

Social media in language learning: Perceptions of Saudi students

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**Abstract****Social media in language learning: Perceptions of Saudi students****Nouf Saad A. Aloraini**

The current literature on students' perceptions towards the use of Social Media (SM) for language learning reports mixed findings. While some studies indicate learners' positive perceptions towards using SM for academic purposes (e.g., Bani-Hani et al., 2014; Borau et al., 2009; Cheng, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014), others suggest that learners' perceptions might vary as a result of their proficiency in the language (e.g., Gamble & Wilkins, 2014). In addition, there is evidence that suggests students have negative attitudes towards the use of SM for educational purposes (Venkatesh et al., 2016). The current study aims to investigate Saudi students' attitudes towards the use of SM (WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter) for learning English as a foreign language.

One hundred adult learners from a university in Saudi Arabia participated in this mixed-methods study, stratified among two proficiency levels: beginners and advanced. Data collection instruments consisted of individual surveys and interviews. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there are differences between beginner and advanced students in their perceptions of the usefulness of SM applications for language learning, but not in their affective feelings towards SM use outside the classroom, nor their choice of SM application to use for learning. Frequency counts indicated that the groups' choices of SM varied according to different language purposes and the skills to be learned (e.g., they preferred WhatsApp for communication with family and friends, Twitter for reading, and Snapchat for learning aural skills). Further qualitative analysis revealed advanced learners' disinclination towards using SM for academic purposes, considering it to be used solely for personal reasons. The research also reports

students' perceived advantages and disadvantages of using these technologies for language learning.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Many professional fields, whether medical, commercial, or educational, have been influenced by the introduction of new technologies. The field of education, second/foreign language (L2) education in particular, is undergoing rapid changes in teaching methodology due to the use of these new technologies which are adaptable to the interests and needs of students and teachers alike. Scholars believe that utilizing such technologies has the potential to solve several pedagogical problems that occur in the L2 classroom, such as the limited amount of classroom time teachers have when compared to the large number of students (Cardoso & Collins, 2016; Roblyer, 2003). In addition, research indicates that the use of various technologies, such as Social Media (SM), may offer opportunities for practice and, accordingly, increase students' motivation (Chapelle, 2009; Ekoc, 2014; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). These technologies may also provide an environment in which constructivist approaches to language learning can take place (Roblyer, 2003; Wang & Vasquez, 2012).

Social constructivists believe that learning is a result of real/authentic experience with the environment and interaction with interlocutors (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Bannan Haag, 1995; Jonassen, 1999). The social constructivist theoretical framework stresses that knowledge is not simply transmitted to the individual, but rather the collaborative construction of information is needed for learning to take place; it also highlights the role of technology, and encourages its integration in the educational environment (Jonassen et al., 1995; Jonassen, 1999).

Following a social constructivist approach to language learning, this study aims to investigate Saudi students' perceptions towards using SM applications (particularly WhatsApp,

Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter) as language learning tools. Previous research has reported that students hold positive perceptions towards using SM for academic purposes (e.g., Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Cheng, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014). However, researchers have also reported variance in perceptions due to students' proficiency level (Gamble & Wilkins, 2014). Contrary to these studies, a more recent investigation by Venkatesh, Rabah, Fusaro, Couture, Varela, and Alexander (2016), in the context of general education, reported that students hold negative attitudes towards using SM for educational purposes, advising teachers to use a mix of both traditional and modern teaching approaches to cater for their students' preferences. In addition, participant comments found in Mitchell (2012) reveal that a Saudi student held a negative attitude towards Facebook as a language learning method, pointing out the inappropriate and incorrect use of grammar and orthography found in L2 users' posts in this platform. Therefore, this study aims to reveal whether the findings reported in the literature are reflected in the Saudi context, as a survey conducted prior to this study shows that Saudis use a variety of SM applications on a daily basis. This research aims to inform language teachers who are considering using SM for teaching and learning, especially within the Saudi context.

The current study followed a non-experimental mixed-methods approach, in which participants ( $N = 100$ ) were recruited from King Saud University (College of Languages and Translation) in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The participants were stratified among two proficiency levels: beginners and advanced. Written surveys were distributed to investigate Saudi students' perceptions and attitudes towards SM (WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter) as language learning tools. In addition to the survey analysis, a group of randomly selected participants ( $n = 14$ ) were invited to participate in a short semi-structured interview with the researcher (for approximately 30 minutes) via SOMA Messenger (a free video, voice call and

messaging application). Interviews were conducted using SOMA as the researcher was not residing in Saudi Arabia at the time of data collection. The remainder of this chapter offers a brief definition of SM and the applications covered by this study. It also provides an overview of the role of technology in the L2 classroom.

### **What are Social Media Applications?**

SM applications fall under the umbrella of Web 2.0 sites, where users become the creators of the website's content (Richardson, 2010). Users can write and share posts about their everyday lives, view each other's content, and express their opinions and views. Most SM applications are available for free and, in most cases, only an email address is required for registration, as well as a Wi-Fi Internet connection or Internet from a mobile service provider. When used for learning, these applications can be categorized under Beatty's (2003) definition of "edutainment," since students will use them for entertainment in addition to educational purposes. Here is a brief summary of some of the most popular SM applications that are covered by this research (see forthcoming discussion for the rationale regarding their inclusion).

**Twitter.** A SM application that allows registered users to read and send short messages in a microblogging manner. These messages are referred to as "Tweets" and they are restricted to 140 characters each.

**WhatsApp.** This application is considered one of the top widely used SM applications around the world (Kallas, 2017), and it is usually used on mobile devices as users must have an active mobile phone number for the service to work. Users can send and receive photos, videos, location data, voice notes (audio messages), and use many other features including text chat, or "texting."

**Instagram.** A SM application that supports audios, images and videos. Mainly, users

“Comment” on or “Like” pictures or videos that have been posted by other users. The application also has a direct messaging (“DM”) feature where users can privately message to one another.

**Snapchat.** This SM application is based on the idea of video messaging. Users can send and receive short videos of approximately 10 seconds. Videos can be added to the user’s “Story” where they can only be accessed for 24 hours before disappearing. Videos that are not posted in “Story” immediately disappear after being displayed. Calling and sending/receiving texts are features also available through the app.

**Facebook.** Considered to be a social networking website/application, users need to register to create profiles, add friends, and update their statuses. Users can also exchange messages privately via text chat or publicly on a friend’s “Wall” or main page. Photos and videos can be uploaded or shared in Facebook through URL links or via a drag-and-drop into users’ posts.

In the following section, we review studies that have examined the use of technology in the language classroom, including computer-assisted language learning (CALL), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), digital gaming, and computer-mediated communication (CMC). Given that communication via SM is computer-mediated, we hypothesize that SM offers the same learning advantages reported in research on the use of technology for learning, particularly in regard to accessibility and the provision of a stress-free learning environment.

### **Technology and the Language Classroom**

This section discusses research that has examined the pedagogical effectiveness of some of the SM applications described above. We argue that since SM is accessible through both personal computers or mobile phones, it combines the benefits discussed in the literature regarding CALL, MALL, digital gaming (henceforth: gaming), and CMC. For example, it has

been demonstrated that CALL has the ability to cover some of the requirements necessary for language acquisition to take place, such as the provision of different types of input, and multiple opportunities for output and practice (Chapelle, 2009). Regarding MALL, it is believed that the use of mobile technology promotes easy accessibility to users for “anytime anywhere” learning (Jaradat, 2014; Stockwell, 2010), which enhances students’ performance in language learning (Jaradat, 2014), and may serve to reduce learners’ anxiety (e.g., in the context of mobile gaming; Grimshaw, 2016). Positive effects on learning, such as an increase in output and reduction in communication anxiety, have also been reported in research on computer-mediated communication (Kern, 1995).

**CALL.** The application and use of computer-based technology in the language classroom has demonstrated many advantages, as reported in literature on the effectiveness of CALL on the acquisition of lexical items (e.g., Smith, 2004), grammar (e.g., Fiori, 2005), reading (e.g., Taylor, 2006, 2009, 2013), writing (e.g., Suh, 2002) and pronunciation (e.g., Lambacher, 1999; Seferoglu, 2005). Some researchers have even proposed that the use of CALL may significantly promote the language learning process in general. For example, Chapelle (2009) connects second language acquisition (SLA) theory to CALL, reporting that CALL is fully capable of facilitating and enhancing the acquisition of a second language, as it may increase opportunities for L2 input, interaction, and feedback. Chapelle also adds that while each SLA theory focuses on a single component of language acquisition, such as output, CALL is characterized by its comprehensiveness in simultaneously covering multiple areas required for language acquisition (e.g., input, output, feedback, and interaction, as discussed above). As such, technology has the potential to play a significant role in language teaching and learning, particularly in providing opportunities for “anytime anywhere” learning, as will be discussed below.

