilitated the interaction between peer review and peer editing, the five-stage computer-mediated collaborative writing project in the experiment interfered with student interaction as it required participants to review and edit during the activity, as well as involving frequent peer interaction. Vurdien (2013) contradicted that even if the students were to participate in cooperation projects to promote the development of collaborative skills, the credit cannot be completely attributed to SNS. Because all members in the whole research team were required to be involved in the exchange of opinions, and the task needed to be negotiated and modified under the guidance of the tutor to reach the final agreement. Similarly, students in Habul-Šabanovi's (2015) research complained that the blog as an extracurricular activity forced students to spend extra time in preparing a purposeful communication. Therefore, we cannot make a decisive judgment on SNS enhancement in above cooperative tasks, as these task designs affected students' spontaneous learning to some extent and may lead to inauthentic interactions. Real interaction needed to depend on students' willingness to share information and switch roles between tasks. Further research needed to explore how task design affects the effect of SNS on EFL learners' performance.

Despite the controversy, most literature listed above had strong points that learning English in SNS contributed to the improvement of collaboration and communicative competence. However, the influence of task-design on students' willingness to interact could not be ignored.

3.2.1.7 Reduction of anxiety

EFL learners might feel nervous or even anxious when communicating with

others in a foreign language in public. Sun *et al.* (2017) have revealed that mobile-based SNS use enabled reduce anxiety when EFL practice was spoken-English. These findings were supported by Kaid and Rashad (2019) in a WhatsApp-based English learning project that SNS led to reduced anxiety in learners and provided a less stressful learning environment. Not surprisingly, high-level foreign language anxiety was a common problem for those learning English. Even after having studied the language since primary school, Chow *et al.* (2018) indicated in a survey of 510 Chinese students' projects that at least one third felt moderately or highly language anxiety in English classrooms.

In the study of Sun *et al.* (2017), participants had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the target social networking platforms before the project began, which seemed to reduce the embarrassment, shyness and fear of face-to-face online communication. They also found that language anxiety affected learners' oral expression ability, and the use of SNS can effectively reduced the anxiety of EFL learners, thus improving their oral performance. In line with Sun *et al.*, Erarslan (2019) stated that social networking platforms were beneficial for timid students to express their views, and no longer felt embarrassed when making mistakes in discussions or comments. Previously, Yen *et al.* (2015) also discovered evidence similar to Sun *et al.*, pointing out that highly advanced familiarity with these communication tools enabled participants to focus on the target language rather than generate additional anxiety due to technology-related stress. In contrast to Sun *et al.* (2017), however, Yen *et al.* (2015) did not comment on the effect of SNS use on learners' anxiety. This might be because there was an intervention in their program, role-playing activities, which have been designed to reduce learner anxiety, so it was not possible to determine the relationship between SNS and foreign language anxiety.

To sum up, the usage of SNS in EFL learning decreased the degree of language

anxiety. A recommendation for English teachers was to use software that students were familiar with or instructed students on how to operate in situations that were new to them.

3.2.2 Using SNS in ESL/EFL pedagogy: Attitudes and roles of teachers

Teachers generally believed that using SNS in language courses was beneficial for EFL students, but was still had some challenges. For example, Raniah and Tariq (2018) utilized a questionnaire to explore four non-native English-speaking female teachers' views on the application of YouTube in multimedia vocabulary teaching. The researchers confirmed teachers' positive views that SNS enhanced student involvement in the teaching and learning process. In addition, the teachers involved in the study agreed that the integration of YouTube in English teaching could improve students' retention and understanding of the target vocabulary. This was supported by the research results of Aldukhayel (2019), that was, video blogging has a significant impact on vocabulary knowledge. Aldukhayel (2019) continued to add that, through the analysis of interviews, all teacher participants recognized the role of blogging on the improvement in listening and pronunciation, as it adopted popular and easy-to-understand daily spoken-language that was suitable for learners at all stages. However, as social networking sites generally contain a large number of diverse learning resources (e.g., digital videos and audios, data files and online communication system), how to combine online resources with traditional pedagogy was a major problem for modern language teachers. Aldukhayel (2019) suggested that language teachers ought to pay more attention to what types of video blogging they chose for students' classes. What they choose should be based on students' interest and proficiency, as it could greatly motivate them to learn better. Besides, the technical ability of teachers was also closely related to the effectiveness of using SNS. Teachers in

