The Use of Social Networking Sites for Instructional Purposes and Applications among English as a Foreign Language Teachers in the English Language Center at Abha College of Technology

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Abstract

Because social networking sites (SNSs) have become a trend with a great influence on many aspects and functions of educational organizations, their potential advantages for instructors have attracted extensive attention in the educational field. The purpose of this study was exploring the use of SNSs by English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in the English Language Centre (ELC) at Abha College of Technology (ACT) in Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire of 15 items was developed and posted online. All EFL teachers ($N = 25$) in the ELC at ACT were invited to fill in the survey on Survey Monkey. The results indicated that the participants had rarely used SNSs for instructional purposes. Indeed, they reported greater personal use of SNSs than use for instruction, but they had high levels of positive perceptions of the use of SNSs as a teaching tool.

Introduction

Since English is a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, there are no organically occurring English speaking environments that can help learners practice English in meaningful contexts. As a result, when Saudi learners attempt to speak English in real-life situations, they encounter many difficulties, and their English often sounds unnatural or bookish. With this in mind, teachers are requested to use social networking sites (SNSs) and applications like Twitter, Facebook, wikis, Skype, Line, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Cambly for instructional purposes because of their potential benefits in the educational field. Further, exposing learners to such sites may help them to communicate better in English with native and competent English speakers. Gonzalez and Louis (2008) noted that such social sites provide learners with opportunities to communicate effectively and improve the quality of the four skills of language—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—by interacting with native and non-native speakers of the target language from around the world.

According to Lafford and Lafford (2005), SNSs and applications play an important role in the teaching and learning of a foreign or second language (L2). In addition, according to Conforti (2009), research has highlighted the importance of the negotiation of meaning and the positive effects of both written and oral tools in the process of second language acquisition (SL2). Recently, SNS and related applications have been used to facilitate communication among a new generation worldwide and have become the focus of researchers who study the impact of these

sites and applications' innovations for L2 teaching and learning (Conforti, 2009).

Knowledge Management from the Technical Social Perspective

There are different models for creating a knowledge management system, depending on whether the intention of the knowledge. Specifically, it can be personal, including tacit knowledge; social, based on the knowledge of a group or community; codified, usually explicit and sometimes aided by artificial intelligence, or hierarchical, as in intranets. However, according to Moteleb and Woodman (2007) none of these models are adequate as a sole approach to knowledge management. Aspects of all of these dimensions of knowledge are important; the authors recommend that information systems are a good way of holding different kinds of raw data, but a knowledge management system "should accommodate the dynamic and inherently unpredictable nature of knowledge … [and] must support multiple meanings for stored entities and must support interactions between interpretations" (Moteleb & Woodman, 2007, pp. 60–61). Social interaction must be combined with technological expertise; however, in today's world, it is impossible to reflect on knowledge management without consideration of the role that technology plays in shaping both the knowledge that we have and the way that we store, transmit, and learn this same knowledge (Holsapple, 2005).

Key Theory: Social Development Theory

Social development theory is a long-established foundation of pedagogy that follows from the observation that babies, children, young people and adults all learn best in a social environment. It has two major dimensions. The first relates to individual development; it emerged from the work of Vygotsky (1978) and the concept of the zone of proximal development, which theorises the nature of learning as a continual striving to reach beyond what a learner knows to acquire new skills and knowledge (Daniels, 2005). The instructor plays a key role in this theory, and the concept of scaffolding is important. Scaffolding can be defined as "the assistance a more advanced learner or language user gives to a less advanced learner in completing a task…. [It] makes use of a collaborative dialogue" (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 248). This theory is often applied in the EFL field through communicative and task-based teaching methods, in which teachers engage in dialogue with students, and students are encouraged to work in groups or pairs, helping each other, talking about their learning, and pooling their different skills and knowledge to achieve a collective task (Storch & Aldosari, 2013).