**MALL and mobile gaming.** Studies have indicated a positive impact of MALL on language learning (e.g., Kondo et al., 2012; Liakin, Cardoso & Liakina, 2015; 2017; Liu, Navarrete, Maradiegue, & Wivagg, 2014; Stockwell, 2010). For example, Stockwell (2010) investigated students' preferences in completing vocabulary activities on different platforms (including mobile devices and PCs). He found that participants' tendencies to complete learning tasks on their cellphones increased, and both platforms resulted in high vocabulary scores. The study also indicated that using mobiles for vocabulary tasks did not pose any obstacles, and although tasks required slightly more time to complete on mobile phones, PCs and mobiles are alike when it comes to learners' speed in completing the activities.

Jaradat (2014) investigated students' perceptions of using smart phones as a medium for extra readings for a French undergraduate course in Saudi Arabia. Participants were asked to complete surveys that focused on their attitudes towards using smart phones to complete exercises, access multimedia for additional reading activities, email for learning purposes, and use voice-over protocol applications for learning. Results indicated that students' attitudes towards mobiles were largely positive. Around 75% of students preferred mobiles to PCs and more traditional learning methods, while 90% reported being satisfied with learning French via mobiles. Quantitative results showed that the utilization of MALL enhanced students' language (vocabulary), and indicated that the main advantage of mobile learning is the accessibility afforded by the technology, as it is unrestricted by place or time. The study concluded that mobile technology has the potential to improve students' interaction and improve their overall learning experience. Recognizing the potential of MALL encouraged a call for considering mobile-assisted language use (MALU) an alternative for CALL (e.g., Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013), based on the assumption that, nowadays, many learners in developing countries have mobile

devices, thus encouraging teachers and learners to embrace these devices for teaching and learning purposes (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009).

Another type of mobile technology can be seen in the use of mobile games. Researchers have concluded that the mobility and accessibility of mobile devices expand and increase the chances of obtaining access to learning resources (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009), and that even “mobile” digital gaming is beneficial for enhancing the learning/teaching experience (e.g., Cardoso, Grimshaw, & Waddington, 2015; Grimshaw, 2016). For instance, Grimshaw’s (2016) study investigated the effects of playing Spaceteam ESL (a mobile game in which students shout instructions to one another to pilot a spacecraft) on oral fluency development, pronunciation anxiety, and students’ willingness to communicate. Results indicate that gaming has the potential to improve fluency and that it may decrease learners’ anxiety when learning a language.

**CMC.** Research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) has reported similar positive results on learning, given that CMC studies view technology as a communication tool that decreases the pressure usually experienced in real-life, face-to-face interactions (Arnold, 2007; Baralt & Gurzynski, 2011; Bradley & Lomicka, 2000). For example, Kern (1995) quantitatively and qualitatively compared students’ production in two teacher-led class discussions: one in the classroom and the other was online (CMC). The study reported that students’ production increased in the CMC modality, and discussions were more student-centered. The results were attributed to the affordances of CMC in reducing communication anxiety. The next section will discuss the impact of other CMC modalities (i.e., SM) on language learning.

**Social Media.** In addition to the attested benefits of CALL, MALL, gaming, and CMC on language acquisition, as discussed earlier, research on using SM applications for language



teaching/learning has recently begun to receive more attention (e.g., Babaei, 2012; Borau et al., 2009; Ekoc, 2014; Hattem, 2014; Wang & Vasquez, 2014). SM is a unique medium for learning as it combines the benefits reported in research on the use of technology for learning, particularly because they are typically accessed via portable mobile devices and, as a consequence, they create a stress-free learning environment, similar to what has been reported in the literature on gaming and CMC.

According to Kessler (2013), SM constitutes a massive (but portable) linguistic corpus, characterized by authenticity and availability, and offers a variety of opportunities for interaction through which learners can develop their language skills. He also added that SM may present language in a stimulating and valuable way, which may increase in-class participation and task engagement. Similar studies have also revealed that the most reported feature for Web 2.0 applications such as SM is the language-learning prone environment they provide (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014; Newgarden, 2009; Wang & Vasquez, 2012). An and Williams (2010) surveyed 14 teachers to examine how and why they use Web 2.0 technology for teaching purposes. The authors found that teachers considered Web 2.0 tools as easily accessible, while also offering opportunities for students to communicate and interact with peers and other users of the target language. Teachers also added that such platforms are easy to use, flexible, increase students' motivation, and turn them into "creators of knowledge" (i.e., learners create content instead of only being on the receiving end of the learning process).

In light of these ongoing technological advancements, Godwin-Jones (2015) encourages language teachers to become not only competent in the language they are teaching, but also capable of coping with the rapid changes in technology. In doing so, language teachers may take advantage of the valuable opportunities that new software and applications offer to stimulate

language learning and facilitate L2 teaching. In my personal experience as a language teacher, I have noticed that my Saudi students heavily use SM for many purposes, such as to engage in business transactions, for entertainment, and for their own education. I have therefore decided to make use of the tools which are already at-hand for these students to help improve their language skills. Further personal observations have also revealed that the number of accounts dedicated to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to the Saudi population in SM are increasing, making it necessary to examine the potential that these platforms may have on language learning. As students' perceptions of technology impact how effective that technology is for language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2015), examining Saudi learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of SM as a EFL tool is also essential.

In response to Godwin-Jones' (2015) call for language teachers to develop skills that enable them to evaluate how new technologies cater to their students' needs and preferences, the current research examines the perceptions of Saudi students regarding the appropriateness of SM applications as language learning tools. More importantly, this investigation aims to discover whether Saudi students would be favourable to using SM applications for language learning purposes, and to examine whether factors such as language proficiency influences their attitudes and preferences for specific SM.

Because this is a manuscript-based MA thesis, Chapter Two consists of a research paper ("a full submittable draft of a manuscript", as indicated in the MA thesis guidelines), in which parts of this chapter are repeated in condensed form.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Introduction**

The use of technology has had a significant impact on the development of a number of professional fields, including education. In particular, second and foreign language (L2 henceforth) teaching is undergoing rapid changes in teaching methodology. Researchers believe that the use these new technologies has the potential to address key problems present in the language-teaching environment, such as limited classroom time (Cardoso & Collins, 2016), the low motivation of students (Chapelle, 2009; Ekoc, 2014; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014), and limited opportunities for output practice (Chapelle, 2009). In addition, the pedagogical use of technology may contribute in the development of a constructivist learning context that has great potential to optimize the language learning process (Roblyer, 2003; Wang & Vasquez, 2012).

Following a social constructivist approach to language learning (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Bannan Haag, 1995; Jonassen, 1999), this study aims to investigate Saudi students' perceptions towards using social media applications (SM; e.g., WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube) as pedagogical tools for language learning. Previous research has reported that students hold positive perceptions towards using SM for academic purposes (e.g., Cheng, 2012; Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Lee & Markey, 2014). However, researchers have also reported a possible variance in perceptions depending on proficiency level (Gamble & Wilkins, 2014). Contrary to studies reported above, others, in the context of general education, found that students hold negative attitudes towards using SM for educational purposes (Venkatesh, Rabah, Fusaro, Couture, Varela, & Alexander, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to reveal whether the findings reported in previous research will hold in the context of Saudi Arabia, and to examine whether language proficiency in the target L2 will influence their

attitudes and preferences for social media applications for their own learning. This will greatly inform teachers who consider using SM for teaching an L2, particularly within the Saudi postsecondary context.

### **Literature Review**

This section provides an overview of research that discusses the effectiveness of popular SM applications (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) on L2 learning, and highlights some of the challenges reported when using SM for educational purposes. The literature review also provides some background information on student perceptions towards adopting different SM for educational purposes, with a focus on language learning.

The current literature suggests that, in general, SM can be an effective learning tool (e.g., Castrillo, 2013; Mitchell, 2012). For instance, while Wang and Vasquez (2014) concluded that Facebook should be used for pedagogical activities as it can extend language practice outside the classroom, others attested that the pedagogical use of Twitter can have a positive impact on students' motivation to write in the L2 (Castrillo, 2013), on the development of communicative and cultural competence (Borau et al., 2009), and on grammar acquisition (Hattem, 2013, 2014). Contrary to these findings, Aloraini (2015) and Wang and Vasquez (2014) have found that while SM use increases the quantity of students' writing, it has no influence on writing quality.

