The Use of Social Media Platforms to Enhance Vocabulary Developing in Learning a New Language: A Review of The Literature

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Abstract
Social media platforms (SMPs) are widely used by many users worldwide in different fields, including business, politics, education, and personal enjoyment (Kapoor et al., 2018). However, the use of SMPs for English language vocabulary learning is still under-researched, particularly in a Saudi Arabian context. Alzahrani (2016) and Alqunayeer (2016) have underscored the scarcity of research exploring the use and effect of SMPs on Saudi learners' vocabulary development, and as these platforms are highly favored in Saudi Arabia, the paucity of research makes the current study timely and pertinent. Furthermore, recent studies in Vietnam and Indonesia have recommended that further research should be conducted regarding the use of SMPs for English language vocabulary learning and indeed for learning English as a second language (Indari & Putri, 2018; Tran, 2016). This paper aims to review the research concerning the use of SMPs for vocabulary learning from 2014 to 2018. Out of 50 peer-reviewed articles, only 15 studies were relevant to SMPs and vocabulary learning. It has been recognized that SMPs are effective in improving learner engagement, motivation, and vocabulary development, suggesting that SMPs can be valuable tools and resources to facilitate learning. The authors have also proposed a definition for the term social media, as one has not been agreed upon in the educational literature, this is not surprising given that the social media phenomenon is still a new and rapidly evolving field of practice and study.

Keywords: English language, learning, Saudi Arabia, social media, vocabulary.

Introduction

The English language is acknowledged as the lingua franca of languages, and within the last decade, much attention has been paid to the use of social media platforms (SMPs) in language learning, whether through computers or mobile devices such as mobile phones or tablets (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Fischer, 2013; Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013). However, as the concept of social media has only been around for the last few decades, it can be viewed from a historical perspective to be a relatively new form of communication. As such, its impacts have yet to be adequately evaluated, and many research gaps exist regarding its effects on language learning (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, & Freynik, 2014; Zourou, 2012).

As stated by Richards (2015), multiple studies have presented substantial evidence that social media has become a favored learning environment for the learning of language skills, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL). Richards's (2015) work has been supported by Ma (2017), who indicates that how learners learn an additional language may be affected by how they use social media. More recently, Puspa (2018) found that vocabulary knowledge usage was enhanced using SMPs more than other forms of technology such as CD-based or web-based learning platforms. In SMPs, English has become the dominant language of programming; however, 80% of social media users do not speak English as their first or primary language (Christison & Murray, 2014). Given that English is the lingua franca of the internet, variance in English language usage increases, with English being no longer the exclusive domain of native speakers. As such, cross-linguistic communication in SMPs provides a casual or ad hoc learning context in which the conversational qualities of the English language are being explored by EFL and ESL users.

It has been found that different SMPs have unique educational benefits and can be used as tools for facilitating learning, provided they are used with appropriate guidance and support (Connolly, 2011). The use of SMPs for education has become popular within the last decade (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Fischer, 2013) because they are instrumental in knowledge sharing and communication, due to their ubiquity and ease of use (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2018); thus, they may also facilitate vocabulary learning (Schwartz et al., 2013). One significant characteristic of SMPs and vocabulary learning which is of particular interest is how SMPs change the conditions for language practices of linguistic repertoires which is due to the hybrid nature of the texts, which fuses oral, written and spoken communication with other multiliteracy elements such as sound, color, and symbols (Cole & Pullen, 2010). However, although social media's potential for enhancing the development of language skills has been widely studied, its use for vocabulary learning is relatively under-researched or is not the primary focus of the research. To address this gap, this paper reviewed the literature to investigate the potential role of SMPs in vocabulary learning, focusing on EFL learners' perceptions and practices.

Main Concepts
Vocabulary

It is widely claimed that vocabulary learning is one of the most crucial aspects of learning a language (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000; White & Kim, 2009). Vocabulary plays a decisive role in developing reading and other language skills among non-native learners (Carlisle, Beeman,

Davis, & Spharim, 1999). It is one of the fundamental components which connects reading, writing, listening, and speaking; therefore, vocabulary learning helps learners master their additional language and use it effectively in different contexts and scenarios (Grosseck & Holotescu, 2008). This premise is supported by Wilkins (1972): "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p. 111). Within second-language learning, the success or failure of second-language acquisition (SLA) can be determined to some extent by the processes of vocabulary learning (Gu, 2005; Nation & Newton, 2008).