The second major dimension of this theory is the way in which a whole culture or society develops through various kinds of interaction within itself, and through contact with other cultures (Jacobs & Asokan, 1999; Jacobs & Cleveland, 1999). Current trends towards globalisation, for example, have prompted countries to reach towards certain goals, and they do this through various kinds of social change. The important thing to remember in relation to the present study is the way in which small-scale social development, at the level of the family or classroom, for example, and large-scale social development, at the level of the country, are

inextricably linked, influencing each other in ways that are both conscious and unconscious. This theory helps researchers to explore the hidden factors that can affect complex systems like EFL education.

Key Theory: Activity Theory

Activity theory is another fundamental part of the modern teaching methodology in Saudi Arabia, as in many other countries across the world. It also recognises the social aspects of learning and highlights the importance of reciprocal interactions between tutors, peers and groups, which is more than just a transfer of knowledge from instructor to student. Activity theory was first proposed by the Marxist scholar Leont'ev (1978) as a way of including those unspoken aspects of the learning process that emerge out of dynamic interactions with people, processes and learning materials. It is useful because it builds on the inner creativity of the individual and the urge to collaborate in groups. In the context of education, it advocates using all kinds of different teaching resources and experiences, requiring the learner to engage with the learning process, experimenting with ideas and materials and coming up with their own way of solving a range of different tasks.

Activity theory requires the learner to exercise choice, and act independently, at least some of the time, which in turn results in more enthusiastic learning and greater commitment from the learner. This contrasts with more passive approaches, such as the traditional rote learning and formal translation methods that used to be popular in Saudi EFL teaching contexts. The theory has been applied very successfully to computer-based learning, both in educational and in work contexts, where the learner must not only gather information, but also interact directly with the computer, or with other people via the computer, to complete different tasks (Mwanza & Engeström, 2005).

Key Theory: Situated Learning

The theory of situated learning considers the specific context in which learning takes place, and it is especially useful in the EFL and ESL field because of the wide variety of different geographical locations, cultural settings and economic conditions that are to be found. This theory is related to the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 2000). Situated learning takes note of the distinction between intentional educational instruction and a much more informal kind of learning through "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 40). The conventions of classroom routine, for example, including the language of instruction and the kinds of interaction that are permitted prohibited, or allowed to occur on the fringes of the formal lesson are significant factors that affect the way in which students learn. Students and teachers develop attitudes and habits that can sometimes be negative and/or stereotypical, and this can limit student progression in EFL (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). It follows from this theory that changing the patterns of interaction in the classroom, and notably also bringing in

more informal and peripheral learning both inside and outside the classroom, can break down these stereotypes and create a more flexible and positive situation for learning. This, in turn, should enhance motivation and improve attainment levels, as students actively help to construct a learning environment that addresses their individual and collective needs.

Literature Review

SNSs for EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) Learning

The range of SNSs that are potentially available for EFL and English as a second language (ESL) teaching and learning is large, and it includes the following: Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Line, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and Cambly. There are also new features of the internet, such as wikis and message boards, translation software, and various apps and tools that are designed for mobile devices, all of which can be integrated into classroom learning in different ways (Richardson, 2009).

Each SNS has specific affordances, For example, Twitter can encourage student interaction outside the borders of the classroom, and it can develop writing skills (Ahmad, 2015), but its character limit can also constrain critical thinking and self-reflection (Kassens-Noor, 2012). YouTube is useful as a source of snippets, complete with text, audio, and video dimensions, which can be integrated into classroom lessons to provide a wide range of authentic vocabulary (Kabouha, 2015); however, it is a vast resource that requires considerable preparation on the part of teachers if it is to be used effectively (Watkins & Wilkins, 2011). The real challenge is finding the specific affordances that best meet the requirements of the EFL setting. This brings us to the next section, which considers the specific needs that exist at the tertiary level of Saudi EFL instruction. A recent study of female university students in Saudi Arabia identified two major barriers to the use of SNSs in learning. The first is that many students had difficulty with the practical aspects of using technology, including problems with the unreliability of internet connections at home and in the university, older computers, and cell phones. The second barrier is that many students lacked knowledge and confidence when they first encountered SNS use in an educational context (Kutbi, 2015). These problems can cause frustration and anxiety, and the more closely the technology is linked to assessment, the stronger these negative feelings are likely to be.