Learner perceptions have revealed overall positive attitudes towards using SM for academic purposes (e.g., Borau et al., 2009; Cheng, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014). However, some students in similar learning contexts hold negative attitudes towards the pedagogical use of SM as they are wary of sharing their social network with teachers and classmates (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Researchers have also reported that proficiency may explain a possible variance in learner perceptions (Gamble & Wilkins, 2014). Given these mixed findings, the lack of studies that

focus on Arab users of SM, particularly those from Saudi Arabia, and the scarcity of research investigating more recent SM applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram), examining Saudi students' perceptions towards SM applications would inform teachers who are considering adopting these technologies for extending classroom practice.

### **The Role of SM in Learning a Second/Foreign Language**

SM applications (apps), most of which are supported by mobile devices (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat), allow registered users to create content (e.g., An & Williams, 2010), as they can share posts (usually text), pictures, or videos of their everyday lives. As such, SM platforms have been receiving increasing attention for their potential to be used as pedagogical tools to enhance the L2 teaching and learning experience (e.g., Jones, 2015; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). SM is also characterized by its constant online availability and a friendly environment that encourages communication and interaction (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014; Newgarden, 2009; Wang & Vasquez, 2012), in addition to offering opportunities for L2 practice outside the walls of the language classroom (Ekoc, 2014).

Previous studies have discussed the pedagogical potential of SM. For example, Cerdà and Planas (2011) stated that while social networking apps, such as Facebook, are not designed for academic purposes, they provide educational benefits by promoting interaction, online discussions, and group work, especially for students who hesitate or shy away from participating in face-to-face activities. Other scholars have claimed that SM is capable of expanding students' learning experience, as it provides them with opportunities to interact and communicate easily, potentially resulting in more effective learning (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). A meta-analysis conducted by Wang and Vasquez (2012) suggests that one of the most important benefits offered by Web 2.0 apps is its ability to establish an ideal learning environment. In these studies,

however, Wikis and Blogs were the most commonly investigated Web 2.0 apps, with little or no attention given to SM and virtual worlds (Wang & Vasquez, 2012). In this study, we contribute to the understanding of the effectiveness of SM on L2 learning by examining the most recent and popular platforms.

**Facebook.** Given that Facebook is one of the first highly used SM platforms and the top SM with active users (Chaffey, 2017), it has been profoundly influential in inspiring the development of other recent SM platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat. Therefore, findings from Facebook-based research can be applied to similar SM platforms. Although Facebook is not investigated in the current study as the target Saudi learners do not use it frequently (see the rationale for this decision in Method), we consider the pedagogical implications found in the related literature to be relevant to the other SM platforms included in the study.

In attempt to investigate the effects of Facebook use on language learning, Wang and Vasquez (2014) examined the quality and quantity of Chinese-speaking English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' writing performance when using this platform. The authors reported a significant difference in quantity of writing between the treatment group using Facebook and the controls, but not in quality. They concluded by suggesting the use of Facebook for activities outside the classroom in hopes that learners would improve some aspects of their writing, particularly those that do not require teachers' feedback.

The pedagogical use of Facebook has also been qualitatively analyzed in an English as a *foreign* language (EFL) context. Ekoc (2014), for example, created a Facebook page to observe the interactions of pre-intermediate students when using it for academic purposes, with a focus on their willingness to interact and to answer questions initiated by peers or the teacher. Qualitative analysis revealed that some students did not answer questions or interact with the

teacher's contributions, while others were interactive with their teacher and peers. The study also reported that participants' contributions revolved mainly around daily, academic, and cultural issues, and that the topic of discussion usually affected their interaction (students interacted the most with funny cartoons and humorous posts). The researcher concluded by advocating the use of Facebook as a source of extra input for EFL learners, and as a method that teachers can use to boost students' interaction skills, arguing that "social media interactions are more flexible in generating discussion on language learning, social issues and gives further opportunity to use the language interactively" (p. 24).

In another qualitative study, Mitchell (2012) investigated student motivation in using Facebook in an intensive English for Speakers of Other Languages course. Initially, participants (the majority of whom were from Saudi Arabia) mentioned using Facebook for purposes such as making friends and to learn about American culture. Although not the main reason for joining the network, most participants also indicated that they improved their English and increased the opportunities for input (e.g., reading) and output language practice (e.g. writing). The study concludes by inviting teachers to use Facebook to teach language lessons that tap into students' social motivations and willingness to explore cultures, such as socio-pragmatics, in order to make the lessons congruent with student motivations.

**Twitter.** The role of Twitter in language learning/teaching has also been investigated in the CALL literature (e.g., Borau et al., 2009; Hattem, 2013, 2014). Newgarden (2009) reviewed its use in an ESL context and reported that Twitter-based interactions have the potential to positively impact classroom community building. She concluded that the real potential of Twitter lies in the accessibility, reachability, and connectivity afforded by the technology, in which

students feel part of the L2 community, and they have the ability to shape their identities as English speakers and negotiate for meaning beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Other studies have found that Twitter use can positively change learning attitudes towards reading and writing tasks (Cheng, 2012) and may enhance learner motivation to write in their L2 (Castrillo, 2013). Borau et al. (2009) found that Twitter was positively perceived after its application to the classroom, and that it has the potential to enhance learners' communicative, sociolinguistic and cultural competencies without requiring face-to-face human interaction. The use of Twitter has also been shown to significantly enhance students writing skills (Castrillo, 2013) and their overall learning experience (Hattem, 2014).

The impact of utilizing Twitter as a medium to promote the acquisition of language features such as grammar and vocabulary is well attested in research. Hattem (2013) indicated that using Twitter in an intensive English grammar course yielded many positive outcomes. Some of the most significant advantages were this SM's ability to help students notice targeted grammatical features, enhance long-term memory capacity, promote positive attitudes concerning its use for learning, and improve grammar skills while aiding students in the process of proceduralization. Perez-Sabater and Montero-Fleta (2015), on the other hand, aimed to discover whether Twitter promoted vocabulary acquisition when complemented by teacher and peer feedback. Results indicated that students successfully incorporated target vocabulary into their "Tweets", or postings, but their success rate in posttests was not statistically significant. However, 67% of participants reported enthusiasm towards using Twitter for learning English, and considered it a significant source of L2 input. According to the authors, the most important outcome of this approach to learning was engaging the participants in activities beyond the classroom, which contributed to a feeling of being part of a community of L2 learners.



**Instagram.** SM platforms can provide rich and enhanced input in a relaxed, stress-free environment, qualities necessary for language learning (Gass, 1997; Gass, Mackey, & Pica, 1998; Krashen, 1985). While previous research has focused on popular SM applications such as Facebook and Twitter, it falls short in reporting the effectiveness of more recent SM applications such as Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp, and in revealing students' perceptions of such platforms when used for pedagogical purposes. In an attempt to enrich this area, the author investigated the use of Instagram as an EFL learning tool by Saudi students, which inspired the conceptualization of the current research. Given that some teachers post language lessons on Instagram (e.g., a post explaining the use of an idiom with links to multimedia resources), Aloraini (2015) conducted a corpus-driven study that examined whether two lesson types (vocabulary or grammar) affected students' output and the amount of feedback they received (from teachers and peers). Quantitative analysis of student responses for each lesson type revealed that vocabulary lessons elicited more output from students. However, in terms of quality (output quality was measured by the number of errors, whether pragmatic, grammar, or vocabulary), vocabulary- and grammar-related posts were alike, as students demonstrated poor output quality for both. In regard to user feedback, the two lesson types did not differ, as there was little to no feedback provided for these activities. Despite these not-so-optimistic results, the researcher suggested that Instagram could still be used effectively for EFL learning, particularly as a source of extra input and practice, which are often limited in the foreign language context.

**The pitfalls of social media use.** The discussion above highlights the positive findings with regard to the use of SM for language-learning purposes. However, the literature also reports negative results. For example, An and Williams' (2010) study concluded that the openness of Web 2.0 platforms made some students feel uncomfortable when using the technology (e.g., self-

conscious and afraid of losing face). Other students raised concerns regarding the grammar and spelling errors often encountered in SM posts and messages (Mitchell, 2012). Adapting tasks and assignments to suit the nature of these platforms presents another challenge, as the success of the implementation of SM in L2 education can impact learning effectiveness (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). Al-Khalifa (2008) and Castrillo (2013) point out that students using Twitter expressed negative opinions regarding the 140-character restriction imposed by the platform. Students also reported that they are easily distracted by additional features such as instant messaging (Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, & Abu-Melhim, 2014), or become anxious trying to keep up with their peers' posts (Castrillo, 2013).