It is also imperative to know that vocabulary learning is determined by the frequency of use and exposure to various situations, scenarios, forms, and contexts (Nation, 1990; Schmitt, 2000). However, because by their very nature, SMPs offer users different reasons for use, ranging from study through to work or pleasure, there is no general linguistic discourse, and the users' purpose for using the SMPs and the social media platforms themselves offer differing contexts. The differing contexts provided by SMPs allow learners to expand, confirm, experiment, and develop their vocabulary (Takac, 2008) formally and factually through to a more colloquial discourse. These different contexts, situations, and scenarios are more likely to be found in SMPs than in traditional settings such as school environments (Alqunayeer, 2016; Lomicka & Lord, 2016), due to the lack of space and time limitations. These contexts will be defined, examined, and their various aspects discussed in this paper.

EFL and ESL learners acquire vocabulary through different vocabulary learning strategies, ranging from using visuals—"a picture is worth a thousand words"—through to labeling objects, e.g., placing a label with the word "desk" on the actual desk. Several researchers have attempted to categorize them, such as Gu and Johnson (1996), Schmitt (1997), and Nation (2001). The taxonomy proposed by Gu and Johnson (1996) includes metacognitive, cognitive, memory, and activation strategies, whereas Schmitt (1997) presented discovery and consolidation strategies. These two strategies involve subsets of strategies: determination and social strategies under the discovery category, and social, cognitive, memory, and metacognitive strategies under the consolidation strategies (Schmitt, 1997). Finally, Nation (2001) proposed three main taxonomies: planning, sources, and processes, each of which has different subsets.

Social Media

Defining social media is quite complex as the medium itself is still developing and evolving rapidly. In the past, social media may have been limited to email and similar comunication forms, whereas now it includes videotelephony and moving past that to avatars in virtual chat rooms and virtual environments. Even though there is no agreed definition or concept of social media, researchers have proposed differing definitions. Dewing (2010) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) perceive social media as the groups of internet-based and mobile applications and services in which users are engaged in online activities, such as creating content, joining communities, exchanging information, and interacting with others. According to these authors, users can create their profiles through which they can connect with others and send/receive instant messages (Dewing, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) added that users could also share and post information in different forms, such as text, audio, photos, videos, and links to

other resources. These various forms might fulfill all learners' needs and encourage them to develop their language learning, including vocabulary, as they have different characteristics of learning styles, such as being visual or auditory learners.

On the other hand, Burke (2013) described social media as the content uploaded by users to social networking sites (SNSs), whether that includes videos, pictures, text, or other multimedia formats. She added that SNSs involve being engaged in a community by creating relationships and communicating with others. Cohn (2011) agreed with Burke's definition, adding that social media helps people connect, whereas SNSs enhance their connections.

Based on these definitions, and to avoid disagreements, the term social media platform (SMP) is used in this paper to refer to any application or site that enables its users to create a profile—whether public or private—through which they can interact, post, or view using any form of media, including text, pictures, videos, live streaming, or links to any other resources. Likewise, the term social media is used to refer to any forms of the content found on SMPs, as proposed by Burke (2013). The following SMPs are discussed in order of their original launch dates: Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), Instagram (2010) and Snapchat (2011):

Facebook
Facebook allows its users to connect, interact, and build friendships with other users, who can also get involved with various societies and communities and share resources and information within user-created networks (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2010). Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, and there were about 2.23 billion monthly active users as of 30 June 2018 (Facebook, 2018). The number of Facebook users in Saudi Arabia is about 22 million (Global Media Insight, 2018), which is about 66% of the Saudi population.