SNS Tools in Saudi Higher Education

Higher education is considered a natural arena for the implementation of social networking technologies for two reasons: First, there has been an uptrend of social networking by "digital natives" (Prensky, 2005), and second, interactive technologies that serve the needs of higher education, where creating, sharing, and disseminating ideas in academic communities is of primary importance, are a suitable venue for this development. In the Saudi Arabian context, the

country occupies an ironic position in relation to social networking, in that it is both deeply traditional and permeated by Islamic precepts and practices, and at the same time, especially in the case of its younger demographic, it is greatly enthusiastic about technological innovations.

Concerning the use of SNSs for educational purposes, information and communications technology initiatives in Saudi Arabia have largely been limited to more traditional forms of electronic engagement, such as the delivery of online study materials and lectures, rather than the incorporation of more cutting-edge web technologies. Little published research is available to support enquiries into how Saudi college students perceive and make use of social networking or to what extent faculty members incorporate social networking applications into their course delivery and pedagogical practices (Chaurasia, Asma, & Ahmed, 2011, p. 312). Other studies have focused only on barriers to social networking in Saudi Arabia, including internet access issues, gender equity, trust and privacy concerns, the lack of Arabic language interfaces, and the predominance of in-person and rote learning styles (Aljasir, Woodcock, & Harrison, 2012; Almalki, 2011; Chaurasia et al., 2011).

A research survey of 250 faculty members at Northern Border University found that, although 97% of the participants had a profile on an SNS, only 28% of educators claimed to use SNSs for teaching processes (Alenizi, 2014). Alshahrani and Al-Shehri (2012) investigated students' and teachers' understandings of and responses to integrated EFL e-learning tools, such as Twitter. Using one university in Saudi Arabia for the setting of their study, the researchers found that the conceptions and practices of integrating e-learning were not allied. Kabouha (2015) conducted a study investigating the effects of using YouTube videos on learning vocabulary in Saudi EFL classrooms. The results showed that 84% of the students found it useful for learning English vocabulary.

Studies on teacher perceptions of the potential of SNS for English language teaching and learning, like those on student viewpoints, reveal a certain ambivalence. One quantitative survey of 75 male and female Saudi EFL teachers at the tertiary level found that they strongly believed in the pedagogical values and benefits of using social media for English language teaching in the Saudi context, but at the same time, most of the teachers saw it as a "double-edged sword" (Allam & Elyas, 2016, p. 1) because it can distract students from the core goals of their learning.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of information regarding the level of SNSs use for instructional purposes among English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers at colleges of technology in Saudi Arabia in general and the factors that may affect their attitudes toward SNSs. EFL teachers in the English Language Centre (ELC) at Abha College of Technology (ACT) were specifically selected as a sample in the study's research site because this represents a primary field for efforts to apply SNSs for educational purposes.

Significance of the Study

This study is potentially significant for several reasons. First, the study's data and findings may provide valuable information concerning the use of SNSs and related applications for teaching and learning purposes, and it may give a clear image of the attitudes and barriers that can hinder EFL teachers in Saudi technical colleges (STCs) from accepting and integrating SNSs and related applications into their teaching. In addition, information and insights provided by the study may assist EFL educators and policymakers at the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) in deciding whether such skills and knowledge related to the use of SNSs and associated applications should be introduced as a part of their curriculum.

Research Methodology

A questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was used for determining participants' perceptions of SNSs as a tool for instructional purposes. The questionnaire used in this study was adopted, with slight modifications, from Alasmari's (2005) study on the use of the internet by teachers of EFL in Saudi Arabian colleges of technology.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study and related survey items were as follows:

1- What is the level of SNS use among EFL teachers in the ELC at ACT and the teachers' perceptions of SNSs as a tool for instructional purposes? Thirteen questions were designed to elicit the EFL teachers' perceptions toward the SNSs as a tool for instructional purposes using a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree);

2- What SNSs were most visited by the teachers? The teachers were asked a question (choose from the list) to determine what SNSs they visited most often; and

3- What were the challenges that prevented the teachers from adopting SNSs as a tool for instructional purposes? The teachers were asked to write down the barriers that hindered their use of SNSs as a teaching tool.