SM platforms also known to distract students from work: participants in Mitchell (2012), for example, expressed that they would consider leaving Facebook if it started to interfere with “obligations” such as schoolwork. However, we do not know whether students would feel the same if SM were used as L2 learning tools to extend classroom activities (i.e., when teachers supervise the SM platform and provide extra materials and activities for practice). Given the mixed results involving students' attitudes (which will be explored in details in the next section) and the fact that we do know very little about the perceptions of L2 learners towards the use of SM as learning tools, it is important to examine this aspect of SM use and its effects on learning (Godwin-Jones, 2015). Because this is one of the goals of this study, the next section reviews literature concerning students' perceptions of using different SM platforms as pedagogical tools.

### **Research on Students' Perceptions Towards SM as a Learning Tool**

In addition to the examining the effectiveness of SM on L2 learning, research has also examined students' perceptions of the pedagogical use of such platforms to explore the rationale behind student preferences. Overall, most studies indicate that students hold positive attitudes

(e.g., Lee & Markey, 2014), but at least one reveals a relatively pessimistic outcome (Venkatesh et al., 2016). When it comes to adopting SM for language learning purposes, studies show that perceptions and uses vary based on proficiency level (e.g., Gamble & Wilkins, 2014; Jones, 2015), as will be discussed below.

**Students' perceptions of SM as a learning tool in general education.** Although there is a scarcity of studies on learners' perception of SM as pedagogical tools, existing studies suggest that, overall, learner attitudes towards them are positive and that students find them to be fun and effective. For instance, Lee and Markey (2014) investigated students' perceptions of using different Web 2.0 applications (i.e., Twitter, blogs, and podcasts) in an intercultural exchange project. At the end of the project, students rated these tools highly (4.5 out of 5). Findings also revealed that approximately 60% of students had positive attitudes towards the pedagogical use of the adopted technology.

As indicated earlier, however, studies have also reported learners' negative attitudes towards the pedagogical use of SM. Venkatesh et al. (2016) surveyed over 15,000 students and 2,600 instructors from 12 different universities in Québec, Canada. One of their aims was to investigate the relationship between users' perceptions towards Information and Communication Technology (ICT), including SM, and course effectiveness. Their findings indicated a statistically significant difference between students' and instructors' perceptions of the pedagogical efficacy of various ICT tools: instructors' perceptions were largely predicted by their perceived effectiveness of ICT, while students' perceptions were influenced by their expectations of traditional learning methods (e.g., lecture style presentations and challenging materials). The researchers noted that care has to be taken when integrating new technologies at the university level, as students associate effective teaching with formal instruction (i.e.,

lectures). They highlighted the fact that “students prefer not to engage in social media for pedagogical purposes, reserving its use for non-academic pursuits” (p. 21). As a result, Venkatesh et al. (2016) argue that teachers should not neglect traditional pedagogical methods, and warn teachers that students may not always be open to the use of innovative pedagogy. The question remains whether such findings will hold for L2 learners, as will be addressed in the following section (and in this thesis).

**Students’ perceptions of SM as a learning tool in L2 education.** The literature indicates that L2 students also hold overall positive perceptions towards adopting SM for language learning. For instance, Bani-Hani et al. (2014) investigated the perceptions of Arabic speaking EFL students towards the use of Facebook for language learning (with a focus on writing) and the perceived challenges they faced. The participants came from intermediate to advanced proficiency levels, and they were asked to join a Facebook group created specifically for the study. Results indicated that most students (88%) viewed Facebook positively, and felt that it contributed to their improvement in writing and vocabulary. Interestingly, 91% of respondents indicated that they carefully edited their posts for spelling and grammar before publishing them to enhance the quality of their writing.

Other studies report mixed findings in student perceptions, which are potentially influenced by proficiency level. Gamble and Wilkins (2014), for example, investigated Japanese students’ attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of Facebook in EFL learning. They surveyed 97 students at the beginner intermediate level from three different private universities. Quantitative findings indicated that students showed some negative attitudes towards completing language-learning activities on Facebook. However, the qualitative analysis of interviews with the participants revealed more positive attitudes, contradicting their quantitative findings. Therefore,

it is unclear whether such findings would be generalizable to other cultural contexts, such as the Saudi postsecondary context addressed in this study.

In a context more closely related to that of the current study, Riazi (2007) examined the perceptions of Arabic female learners majoring in English language and literature, from various educational levels, towards using different L2 learning strategies. A questionnaire was distributed to collect data on students' perceived use of language learning strategies (including direct strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation; and indirect strategies: metacognitive, affective, and social), taken from the Strategy Inventory in Language Learning (Oxford, 1990). Results show that both freshmen and juniors favoured the use of direct strategies for learning over indirect ones (including social strategies). Although the study did not focus on learners' perceptions of SM as learning tools, it raises a question that is closely related to the current study: will Saudi students hold negative attitudes towards SM, given that other members of this population generally dislike social strategies for learning? This study also reported that freshmen participants showed more tendencies to use more of a variety of learning strategies than juniors; this also calls into question whether the participants' level of proficiency has an effect on their attitudes towards the use of SM. This issue will be addressed in the following section.

### **SM Use and Proficiency Level**

Research suggests that the uses of SM can differ due to language proficiency. In Jones's (2015) investigation of the use of SM and social networking platforms in learning a minority language (Welsh), the author explored which technologies Welsh L2 learners used to practice the new language and how they used them. Results indicate that although all participants used SM for learning Welsh, they varied in what type of applications they used and how they explored them as pedagogical tools. Beginners reflected a basic use of SM as they listened to and watched

Welsh programs, searched for information, and tried to make contacts. Advanced learners, on the other hand, showed more creativity and tended to utilize this technology to engage in SM language practice groups and blogging.

Other studies have also reported a variance in the ways technology, including SM, is used by learners as a result of proficiency differences. For instance, Li, Snow, Jiang, and Edward (2015) investigated whether there were differences in the use of technology (including SM), among urban adolescents from a variety of language backgrounds, with varying levels of English proficiency. Among the reported results, researchers found that language learners with higher self-reported English skills used technology in a wider variety of ways (e.g., for blogging, Internet-based research, and reading) than those with a lower self-reported English proficiency.

### **The Current Study**

As indicated above, research indicates that the pedagogical use of SM can have a positive effect on learning (e.g., Borau et al., 2009; Castrillo, 2013; Hattem, 2013, 2014; Mitchell, 2012), student motivation (An & Williams, 2010; Castrillo, 2013; Cheng, 2012; Ekoc, 2014; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014), and on the level of enjoyment while completing L2 activities (Lee & Markey, 2014). For these reasons, many scholars believe that SM should be incorporated into the L2 curricula in order to extend practice outside the classroom (Wang & Vasquez, 2014). However, research on students' perceptions towards the use of SM applications for language learning purposes has reported mixed findings. While most have suggested positive learner perceptions (e.g., Bani-Hani, et al., 2014; Borau et al., 2009; Cheng, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014), at least one has indicated that students perceive the pedagogical use of SM negatively (Venkatesh et al., 2016). In the L2 context, on the other hand, there is a certain degree of

variance in perceptions, which is sometimes attributed to students' proficiency in the target language (e.g., Gamble & Wilkins, 2014).

Godwin-Jones (2015) highlights the significance of the learning context and learners' views towards the uses of various technologies, and stresses that these factors can affect the degree to which these technologies are effective in L2 learning. Therefore, it is important to investigate whether students are comfortable, confident, or hold positive attitudes towards the use of any particular technology before it is deemed appropriate for use in the language classroom. For these reasons, the purpose of this research is to investigate Saudi student perceptions, particularly with regard to SM's usefulness and students' affective feelings towards its adoption for learning EFL (e.g., the degree to which they enjoy using SM and how learner-friendly it is). This study also aims to examine whether the findings reported on students' perceptions of SM as pedagogical tools will remain true in the Saudi context, and whether students' SM preferences differ according to the targeted language skill (e.g., students might prefer an application to learn vocabulary, but favour a different one for practicing listening or speaking). It highlights three applications that have not yet been investigated thoroughly in the literature (WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat), and one that was added based on a preliminary survey involving Saudi EFL students (Twitter – see forthcoming discussion in Method). The study will address the following research questions (RQs):

1. What are students' perceptions of the usefulness of SM applications (WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter) and their affective feelings towards their pedagogical use?
  - Are these perceptions affected by users' proficiency level in English?
2. Are there differences in student use of SM applications for different language purposes?