Twitter
Twitter was founded by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams in March 2006. Its users post and interact with messages called tweets, which were initially limited to 140 characters each but doubled to 280 characters in November 2017. Users can tweet different forms of media, such as text, video recordings, pictures, links, and live videos. According to Twitter (2018), there are approximately 336 million monthly active users. In Saudi Arabia, there are about 17 million users on Twitter (Global Media Insight, 2018), representing 51% of the population.

Instagram
Instagram is a platform that is used to share photos and videos. It was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in October 2010 and then sold to Facebook in April 2012. The uploaded photos and videos can be edited by different filters in the platform and labeled with various tags and location information. The posts can be shared in public or only with pre-approved followers. Instagram's users can post, like others' posts, follow others, and send private messages. There are 800 million monthly active users on Instagram worldwide (We Are Social & Hoottsuite, 2018). However, in Saudi Arabia, there are about 18 million monthly active users (Global Media Insight, 2018), 54% of the total population.

Snapchat

The Snapchat platform was founded in September 2011 by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown. Snapchat is only available as a smartphone application where users can upload pictures and short videos lasting a maximum of 10 seconds. These are stored for 24 hours, and then they become inaccessible. According to We Are Social and Hoottsuite (2018), there are 255 million users on Snapchat globally, and about 13 million users in Saudi Arabia (Global Media Insight, 2018), which represents 39% of the population.

Social Media and Vocabulary Learning

For this literature review, several academic databases were explored (i.e., the University of Tasmania Library, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and ERIC) using the following keywords in each database, resulting in about 64 search entries: Vocabulary Learning, Vocabulary Acquisition, Social Media, Social Networking, Social Network, Social Networks, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Fifty academic articles were found; however, only 15 of these met the inclusion criteria. The search was limited to items published from January 2014 to December 2018, as the field of social media research is relatively new and is rapidly changing. Similarly, Golonka et al. (2014) reviewed over 350 studies published up to 2012, but they did not find any studies on the use of SMPs for language learning. However, the authors came across some related studies (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; Khany & Monfared, 2013; McDermott, 2013; Warschauer, 2002; Zourou, 2012), and they are referred to in this section.

Regarding the exclusion criteria, articles on YouTube and WhatsApp were excluded for many reasons, including their mechanisms and principal uses. For example, the primary purpose of YouTube is to share videos rather than posting and uploading various forms of content. Regarding WhatsApp, users must have a phone number to create an account and can only interact with individual users whose phone numbers are saved, or with other users who are members of the same WhatsApp group. Besides, unlike other SMPs (i.e., Twitter and Facebook), WhatsApp users cannot search for other users' profiles, locations, and posts, as user accounts are not public and can only be accessed via phone number. Therefore, WhatsApp is considered more of an instant-messaging application rather than an SNS. For a platform to qualify as an SNS, user profiles should be the backbone of social media sharing (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

In the last five years, several studies have been conducted on the use of various SMPs for EFL and ESL vocabulary learning (Al-Tamimi, Al-Khawaldeh, Natsheh, & Harazneh, 2018; Al Mubarak, 2017; Indari & Putri, 2018). Some researchers recognized the effectiveness of SMPs in improving learner engagement and motivation (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; Ventura & Martín-Monje, 2016; Zourou, 2012). Ventura and Martín-Monje (2016) further found that the use of SMPs has helped learners progress in their vocabulary learning. This evidence suggests that SMPs have the potential to be valuable tools and resources for learning.

The platforms investigated include Facebook and Twitter, as well as social media in general. The database searches revealed three studies regarding the use of Twitter for vocabulary learning (see Table one), eight studies on Facebook (see Table two), and four studies on social

media in general (see Table three). To the best of the present researcher's knowledge, however, there are no previous studies regarding the use of other SMPs to this effect, such as Snapchat and Instagram.