Raniah and Tariq's (2018) research reached a consensus that training about how to use SNS effectively in curricula should be given, which helped instructors maximize the presentation of the most useful lessons to the students based on the target content.

Although SNS played a great role in English teaching, it could not completely replace the position of language teachers in the curriculum. Habul - Šabanovi (2015) pointed out that teachers played a new role in the process of SNS-assisted learning, that was, a transformation from the original information disseminators into students' facilitators and mentors. This finding was consistent with the learner-centered ideology; that was, students enabled learn independently according to their own needs and interests, while teachers were only regarded as observers and assistants to help them achieve their final goals (Schiro, 2013). As Saad *et al.* (2015) found, teachers acted as a motivator, encouraging students to actively read short stories on blogs and freely communicate with each other to express their ideas. At the same time, a teacher was more like a friend, who had equal opportunities to comment with students in such a popular online community, and even had a public or private communication with students (Rodliyah, 2016). In particular, in the cultural exchange program, Raniah and Tariq (2018) stressed the importance of teachers to the development of students, because teachers were able to defuse possible misunderstandings and prejudices in terms of language and culture among students from different countries, helping them build a harmonious relationship, and progressing English knowledge and skills.

Overall, language teachers universally approved that SNS-assisted teaching improved L2 in various aspects, including the memory and understanding of vocabulary, listening and pronunciation. What's more, teachers played an irreplaceable role in SNS-assisted instruction, helping, supporting and encouraging students to achieve the improvement of foreign language in all

aspects. An important suggestion was that the effective use of SNS in English teaching needed to be based on the combination of computer abilities of language teachers, students' interests and demands, and teachers' intervention in the teaching process.

3.3 Summary

In this chapter, 8 pieces of evidence of the effectiveness of SNS in ESL\EFL learning and teaching were analyzed in terms of: the features of SNS; the application of SNS in English learning and instruction, and the views of students and teachers on SNS. To conclude, most students and teachers hold a positive attitude toward the application of SNS in L2TL. The main findings included the following eight aspects: (1) SNS had the feature of flexible access and ease of use, but existed the risk of personal privacy disclosure and potential technical problems; (2) SNS stimulated ESL\EFL learners' interest and curiosity, and improved their intrinsic motivation and participation; (3) SNS provided ESL\EFL learners with a real language learning environment; (4) in the context of reasonable task-design, using SNS in L2TL could improve ESL\EFL learners' collaboration and communication abilities; (5) compared with the traditional learning environment, the degree of anxiety of learners in SNS-assisted learning environment was relatively low; (6) teachers played an important role in SNS-assisted instruction, and they generally believed that SNS could enhance ESL\EFL learners' English abilities in all aspects. Next, we would discuss and summarize this evidence, provided suggestions for the implementation of SNS in foreign language education, and for future research and practice.

4. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the effectiveness of social networking sites (SNS) for ESL\EFL teaching and learning(L2TL), as well as the perspectives of ESL\EFL students and teachers on this educational purpose. The results have shown that SNS involvement seems to have a positive effect on ESL\EFL students' learning new knowledge and skills, including improvement in writing, speaking, and vocabulary acquisition, which is echoed in other studies (Sun and Yang, 2013; Naghdipour and Eldridge, 2016; Talakoub, 2018). The review also has pointed out that the ease of use and flexibility of SNS stimulate students' intrinsic motivation and increase their engagement in learning, which is Alberth's (2018) an important point. Besides, compared with traditional foreign language teaching, the review also has suggested that SNS provide a relaxed and real language learning environment for learners, and have the potential to promote learners' cooperative, communicative and cross-cultural abilities.