3. Which SM application(s) do students prefer for learning English?
  - Are there differences in students' SM choices according to the targeted language skills?
4. What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of learning EFL through SM within the Saudi context?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participant pool consisted of a convenient sampling of 100 randomly selected participants (see Table 1 for details) studying English at King Saud University (College of Languages and Translation) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The participants were recruited from two different proficiency levels (beginners and advanced) to address RQ1 and RQ2. Intermediate-level students were not surveyed to avoid borderline cases such as high-beginner and low-advanced students. Only one participant reported coming from a country other than Saudi Arabia, and so his survey was not included in the analysis. The other 99 participants were Saudi adults (mean age 23 years), speak Arabic as their mother tongue, and are learning EFL. After graduation from this language program, students are expected to work as English-Arabic translators. This particular program could be classified as an intensive English course, where students are exposed to explicit English language instruction and are expected to engage in significant language practice.

Table 1

#### *Distribution of Participants*

Gender	Beginners	Advanced level
Males	24	25
Females	25	25



Students volunteered to participate in this study during an initial recruitment process, after which they signed a consent form that was provided to them in Arabic. Care was taken to assure that the survey data and interviews would remain confidential, and that only the researcher and her supervisor would have access to them.

### **Materials**

Personal observations and communication with family members and friends indicated that Saudis use a variety of SM applications, eight among which were heavily used. The eight applications were: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Youtube, and Path. However, some SM applications were more frequently used by Saudis; therefore, in order to limit the focus of the study and thus obtain reliable results, an initial survey containing only two questions (Appendix A) was created for this purpose. The survey was conducted online via SurveyMonkey; the survey link was published through SM (mainly WhatsApp) to reach a large number of Saudi SM users. The first question asked participants to indicate their most used SM app out of the previously mentioned eight applications. Participants were allowed to choose up to 4 applications from the available eight options (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Youtube, and Path). The second question asked participants about their nationality in order to eliminate responses coming from other countries.

This preliminary survey yielded a total of 800 responses, with only 22 respondents who indicated coming from a country other than Saudi Arabia; consequently, their answers were discarded. Participants who did not respond to the second question were also eliminated (three responses) and were not included in the initial data pool. The total number of responses included was therefore 775. The majority of participants (85.29%) indicated that they used WhatsApp the most frequently, followed by Snapchat (77.16%), Instagram (58.44%), and Twitter (41.42%).

Facebook received the lowest rate of use (only 3.23%) and, consequently, it was excluded from this study. YouTube was also eliminated as it does not allow quick creation of content (i.e. it takes time to create, edit, and upload a video on YouTube) unlike the other targeted SM platforms. Therefore, only the top four most used SM applications that allowed simple and quick creation and sharing of content were included in the current study: WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter.

Following the results of this initial task, a survey was created for the current study (see Appendix B), which was distributed to King Saud University students, to be completed in Arabic to avoid any language-related issues. The survey consisted of two parts: the first was designated to collect demographic information while the second contained three subsections. The first subsection consisted of four tables for quantitative analysis (one table for each SM application). Each table in the first subsection consisted of 17 statements, which were inspired by or adopted from previous research on learners' perceptions of SM. Students responded to items 1 to 11 using a six-point Likert scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree" to measure the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Participants responded to items 12 to 17 using a six-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always" to measure the frequency of using the targeted SM applications for specific language purposes (e.g., frequency of writing, speaking, and listening). The six-point Likert scale was adopted to avoid the "neutral" option (cf. a five-point Likert scale where participants have the option of picking the middle option, 3). The key words in each statement were bolded to call the participants' attention to what is relevant. The second subsection consisted of a ranking question to compare the four selected applications. Respondents were asked to assign each application a number from one to four (4 being their favorite) according to the statements they read. For example:

My favorite SM application for learning English.

WhatsApp ( ) Snapchat ( ) Instagram ( ) Twitter ( )

The third subsection consisted of three open-ended questions designed to collect data regarding the perceived advantages, disadvantages, and other uses of the SM applications, such as: “What are the advantages and disadvantages of using SM applications for language learning?”, and “Explain why and how you use each of the following SM applications.” The third subsection also had a preference question: “Choose one or two of the discussed SM applications to learn the skills listed below”, which focused on discovering whether students’ preferences would vary due to the targeted language skill (for instance, students might prefer a particular application to learn vocabulary and a different one for listening and speaking). Throughout the survey, higher values were always associated with positive perceptions to avoid failure in understanding the value system adopted. Participants had to choose 6 from the Likert scale to indicate that they “strongly agreed” with a statement, or write 4 next to their favorite application (and 1 was always associated with the lowest possible score) when they are asked to rank the targeted applications.

Open-ended semi-structured oral interviews (Appendix C; slightly adapted from Marissa, 2013), which lasted approximately 30 minutes each, were also conducted at the end of the data collection process to collect in-depth, detailed data about the participants’ perceptions of their English-learning experience using the four SM applications targeted by this research. Participants (n = 14) were randomly selected. The open-ended questions from the survey and the oral interviews were analyzed qualitatively.

**Procedure**

In order to assess the effectiveness of the questionnaire in answering the research questions, the survey was piloted with 4 adult Saudi females living in Montréal, Canada, who identified themselves as English language learners and who claimed to use SM applications on a daily basis. The survey was also piloted with two MA students in Applied Linguistics at Concordia University. Changes were made based on their feedback to ensure that the survey was as clear and effective as possible. The researcher then translated the survey and asked another Arabic speaker to verify the translation. The final version was then pilot-tested by a small group of five Arabic-speaking ESL learners.

Participants were asked to voluntarily take the survey at the beginning of one of their English classes at King Saud University, which took them approximately 20 minutes to complete. The teachers briefly explained the scope of the study, asked participants to read and sign a consent form (in their L1, Arabic), and explained how to answer the survey questions. Fourteen randomly selected females (7 from the advanced level and 7 from the beginner level) were asked to participate in a 15-to-20-minute interview (in Arabic) with the researcher using SOMA Messenger (an application that provides free video and voice calling as well as messaging services). The interviews were audio-recorded with GarageBand software, and then transcribed and translated.

**Design and Data Analysis**

The study followed a non-experimental research design. Proficiency level was operationalized as the participants' formal level of proficiency as assigned by the institution. Saudi learners' perceptions towards the usefulness of SM as language learning tool was derived from participant responses to items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9 in the questionnaire (first subsection).

Students' affective feelings towards SM for language learning purposes was defined as participants' responses to items 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11 in the questionnaire (first subsection). The related quantitative data were used to answer the first RQ. Items 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 (first subsection) were used to answer the second RQ by means of quantitative analysis, in addition to qualitative analysis for item 3.3 (why and how students use SM). The second subsection (ranking question) and item 3.4 (preference question) were used to quantitatively answer the third RQ, in addition to item 5 from the survey.

The fourth RQ was answered qualitatively by categorizing the data from the open-ended questions (items 3.1 and 3.2) in the survey, as well as the oral interviews. The interviews and the open-ended questions were translated and transcribed by the researcher and double-checked by another researcher, and then analyzed according to the coding methods proposed by Saldaña (2009) and L'Écuyer (1990). Based on these two authors' recommendations, we initially categorized the participants' responses based on the general questions that guided this research (i.e., learners' perception of SM with respect to their strengths and weaknesses as pedagogical tools) and relevant subcomponents (e.g., the tools' pedagogical affordances). In-vivo coding was chosen as a first-cycle coding method in an attempt to more fully encapsulate participants' intended meanings. Codes were extracted verbatim from the survey and the transcripts and inserted into columns in a spreadsheet. Afterwards, pattern coding was used as a second-cycle coding method to group these verbatim codes by similarity to create themes, categories, and sub-categories, according to the main themes adopted in this study, namely, the participants' overall perceptions of L2 learning with SM, and the pedagogical affordances that these technologies provided in terms of their social, educational, and language learning potential.

For the quantitative data, a two-way analysis of variance ( $2 \times 4$  ANOVA) was run to answer the first RQ and part of the third RQ in order to report the degree of statistical significance. Therefore, the level of significance (alpha) was reduced to  $p = 0.017$  in order to account for the number of ANOVAs (total of 3) carried on the data set. The remaining quantitative data were answered through means of frequency counts.