Participants

The study's population was all the current EFL teachers ($N = 25$) in the ELC at ACT, which possessed the institutional characteristics necessary for this study.

Basic Assumptions

There were two assumptions underlying this study. They were as follows:

1. The EFL teachers in the ELC at ACT had sufficient expertise with SNSs, had used them, and would respond meaningfully to items in the questionnaire; and

2. The participants in the study would provide truthful information about their level of use of the SNSs and their attitudes toward them.

Results and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was posted online and all the EFL teachers in the ELC at ACT ($N = 25$) were invited to participate in completing the questionnaire. The response rate was 96%. The small percentage of non-respondents will not change the findings of the research, and the results of the study will be reliable and valid (Alasmari, 2005).

Table 3.1: Response Rate and Percentages

| Distributed		Returned	Unreturned	Usable	Unusable
Number of Questionnaires	25	25	0	24	1
Percentage	100	100%	0%	96%	4%

Table 3.2: EFL Teachers Perceptions toward SNSs as a Tool for Instructional Purposes

(13 questions) Answered: 23   Skipped: 2

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Languages are acquired socially.	0.00% 0	4.35% 1	8.70% 2	65.22% 15	21.74% 5	23	4.04
I use some of (SNSs) for learning.	0.00% 0	4.35% 1	8.70% 2	69.57% 16	17.39% 4	23	4.00
Social networking sites have the potential to enhance EFL instruction	4.35% 1	0.00% 0	30.43% 7	34.78% 8	30.43% 7	23	3.87
Social networking sites can make learning English easier and more efficient.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	17.39% 4	52.17% 12	30.43% 7	23	4.13
Social networking sites can be used to teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	0.00% 0	8.70% 2	13.04% 3	47.83% 11	30.43% 7	23	4.00
Social networking sites usage fits my student's learning styles and level of Internet expertise.	4.35% 1	17.39% 4	30.43% 7	39.13% 9	8.70% 2	23	3.30
I use some of social networking sites for teaching.	0.00% 0	21.74% 5	43.48% 10	21.74% 5	13.04% 3	23	3.26
I like to know about resources available on the Internet for the use of Social networking sites for instruction.	0.00% 0	4.35% 1	4.35% 1	47.83% 11	43.48% 10	23	4.30
Social networking sites have a negative impact on personal and professional life.	0.00% 0	21.74% 5	43.48% 10	21.74% 5	13.04% 3	23	3.26
Social networking sites do not contradict with my religious and social manners.	8.70% 2	17.39% 4	26.09% 6	34.78% 8	13.04% 3	23	3.26
Social networking sites could be alternative English speaking environments where Saudi EFL students can learn and practice English with native speakers to compensate for the absence of English speaking environments in Saudi Arabia.	4.35% 1	13.04% 3	21.74% 5	43.48% 10	17.39% 4	23	3.57
I will use social networking sites in my teaching in the future.	0.00% 0	4.35% 1	13.04% 3	56.52% 13	26.09% 6	23	4.04
EFL teachers should be educated/trained how to use the social networking sites for educational purposes .	0.00% 0	4.35% 1	0.00% 0	34.78% 8	60.87% 14	23	4.52