Table 1.*List of studies on the use of Twitter for vocabulary learning*

No.	Study	Year	Place	No. of Participants	Age	Method
1	ESP Vocabulary and Social Networking: The Case of Twitter	2015	Spain	75	20–27 years	Mixed
2	Learning Vocabulary via Twitter	2014	Mexico	183	University students (adults)	Quan
3	The Impact of Teaching Through Twitter on Students' Vocabulary Learning	2016	Saudi Arabia	160	University students (adults)	Quan

Table 2. *List of studies on the use of Facebook for vocabulary learning*

No.	Study	Year	Place	No. of Participants	Age	Method
1	The Impact of Social Media on Vocabulary Learning; Case Study – Facebook	2014	Romania	127	University students (adults)	Quan
2	Enhancing Students' Vocabulary Knowledge Using the Facebook Environment	2016	Malaysia	33	University students (adults)	Mixed
3	Learning Specialized Vocabulary Through Facebook in a Massive Open Online Course	2016	Spain	61	University students (adults)	Mixed
4	Self-Directed Vocabulary Learning in Facebook: From the Perspective of Social Presence (forthcoming)	2014	Taiwan	180	University students (adults)	Mixed

5	The Effect of a Facebook Game That Requires English Vocabulary Knowledge on Students' English Vocabulary Development	2015	Turkey	81	10–14 years	Quan
6	Training Learners to Use Quizlet Vocabulary Activities on Mobile Phones with Facebook	2016	Vietnam	21	University students (adults)	Mixed
7	The Effect of Using Facebook on Improving English Language Writing Skills and Vocabulary Enrichment Among the University of Jordan Sophomore Students	2018	Jordan	30	University students (adults)	Quan
8	Sudanese Students' Perceptions of Using Facebook for Vocabulary Learning at University Level	2017	Sudan	85	University students (adults)	Quan

Table 3.   *List of studies on the use of SMPs for vocabulary learning*

No.	Study	Year	Place	No. of Participants	Age	Method
1	The Effect of Using Social Media on the Students' Vocabulary Achievement at Tenth Grade	2018	Indonesia	75	14–16 years	Quan
2	Investigating the Impact of Social Media on Improving EFL Students' Vocabulary	2016	Algeria	35	University students (adults)	Mixed
3	The Role of Social Media in Development of English Language Vocabulary at University Level	2016	Pakistan	36	University teachers (adults)	Quan
4	Analysing the Potential of Social Networking Sites on EFL Learners' Vocabulary	2015	Iran	100	University students (adults)	Quan

Mastery: A Situated-learning
Approach

Sabater and Fleta (2015) presented a paper on using Twitter for learning specialized vocabulary in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). They examined students' confidence and communication in using ESP vocabulary through a blended learning approach, combining online digital media with conventional classroom methods, which included face-to-face and online meetings. They found that students' participation and communication in the classroom and beyond were enhanced after using Twitter (Sabater & Fleta, 2015). Despite that, there were no perceived positive effects with regard to vocabulary learning (Sabater & Fleta, 2015).

Alqunayeer (2016) conducted a study on the impact of teaching through Twitter on students' English vocabulary learning in a Saudi university. She divided 160 participants into two groups: experimental and control, with 80 participants in each. The control group was taught in the traditional method by using flashcards, pictures, hints, gestures, or simple explanations, and the experimental group was taught by using the social media platform Twitter over eight weeks. She found that the experimental group, which was taught vocabulary items through Twitter, demonstrated significantly higher vocabulary knowledge than those in the control group. This was measured by the results and analysis of a pre-test and a post-test for both groups. She also reported that not only vocabulary improved but also writing and researching skills. Alqunayeer (2016) concluded that since "integrating social networking sites is a new trend in Saudi Arabia, researchers need to investigate the aptitude of Saudi students in using and integrating such technology" (p. 42).

In contrast, another study conducted by Santana, Garcia-Santillan, and Pozos-Texon (2014) in a Mexican university found that there was no significant difference in learning outcomes between acquiring vocabulary via Twitter or via the traditional way inside a classroom. The researchers argued that Twitter was not a particularly useful method for vocabulary learning, because any new vocabulary contained in tweets was not brought to the learners' attention and therefore not interacted with. In other words, the learners were not exposed to these items frequently enough to affect their language learning through interactions on Twitter. Santana (2014), in her sole-authored paper on the same study, claimed that learners should be exposed to more words every day to ensure that they will acquire them.