## Results

### Quantitative Data Results

**ANOVAS.** An ANOVA was run to answer RQ 1 (perceptions of SM usefulness and affective feelings) and RQ 3 (which application students prefer for learning). Cronbach alphas for the survey items used to report the usefulness and affective feelings were calculated to measure how closely related the items were as a group (internal consistency) and they all were found to be  $> 0.80$ . Mauchly's test of sphericity was not significant; therefore, the univariate approach to mixed between-within ANOVA was followed. The results are discussed according to the descriptive statistics (based on means and standard deviations) in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2

#### *Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Usefulness*

Application	<u>Beginners</u>		<u>Advanced</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
WhatsApp	14.62	4.74	14.85	6.58
Snapchat	20.46	5.11	19.12	6.95
Instagram	20.04	6.41	18.26	6.84
Twitter	20.67	5.42	23.56	5.17

For Saudi students' perceptions towards the usefulness of SM, there was a significant main effect of application type,  $F(3, 246) = 30.66, p = 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.272$ ; a non-significant main effect for proficiency level,  $F(1, 82) = 0.001, p = 0.998, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$ , and a significant interaction between application type and proficiency level,  $F(3, 246) = 3.58, p = 0.014, \eta_p^2 = 0.014$ . Follow-up pairwise comparisons of the simple effects of application type within the advanced learners group after a Bonferroni adjustment indicated the following significant differences: WhatsApp was perceived as less useful than the other three,  $ps < 0.49, ds < 1.086$ , Twitter was more useful than the other three,  $ps = 0.001, ds < 1.086$ , while Snapchat and Instagram did not differ from each other,  $p = 1.00, d = 0.151$  (WhatsApp < Snapchat = Instagram < Twitter).

For beginner students, follow up pairwise comparisons of the simple effects of application after a Bonferroni adjustment yielded the following significant differences: WhatsApp was different from the other three applications, being perceived as less useful,  $ps = .001, ds < 0.891$ , while Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter were nearly identical in usefulness,  $ps = 1.00, ds < 0.086$  (WhatsApp < Snapchat = Instagram = Twitter). Another set of pairwise comparisons of simple effects was conducted to see if the two proficiency levels differed within a specific application type. The only application where a significant preference for usefulness was shown between levels was Twitter,  $p = 0.015, d = 0.544$ .

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Affective Feelings*

Application	<u>Beginners</u>		<u>Advanced</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
WhatsApp	17.39	4.27	17.53	5.66
Snapchat	21.51	5.34	20.82	6.27
Instagram	19.88	6.09	18.97	6.40
Twitter	20.67	5.59	23.85	5.37

As for Saudi students' affective feelings (e.g., how friendly SM platforms are for learning), the main effect of application type was significant,  $F(3, 246) = 16.329, p = 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.166$ , but the main effect of proficiency level was not significant,  $F(1, 82) = 0.261, p = 0.611, \eta_p^2 = 0.003$ , and there was non significant interaction between application type and proficiency level,  $F(3, 246) = 3.296, p = 0.021, \eta_p^2 = 0.039$ . In order to explore the main effect of application type, pairwise comparisons were performed. The results indicated that students had significantly less affective feelings for using WhatsApp for learning than Snapchat and Twitter  $ps = .001, ds < 0.707$ ; and Instagram had significantly less affective feelings from students than Twitter,  $p = .002, d = 0.391$ .



Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Use Outside the Classroom*

Application	<u>Beginners</u>		<u>Advanced</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
WhatsApp	3.33	1.44	3.32	1.58
Snapchat	3.80	1.35	3.42	1.62
Instagram	3.56	1.60	3.26	1.62
Twitter	3.84	1.52	4.44	1.46

Regarding Saudi students' preference of SM for language learning, the main effect of application type was significant,  $F(3, 258) = 9.359, p = 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.098$ , but the main effect of proficiency level was not,  $F(1, 86) = 0.035, p = 0.851, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$ ; in addition, there was no interaction between application type and proficiency level,  $F(3, 258) = 3.209, p = 0.024, \eta_p^2 = 0.036$ . Pairwise comparisons were performed to explore the main effect of application type, and they indicated that Saudi students are significantly more willing to use Twitter outside the classroom than the other three applications,  $ps < .013, ds < 0.468$ .

**Frequencies.** To answer the second RQ concerning differences in students' use of SM for different language purposes, frequency counts were used to tabulate items 12 to 17 in the survey for respondents who selected "sometimes," "usually," or "always". Related percentages are summarized in Table 5 for comparison.

Table 5

*Frequency of Social Media Use for Different Language Purposes*

	<u>WhatsApp</u>		<u>Snapchat</u>		<u>Instagram</u>		<u>Twitter</u>	
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
Frequency of use to <b>communicate with friends and family</b> (possibly in Arabic)	98%	98%	65%	64%	37%	23%	29%	44%
Frequency of use to <b>communicate in English</b>	12%	28%	34%	31%	25%	19%	31%	53%
Frequency of <b>writing</b>	81%	86%	47%	44%	23%	19%	33%	53%
Frequency of <b>speaking</b>	71%	74%	40%	44%	16%	13%	17%	25%
Frequency of <b>reading</b>	79%	80%	51%	56%	48%	50%	68%	80%
Frequency of <b>listening</b>	57%	66%	87%	77%	56%	37%	42%	64%

*Note.* B = Beginners; A = Advanced.

As the table shows, WhatsApp stood out as the main SM application for communication with family and friends, possibly in participants' L1 (Arabic). For communication in English, beginner students seemed to use the target language more frequently in Snapchat, while advanced learners favoured Twitter. As for writing, WhatsApp stood out as the most popular application for both proficiency groups, followed by Snapchat for beginners, and Twitter for the advanced learners. Results also indicate that both groups used WhatsApp for speaking, followed

by Snapchat. With regard to reading, both groups seem to read more in WhatsApp followed by Twitter. Finally, Snapchat stood out as the favoured application used for listening activities.

Table 6

*Frequency Results of the Ranking Question (Item 3.3)*

	<u>WhatsApp</u>		<u>Snapchat</u>		<u>Instagram</u>		<u>Twitter</u>	
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
Favourite SM application to <b>interact with friends and family</b>	66%	76%	16%	4%	4%	4%	14%	16%
Favourite SM application for <b>learning English.</b>	14%	10%	22%	12%	25%	16%	39%	62%
Favourite SM application to <b>practice English.</b>	10%	8%	35%	24%	18%	18%	37%	50%
Overall <b>favourite SM</b> application	20%	33%	33%	18%	14%	10%	33%	39%

*Note.* B = Beginners; A = Advanced.

Frequency counts were also run for items 3.3 (SM ranking question) and 3.4 (SM preference question) in the survey to answer the third RQ concerning the application that students prefer for English learning. Related percentages are summarized in Tables 6 and 7 for comparison purposes. Table 6 shows that both proficiency groups prefer WhatsApp for interaction with friends and family. The table also shows that both groups not only prefer Twitter for learning English, but also to practice the language and as an overall favourite SM application. Thus, both groups reflected similar preferences for the type of SM application in this regard.

Table 7

*Frequency Results of SM Preference for Targeted Language skills (Item 3.4)*

	<u>WhatsApp</u>		<u>Snapchat</u>		<u>Instagram</u>		<u>Twitter</u>	
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
Most effective application to learn <b>listening</b>	16%	15%	57%	53%	21%	16%	6%	16%
Most effective application to learn <b>speaking</b>	33%	36%	47%	46%	8%	7%	12%	11%
Most effective application to learn <b>writing</b>	50%	41%	4%	3%	6%	9%	40%	47%
Most effective application to learn <b>reading</b>	28%	30%	4%	7%	18%	13%	50%	50%
Most effective application to learn <b>grammar</b>	36%	21%	18%	10%	15%	22%	31%	47%
Most effective application to learn <b>vocabulary</b>	32%	26%	18%	14%	27%	18%	23%	42%

*Note.* B = Beginners; A = Advanced.

The results in Table 7, on the other hand, indicate that students' preferences for SM applications vary according to the targeted language skill. For both groups, Snapchat stands out as the most effective SM to learn listening and speaking. Both groups also chose Twitter as the most effective application to learn reading. However, for learning writing, grammar, and vocabulary,

students differed in their choices of SM: beginners perceived WhatsApp as the most effective application to learn those skills while advanced learners chose Twitter.

### Qualitative Data Results

**Open-ended questions.** In the first two open-ended questions, participants were asked about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using SM as a pedagogical tool to learn English (RQ 4). The responses of the two groups are summarized in the following table, after they were subjected to a thematic analysis (see Appendix D for the details of each theme).