Research on SNS in L2TL to date has utilized a variety of learning theories, especially situated-learning, learner-centered, social cognitive theory, as well as research methodologies and techniques, including discourse analysis, quantitative or qualitative data analysis and mixed-method analysis. As practices mature, they are expected to promote theoretical development and methodological innovation in their related fields, including new media research, educational technology, computer science and technology.

However, due to the limitations of many studies in the literature review, including the small number of researchers and the small scope of research

objects, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion on the impact of social networks on learning. Other critical reviews of social networking sites for language learning and teaching have also reported similar limitations (Hattem and Lomicka, 2016; Alnujaidi, 2017; Barrot, 2018) They have concluded that the evidence for learning through SNS lacked generalizability. Therefore, we need more targeted and robust research aimed at a broader population, using effective tools to measure and establish causal relationships between SNS use and learning, to enhance our understanding of these online tools.

Also, this paper has proposed that technical constraints, privacy restrictions, task design, learners' needs, and social user anxiety are the main challenges of the application of SNS in L2TL. These intervention factors singly or synthetically affect the effect of SNS on ESL/EFL education.

A few of the literature examined in the review indicated the impact of technical constraints and network risks on learning. Regarding computer technology, the instability of network and SNS and computer hardware failure are the main problems that plague students in online foreign language education. Difficult-to-operate SNS tends to erode the enthusiasm and patience of beginners in online English learning and hinder their learning progress, thus negatively affecting the learning effect. Thus, school administrators should unite technical experts to strictly select reliable, stable, and easy-to-use SNS as teaching tools, and lay a foundation for providing effective SNS-assisted English classes for students. Furthermore, teachers or parents must give technical guidance in practice for young learners who lack editing skills or experience in using social networks.

It should not be overlooked in either research or practice that all local SNS, and the vast majority of educational SNS, are usually commercial enterprises. Researchers have faced challenges by the rapid changes of research objectives as SNS produce, incorporate new functions and fall in and out of fashion,

particularly in solving personal privacy problems and in accessing, collecting and managing data. Hence, they should be subject to test and evaluate by professional technical teams under the jurisdiction of the government.

An intersection existed between task design issues and innovative technologies. Certain SNS in the review have special potentials, such as wikis for collaborative learning, and Facebook and Blogs for situated-learning, they can be made full use of through careful task design. Nevertheless, with the rapid development of technology, researchers and educators should reflect on whether the intervention of target SNS can meet the real use of learners. For example, some students use SNS only for socializing with target language speakers, while others use them for obtaining additional specialized knowledge. These are authentic purposes of learners in foreign language learning and may cause difficulties in the development of a task-based curriculum. The review supported Gonzalez-Lloret (2017) 's view that the choice of technology or SNS in ESL\EFL classrooms should be consistent with students' multiple wishes and desires for topics and activities in class.

Another revelation for faculty or educators is that task design in SNS-assisted instruction should conform to a core principle, namely, a student-centered teaching philosophy. Technological innovation brings us more diversity in what we do, so teaching tasks may become complicated and ambiguous during the design process, which is not conducive to guiding students to achieve their learning goals. When incorporating SNS into the ESL\EFL classroom settings, instructors should persistently put students in the first place, and design an instruction scheme that meets the needs of most students by combining different students' interests, cultural background, practical ability and learning objectives.

Social anxiety may be an underlying problem of social networking platforms for ESL\EFL education purposes. Although the literature review provides a sign for

SNS in reducing learners' anxiety, more studies have shown that SNS use is positively associated with users' negative emotions (Rosen, 2013; Fox, 2015; Seabrook, 2016). Jones (2016) has confirmed that an increase in the frequency of social networking sites would lead to an increase in anxiety or depression. Calancie *et al.* (2017) also have revealed several stressors of users, covering fear of being judged, seeking approval, unwillingness to compare with peers, and desire for privacy. Understanding this latent theme can help foreign language teachers and parents to instantly identify the pressure source for ESL/EFL learners in SNS-assisted learning, and provide strategies for them to use social networks.