A study of the use of Facebook to improve students' vocabulary knowledge found that most of the learning occurred when the students interacted and socialized with fellow students and other Facebook users, particularly those who were native speakers of the target language (Kabilan & Zahar, 2016). The researchers argued that Facebook might be an effective learning tool, as it can motivate students and increase their engagement, interaction, collaboration, and confidence.

Tran (2016) similarly pointed out that Facebook had the potential to increase student participation and engagement.

A study by Guvendir and Gezgin (2015) examined the effect of a Facebook game on students' vocabulary development, finding significantly positive outcomes. The same results were found in a study conducted on the use of SMPs (i.e., via Facebook) for vocabulary learning among schoolchildren (Indari & Putri, 2018). Tran (2016) also reports that "learners had a positive view towards mobile learning and towards using social networking to support their learning" (p. 54).

In contrast, Monica-Ariana and Anamaria-Mirabela (2014), who limited their study to Facebook use in Romania, found no significant differences between students who were exposed to target vocabulary through Facebook and those who were not; however, they did find that students who used Facebook were more engaged and motivated to learn. This absence of improvements and developments in this study and other similar studies might be attributed to its methods. The researchers in this study attempted to test the effectiveness of SMPs on vocabulary learning in just a short period by employing pre-test and post-test designs where the participants' voices were not emphasized and not taken into account comprehensively. While every situation is unique and the participants' perceptions and interpretations are significant and unique as well, which constitute each transaction and situation, especially in education and social science research (Pring, 2000). Therefore, methodological gaps have been revealed by reviewing these studies.

Among the researchers who studied SMPs in general, Bouhami (2016) concluded that SMPs are helpful and effective in improving EFL students' vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Khan, Ayaz, and Faheem (2016) found that SMPs play an influential role in vocabulary learning, as the SMPs trigger learners' interests and present vocabulary in different forms, including text, pictures, video, and other online media.

Al-Tamimi et al. (2018) and Nikbakht and Boshrabadi (2015) highlighted that learners in their experimental groups excelled in learning the target vocabulary compared to learners in their control groups, concluding that SMPs play a decisive role in vocabulary learning. It is worth noting that participants in these two studies were studying English at different proficiency levels. Participants in Al-Tamimi et al.'s (2018) study were undertaking a Bachelor's Degree majoring in English, and in Nikbakht and Boshrabadi (2015), they were doing a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics. Therefore, each cohort was studying English for different motivations and purposes, but they yielded the same results toward utilizing SMPs for vocabulary learning.

Conclusion

This review of literature has shown that the use of SMPs for vocabulary learning is comparatively under-researched, particularly in a Saudi Arabian context. The focus of most studies is on the use of SMPs in controlled groups and classroom environments where the students are invited to use those social media tools for language learning. This reveals a stark limitation, as the students might have participated in the studies only in order to pass the course or please the teacher/researcher. It is recommended that future research is conducted to fill these gaps in the

literature and research, where the researcher is an independent observer. It is also crucial to focus on investigating and explaining EFL and ESL learners' perceptions and practices, which are vital in the use and application of SMPs in language learning (Khany & Monfared, 2013; Warschauer, 2002). Besides, most studies have not provided enough information about SMPs' employment or sufficient details and data about the experiments. This shows another constraint, which is the absence of a thick description that is defined by Geertz (1973) as providing a rich, clear, complete, and detailed description of the research.

Moreover, Davis (1995) reasoned that there should be three components of the thick description: general, interpretive, and particular. The particular description refers to providing representative data instances. Thus, the credibility and the transferability of these studies are decreased due to their lack of a thick description (Brown & Rogers, 2002), which makes drawing conclusions noticeably problematic.

This review of the literature on SMPs and language learning has highlighted a paucity of studies that have considered why individuals are using SMPs for language learning and how SMPs can be used for that learning. By highlighting these studies, this paper's authors intend to research how adult Saudi English language learners are using their current SMPs to acquire vocabulary. This understanding may then enable others to understand that second language learning and vocabulary learning may occur in formal and informal ways through the use of social media platforms.

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