Table 8

*Participants' Response to the First Two Open-ended Questions: General themes*

	<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Disadvantages</u>
Beginners	General advantages	General disadvantages
	Communication advantages	Communication disadvantages
	Educational advantages	Educational disadvantages
	Language learning advantages	Language learning disadvantages Health concerns
Advanced	General advantages	General disadvantages
	Communication advantages	Communication disadvantages
	Educational advantages	Educational disadvantages
	Language learning advantages	Language learning disadvantages Health concerns Technical issues

Table 8 indicates that the same themes emerged in both groups. General advantages were operationalized as such because they relate to the use of Internet and mobile phones, not exclusively to SM. In this category, both groups highlighted that SM is characterized by “availability,” “affordability,” user-friendliness, time saving, and familiarity (see Appendix D for

a list of interview quotes and related themes). As for its advantages for communication, students indicated that SM allows them to “connect with people from all around the world,” and that they use SM to “communicate with family and friends”. Both groups also mentioned educational advantages such as “learn[ing] anywhere-anytime”, the availability of content and resources (e.g., pictures and videos) that can enhance learning, and opportunities for “continuous learning”, which can even go “beyond what is given in [schools]”. For some participants, SM can be used for both entertainment and education purposes, thus changing the dynamics of the traditional classroom. Finally, the two proficiency groups listed some advantages of SM for language learning, emphasizing that it provides them with opportunities to “practice the language,” “learn new words”, connect with native speakers, and “learn about Western culture and its nature”. Beginner learners added that SM provides shy students with a chance to speak out and participate without being afraid of saying something wrong, while advanced participants mentioned that it is easier to reach language experts through SM in case they needed help or have questions to ask.

As for the disadvantages, seven beginner students (out of 49) stated that there were no disadvantages to report, while only four advanced learners (out of 50) provided the same response. Similar themes emerged in the responses of both groups. For example, when reporting the general disadvantages of SM, a small number of participants ( $n = 7/99$ ) stated that such tools were a “waste of time” and that there is a great chance of losing content (e.g., some posts or tweets get deleted) in such platforms. The communication disadvantages included issues such as the lack of privacy (mentioned by advanced participants) and “the absence of human interaction.” Participants were also concerned about misunderstanding other users or encountering disrespectful incidents, given that users “don’t usually know the person with whom

they are communicating.” Respondents also mentioned educational and language-learning disadvantages that mainly revolved around the accuracy of the resources available in such applications (i.e., the information available on SM is not necessarily accurate) and the absence of supervision. In general, advanced learners expressed concern regarding the absence of effective feedback and the lack of using academic English in social environments. Interestingly, both groups stated that SM exposed them to language errors, which could lead them to think that recurring mistakes are correct or acceptable forms in the target language. As mentioned earlier, students’ responses are summarized in more details in Appendix D.

Qualitative analysis for the third open-ended question (how and why participants use SM applications) indicates that there is a slight trend for beginners to use SM and related activities (e.g., to communicate with family and friends, post pictures, or tweet) more than advanced students (see Appendix E for details), particularly in their use of Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram. Results also show that Twitter was the only SM application that students used for learning in general, learning a language, stating opinions, expressing thoughts, and receiving breaking news. This aligns with the statistical results described earlier, which revealed that students’ preferred SM application for out-of-class use was Twitter (a summary of the participants’ responses for this question are available in Appendix E).

**Participants’ interviews.** The interview questions were designed to answer RQ 4, which asked participants about their perceived advantages and disadvantages of learning EFL through SM, and to obtain information about their use of SM. Because there was an overlap with the results obtained through the open open-ended questions reported above, the focus here will be on the themes and information that persisted during the interview, or that revealed a different aspect of learners’ perceptions of SM use.

The semi-structured interviews revealed that advanced participants (4/7) prefer to use SM (i.e., WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter) as supportive tools for language learning, not as the main method of instruction (interview transcriptions are available in Appendix F). By “supportive,” they mean that they access it in their free time in order to develop their language, or with minimum teacher involvement. One student explained her preference by stating that language learning is better practiced in a classroom setting where face-to-face interaction with a teacher is possible, as this physical existence in one place enables her to express her thoughts clearly:

*Using SM directly to teach language can work for some people, but for me and my personality I like face-to-face learning. I love discussing things I don't understand with the teacher. I can say what I want more clearly when we are physically in one place, not through something, even if it was Snapchat (Student A).*

Others explained this preference by stating that SM constitutes a private space, therefore, using it for language learning with a teacher “ruins” their learning experience. Students also reported that they do not want L2 learning to interfere with their social identities:

*Because my Tweets are sometimes funny or personal, I don't like mixing school with them. I can use it on my own in my free time for indirect learning but not something formal or direct. This problem can be resolved if I open another account to learn, not my personal account. I don't want other people to see my schoolwork (Student F).*

Two out of the seven advanced participants expressed extreme disagreement towards using SM for pedagogical purposes, referring to the privacy concerns raised above: “*I don't think it is a good idea to use Twitter or SM for learning ... Maybe I will not like it anymore if learning is involved*” (Student C). Only one participant (1/7) in this proficiency group stated that she



would use SM for language learning, without any display of privacy concerns. Four (out of 7) of the advanced participants indicated that they would create a separate SM account/s if it/they were to be used for language learning, expressing the same privacy issues discussed earlier.

The analysis of semi-structured interviews for the beginner students revealed that the vast majority (6/7) favour using the four targeted SM (WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter) to support their language learning, but not as a main method of instruction (interview transcriptions are available in Appendix F). However, for beginners, the notion of SM as a “supportive” resource differs from the one expressed by advanced learners. For example, participants in this group showed excitement towards using these tools with their teachers and are even willing to do homework on those platforms:

*“I am with the idea of using SM with the teacher for learning purposes. That would be so exciting! I can’t wait to try it with my teachers”* (Student I).

*“I love the idea of learning through Instagram and SM and I am even excited for it, even if the teacher supervises it. I would love to do homework on Instagram too”* (Student N).

Participants at this proficiency level did not show any concerns about their SM use in learning interfering with their personal space, suggesting that they have no issues in mixing education with fun:

*“We are using those applications anyways so why not use them for learning instead of going to Blackboard and other formal websites. Making use of those applications we are already using makes more sense, and more fun”* (Student J).

*“These days and this generation, we use our devices a lot so it is good to use them for learning as well. I would use my personal account, not create another one for learning. I don’t think learning ruins the platform or take away from the fun we experience there.*

*Actually, I would feel less guilty if I used the application to learn because sometimes I feel like I am just wasting time” (Student K).*

Only one student in this proficiency group expressed reluctance to use SM as a learning method, raising issues regarding her personal space, and preferring tools specific for learning:

*Some applications are designated for learning. I prefer to use those over SM. It bothers me somehow to go to that application and log in to find the materials. So yes, I am with using an application I use daily for learning purposes. I like the idea but it bothers me because SM is my personal place. We should keep education away from the platform; it is going to ruin the platform (Student H).*

Most beginner participants (6/7) indicated using SM for the purpose of practicing English, referring to limited classroom time and the practice opportunities that SM affords them, given Saudi students generally do not use English outside the classroom:

*“I consider using English in SM and correcting myself when I use it as a way to practice the language ... I believe that using SM is effective and something important, the classroom is not enough ... Here in Saudi we do not use English a lot, and they say in order to learn English very well you have to study abroad. So, I think SM environment gives us that feeling” (Student L).*

*“I use English because I don’t use English elsewhere, its rare in real life here. Even the English we use here (in Saudi) like in ordering in restaurants is not that complicated, so I try to use vocabulary we don’t use that much” (Student K).*

The majority of the participants in the two proficiency groups (13/14) stated that they pay attention to language elements such as the choice of vocabulary and grammar when they use English in SM. They explained that before posting on SM, they double-check their writing and

use tools such as *Google Translate* and spell checkers to make sure that their posts are error-free. Some of them attributed this to their personality traits such as being “meticulous” or “perfectionist”:

*When I use English in WhatsApp I pay very close attention to my grammar and vocabulary even if it was everyday chatting. I believe that if I say it right I will improve my English not like if I don't care and say whatever (Student I).*

To conclude, although participants view the pedagogical use of SM positively in many aspects (e.g., they are willing to use them as complements to in-class activities), they are also aware of the problems involved, including a perceived lack of privacy and an invasion of their private social space.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate Saudi students' attitudes towards and perceptions of using SM as a language learning tool, and whether factors such as proficiency level influenced their perceptions. Data were gathered for quantitative and qualitative analysis from 100 university students studying at King Saud University to answer four research questions (RQs). The first RQ was: What are students' perceptions of the usefulness of SM applications such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, and their affective feelings towards their pedagogical use? Are these perceptions affected by users' proficiency level in English? A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that there were significant differences between beginner and advanced students regarding their perceptions of the usefulness of the four SM applications. Participants at the advanced level perceived WhatsApp as the least useful and Twitter the most useful, while Snapchat and Instagram did not differ from one another. Beginner participants also perceived WhatsApp as being the least useful, but there were no differences

with regard to usefulness for the other three applications. This suggests that, with regard to usefulness, beginner students judged the four SM applications more positively than the advanced group, with Twitter rated the most useful by both groups.