As shown in Table 3.2, the responses indicated that the teachers had highly positive views toward tutorial use of SNSs. This positive attitude may lead to a valuable foundational step for SNS adoption for instruction. First, 20 teachers out of the 24 participants reported having the most positive attitude toward the statement, "Languages are learned socially" (86.96%). This high level of agreement proves that the participants acknowledged the significance of social learning. Second, another high level of agreement appeared for the statement, "I use some SNSs for learning" (86.96%). As an initial finding, this high response has positive indications for the usage of SNSs by the participants for personal learning. Third, the statement "SNSs can make learning English easier and more efficient" (82.60%) also exhibited a positive high level of agreement and supported the previous statement in the context of learning uses. Fourth, in terms of teaching, the participants mainly agreed (78.26%) that "SNSs can be used to teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing." Fifth, for teaching using SNSs, a reasonable level of agreement was shown (65.21%) for the statement, "SNSs have the potential to enhance EFL instruction." Sixth, 14 participants selected "Strongly agree" or "Agree" for the statement, "SNSs could be alternative English-speaking environments where Saudi EFL students can learn and practice English with native speakers to compensate for the absence of English-speaking environments in Saudi Arabia." Thus, SNSs seem to be appropriate virtual environments for practicing English with a medium level of agreement (60.87%). Seventh, it is apparent that, to some extent, SNSs do not have negative effects on learners' personal and professional lives. This can be extrapolated from the responses to the statements, "SNSs have a negative influence on personal and professional life." Only 34.78% of the participants agreed with this statement. Eighth, although all 24 participants visited SNSs very often, as shown in Table 3.3, only 47.82% of them agreed with the statement, "SNSs do not contradict my religious and social customs." Ninth, the participants reported a medium level of disagreement concerning the statement, "SNS usage fits my students' learning styles and level of internet expertise" (47.83%), indicating a student-related limitation that hinders using SNSs in EFL instruction. Tenth, the participants' responses to the statement, "I will use SNSs in my teaching in the future," were extremely positive, and 19 participants (82.61%) said they intended to do this. Eleventh, it appears that the participants had positive perceptions of SNS use for educational purposes; however, only eight participants (34.87%) agreed with the statement, "I use some SNSs for teaching." Finally, this poor use seems to be related to the participants' lack of knowledge and skills to adopt SNSs in the classroom. This was extrapolated from two pieces of evidence, as follows: 1) the extremely high agreement (95.65%) with the statement, "EFL teachers should be educated/trained on how to use SNSs for educational purposes," and 2) the high level of agreement (91.31%) with the statement, "I like to know about resources available on the internet for the use of SNSs for instruction." It is clear that teachers are asking for training on this topic.

Q2 Which social website do you visit most often?

Answered: 24   Skipped: 1
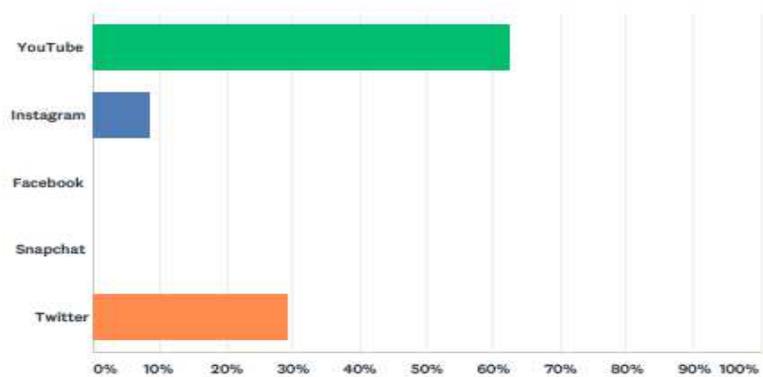
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
YouTube	62.50%	15
Instagram	8.33%	2
Facebook	0.00%	0
Snapchat	0.00%	0
Twitter	29.17%	7
TOTAL		24

Table 3.3. SNSs Teachers Visited Most Often

The participants were asked a question (choose from the list) to determine what SNSs they visited most often. Table 3.3 shows that 62.5% of the participants often access YouTube, 29.17% visit Twitter, and 8.33% access Instagram. All 24 participants accessed some of SNSs and did so frequently. This high level of access and expertise on SNSs may be a good indication of a future use for educational purposes.