Besides, some implications for future research and practice have been put forward by the researchers:

(1) Because of the diverse features and functions offered by SNS, educators should explore other popular platforms such as LinkedIn and Myspace, even though Facebook, Wiki and Blogging have been widely utilized for learning in the linguistic education literature. This will provide important insights into how foreign language learners can use these digital tools to improve their knowledge and skills throughout their learning lives.

(2) The learning context also needs to be described in detail. The powerful description of where these SNS play a role and how they blur the line between formal and informal learning was left out in this study, a gap noticed elsewhere. Researchers need to further explore the relationship between SNS-assisted learning environment and learning outcomes to improve the quality, reproducibility, and transparency of educational research.

(3) Most usages of social networking sites in this article took place under the supervision and guidance of teachers. Educators could encourage students to learn L2 to co-design, run and evaluate their educational activities on SNS,

which might promote learning (O'Connor *et al.*, 2018).

(4) The involvement of SNS in traditional ESL\EFL classrooms means that teachers need to have strong computer application ability and editing ability. Institutions should provide training and professional development for teachers to enhance their SNS capabilities and promote their SNS application in teaching practices (Alnujaidi, 2017).

(5) Institutions should encourage to development of a reward and punishment system, which not only encourages and motivates exploration, communication, critical thinking and risk-taking of SNS but also monitor and evaluates ESL/EFL teachers and students when SNS integrating into their practices.

5. CONCLUSION

Social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and Twitter in education are no longer a new phenomenon. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have been published to explore the effectiveness of SNS in English as second or foreign language teaching and learning (L2TL). This article presents a critical review from 31 studies, which aimed at synthesizing the evidence of the effectiveness of SNS in L2TL. The improvement of EFL learners' knowledge and abilities in SNS-assisted learning in this review was found, including vocabulary acquisition, writing skills, oral performance, and intercultural communication and collaboration ability.

Combining with the main characteristics of SNS, this study also produce evidence from the perspective of students and teachers that SNS support L2TL. SNS have the potential to provide a more authentic language communication environment and more interactive experience, as they can not only stimulate students' personal motivation to improve learning but also promote their participation.

However, some gaps have not been uncovered by the original research, particularly in terms of technical glitches, personal privacy and social anxiety. Despite these hidden troubles, the attitude toward social networking sites as a supplementary tool for L2TL stills approves.

One of the contributions of this study is to adopt the subject analysis, combining quantitative, hybrid, and qualitative results to reflect current

evidence of social networking services in English as second or foreign language education. Another contribution is that guide the design and delivery of SNS-based L2 instruction for educators. Most implications in this review emerge from learner style, relevant pedagogy or learning theory, and the interaction between digital media and task design, which benefit instructors to explore more potential of SNS and maximize their roles in EFL education.

However, some limitations of this review may decrease the generalizability of the results. First of all, the foreign language or second language involved in this review is English only, and the results may not apply to other foreign language education. Second, only English language literature was searched, which may have reduced the number of potentially relevant studies. Third, secondary information sources such as literature reviews, descriptive and critical articles and thesis are excluded, which may omit some related studies. Fourth, the population distribution of primary research is mainly from adolescents or young adults, and the evidence from children and middle-aged and old learners are probably missing. Therefore, some age differences in EFL education may be absent from the reviewed findings. Finally, the included studies are heterogeneous, which means that differences in the impact of qualitative or quantitative analysis on research results may be ignored.

To sum up, although critical analysis has come up with some potential research flaws and gaps, the shortcomings of the original research can also be considered a valuable negative effect, preventing future researchers who wish to study the subject from repeating the same defects. Besides, some important findings also reveal the role of social networking sites in English as a second or foreign language teaching and learning.

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