Challenges that Prevented the Teachers from Adopting SNSs as a Tool for Instructional Purposes

To gain a deeper understanding of the factors shaping the participants' SNS usage, the EFL teachers were asked (in question 14) to write down the most important barriers limiting their usage of the SNSs for teaching. The participants' responses were classified into three categories based on the patterns of responses, as illustrated in the following lists of answers:

1. **Resistance-related responses:**
- "Desire"
- "Attitudes of teachers toward technology"
- "Technology phobia"
- "Absence of motivation"
2. **Equipment, time, curriculum, and internet access–related responses:**

- "Absence of technical facilities"
- "Ads, bad internet connection, especially in Abha"
- "Availability of internet; cost of internet"
- "Time, cost, internet connections"
- "Weak internet"
- "Unavailability of the internet in some areas"
- "Resources"
- "Lack of modern technology in the study halls"
- "Lack of teaching aids in the classrooms"

3. **Teachers' and students' unawareness and expertise-related responses:**

- "Lack of appropriate sources for EFL learners"
- "Lack of English use on SNSs"
- "Lack of awareness of how important it is to use SNSs"
- "Lack of experience using social networking by trainers and trainees"
- "Lack of knowledge about how to employ technology in EFL teaching"
- "How to convince students to use these sites to learn"
- "Skills of teachers"
- "Aghhkkkkkhhklllknhbvvc" (an expression depicting some teachers' lack of awareness).

Discussion of the Findings

The questionnaire consisted of 15 statements measuring the participants' perceptions of the SNSs as a tool for EFL instruction. They were divided into three parts: Part 1 consisted of 13 statements for determining participants' perceptions of the SNSs as a tool for instructional purposes using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree); Part 2 included a question about the SNSs the participants often accessed; and Part 3 consisted of a question requesting the participants to write down the barriers that were thought to limit teachers' usage of SNSs for teaching.

The findings from the survey data indicated that the participants generally had positive perceptions of the SNSs as a tool for EFL instruction. In addition, the mean score for teachers' personal use of the internet, although it was somewhat limited (2.0), was the highest among all other types of use (for instructional and professional purposes) and likely led to their optimistic perceptions. In other words, the teachers had experienced the SNSs for personal use to the extent that they acknowledged their value for instruction, and therefore, they were willing to use them in their classrooms. As mentioned above, it has been widely reported that SNSs provide various opportunities for students to be involved in authentic communicative language experiences with native speakers of English from around the world. For this reason, Saudi EFL teachers may have already developed such positive perceptions toward the use of the SNSs for instruction because of their awareness of their prospective authenticity.

Conclusions and Implications

The results from this study indicated that the teachers generally had positive perceptions toward the use of SNSs, despite the different limitations regarding their implementation in the ELC at ACT. It is essential for the curriculum design department at TVTC to sustain and promote such positive perceptions as an essential signal for promising future SNS adoption. Designing curriculums related to social sites and implementing training courses and the like for EFL teachers on SNS use will not only deepen the teachers' skills for selecting appropriate teaching resources but also broaden their horizons concerning the integration of SNSs and such technologies in the classroom.

Ultimately, the results suggest that colleges of technology have to take more active roles in promoting EFL teachers' professional development. EFL teachers must be offered opportunities for developing the specialized skills required to use applications and SNSs in language instruction by skillful experts who can model such teaching usage in language classes.

Although SNS use in the Arab world is extensive, the adoption of SNSs in education is limited. A study using a questionnaire with 251 higher education students in Kuwait found that most of the respondents were extremely comfortable using SNSs, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, in their leisure time, but they found the university virtual learning environment (VLE) "somewhat hard to use" (Alsanaa, 2012, p. 398). Although the VLE requires that students use similar skills to those employed in social use of the internet, it was found that students in Kuwait are especially hesitant to use e-learning in connection with their grades and assessments, and this is something that requires further research. Similar reservations, especially on the part of male students, were identified in a study on student perceptions of e-learning in the United Arab Emirates (Tubaishat & Lansari, 2011). These studies demonstrate the important role that the teacher plays in the minds of the students, especially when it comes to the assessment dimensions of learning, and there is not much evidence that students necessarily want to link their use of e-learning platforms and SNS.

A Limitation of the Study and Future Research Recommendations

The research was administered in the ELC at ACT in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to other technical colleges. Accordingly, because of this limitation, further research is needed on the real use of the SNSs by EFL teachers in the other Saudi technical colleges (STCs).

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