The qualitative analysis appears to confirm the ANOVA findings, giving us an explanation as to why such difference in perception surfaced between the two proficiency levels. The idea of SM applications as “supportive tools for learning” discussed earlier differs between the beginner and advanced participants. For advanced learners, “supportive” means with minimum teacher involvement and as an activity done independently during students’ free time, as SM is perceived as part of their private space. For beginners, “supportive” may mean learning resources added to what is already provided in the classroom, which may also be teacher-guided. Both groups therefore accept SM as a pedagogical tool, but differently: one as a complement (advanced) and the other as an extension (beyond).

These results comply with the socio-constructivist approach (Jonassen et al., 1995; Jonassen, 1999), which claims that scaffolding is an essential aspect of learning, particularly in the beginning stages when more teacher guidance is required (Roblyer, 2003). At the advanced level, however, learners have already passed the threshold where scaffolding is necessary, and do not need the same level of structuring to complete their language learning tasks. Beginner learners may, therefore, view the use of SM (as any teaching tool) more readily as part of the learning process. More advanced learners, on the other hand, are more likely to view SM as an addition to the L2 classroom. This preference can also be related to a learner's confidence in using the language: advanced learners, who are more confident in the L2, prefer more independent means of learning, while beginner students, who have not reached the same level of confidence, may still need the teacher’s guidance and feedback.

Regarding affective feelings, considering the statistical analysis, the two proficiency groups were relatively less optimistic about the pedagogical use of WhatsApp and Instagram than they were for Twitter and Snapchat for learning an L2, thus indicating that there were no differences between advanced and beginner students. The interviews, however, revealed that beginner students showed more excitement towards using SM for language learning, raising no concerns about the possibility that their use would threaten or ruin their private space. Our findings regarding beginner students contradict the quantitative results observed in Gamble and Wilkins' (2014), wherein both beginner and more advanced (intermediate) participants expressed negative attitudes towards using SM for language learning.

Our findings involving advanced learners contradict those in Bani-Hani et al. (2014), where intermediate and advanced participants displayed positive perceptions about using a particular SM (Facebook) for language learning, and contradict Lee and Markey's (2014), whose advanced participants showed excitement towards using SM for learning. Interestingly, our results for the advanced participants corroborate Venkatesh et al.'s (2016) findings: although their study focused on the context of general postsecondary education, their participants as well as the advanced participants in the current study considered SM to be their personal space, resenting its use for academic purposes. Also, our findings concerning advanced participants might explain why some pre-intermediate participants in Ekoc (2014) refrained from interacting with their teacher and peers in Facebook, as the "presence" of a teacher might have affected their interactions. Finally, the results presented here are similar to those observed in Newgarden (2009), who claimed that students tend to reframe their identities in SM, which might explain advanced learners' reluctance to expose their identities to the public:

*Because my Tweets are sometimes funny or personal, I don't like mixing school with them. I can use it on my own in my free time for indirect learning but not something formal or direct. This problem can be resolved if I open another account to learn not my personal account. I don't want other people to see my schoolwork (Student F).*

The second RQ was: Are there differences in students' use of SM applications for different language purposes? Frequency counts indicated that both proficiency groups use WhatsApp for writing, reading, speaking and communication with family and friends, and they frequently use Snapchat for listening. We can explain learners' choice for using WhatsApp for writing, reading, and speaking in light of the ranking question results that indicated students' preference for WhatsApp for communicating with family and friends (which involves using their first language). This suggests that the type of writing, reading, and speaking in WhatsApp is reserved for family and friends, and their preference is restricted mostly for use in their first language. As for SM use for communication *in English*, groups differed in their selection of preferred application, as beginners favoured the use of Snapchat while advanced learners preferred Twitter. Qualitative analysis also revealed that the groups differed in their use of the SM platforms, with beginners generally showing a wider variety of use for different purposes than their more advanced counterparts. These findings contradict those in Jones (2015), in which beginners used social networking platforms in a more basic fashion than advanced learners, and Li et al.'s (2015), who revealed that learners with higher self-reported English proficiency used technology (including SM) in more diverse ways than did their lower proficiency peers.

An ANOVA and two sets of frequency counts were run to answer the third RQ: Which SM application(s) do students prefer for learning? Are there differences in their SM choices according to the targeted language skills? ANOVA results indicated that, among the four SM

included in this study, the two groups preferred to use Twitter for learning outside the classroom. This is also supported by frequency counts of the ranking questions in which both groups not only preferred Twitter to learn English, but also to practice the language. The second set of frequency counts (preference question) indicated that proficiency group choices of SM only differed according to the language skill targeted, particularly in learning writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Both groups chose Snapchat as the most effective application to learn about speaking and listening skills, a choice that can be easily attributed to the application's unique features, as Snapchat enables students to record and receive videos through video chatting, thus allowing students to both produce (speak) and receive (listen to) language. An interesting feature of Snapchat is that posts disappear after a 24-hour period if shared in the "My story" feature, or after 10 seconds if sent privately. The ephemeral nature of these posts gives students the opportunity to use the language with no fear of making mistakes or losing face, similar to what is observed in the literature about computer-mediated communication (e.g., AbuSeillek, 2012; Grimshaw, 2016; Reinders & Wattana, 2012), in which participants tend to achieve better communication skills when they interact with their interlocutors around and through computers, not face-to-face.

The two proficiency groups chose Twitter as the most effective SM application to learn reading. However, students differed in their choices of SM for learning writing, grammar, and vocabulary: beginners perceived WhatsApp as the most effective application to learn these skills while advanced learners chose Twitter. Qualitative analysis confirms these findings, particularly when students preferred Twitter for learning in general. For example, an analysis of the third open-ended question indicated that Twitter was the only SM application that both groups mentioned using for purposes such as general learning, language learning, stating opinions, and

expressing thoughts. Also, during the interviews, students stated that they preferred Twitter because it kept them updated with what happens in the world (globally and locally), as it is used by a wide range of users from different backgrounds, age, and expertise: “*Sometimes when I have a question I ask in Twitter if I can’t find the teacher and I get responses from other specialists*” (Student B). From another student’s perspective, “*Twitter is the SM application that aligns with education and knowledge*” (Student E). Our results also show that advanced participants kept their preference for Twitter (for learning grammar, vocabulary, and writing) consistent with their choice of application to use for learning and practicing English, unlike beginner participants, who were more likely to shift their platform choices (e.g., WhatsApp for learning vocabulary, grammar, and writing; Snapchat for learning listening and speaking; and Twitter for reading).

Finally, a qualitative analysis was used to address the fourth RQ: What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of learning EFL through SM within the Saudi context? Students reported that the main advantages were the sense of accessibility, availability, and affordability of using such tools for language learning, in addition to offering an opportunity to practice English, especially in an environment where language use is very limited and often confined to the classroom. Students indicated that SM gives them a chance to immerse themselves in the target language (via multiple exposures to the L2 input), which is significant for language development (Krashen, 1985). These findings are similar to what has been reported in Mitchell (2012), whose participants claimed that Facebook use increased their language input and output opportunities.

In addition, regarding the fourth RQ, learners pointed out that SM are characterized by comprehensiveness (e.g., people engage in many different activities other than to communicate



and learn or practice a language, including discovering the world) and that it offers them opportunities for “continuous learning” that go beyond what they learn in the language classroom. Qualitative analysis also revealed that the majority of the participants pay attention to their grammar and vocabulary before posting in SM, which resonates with the findings discussed in Bani-Hani et al. (2014). This suggests that SM may contribute to improving the quality of students’ written output, as students engage in self-correction to ensure their writing is acceptable. Learners also mentioned that the language they encounter in SM “sticks”, unlike any other learning method. This perceived advantage can be explained by the Learning-by-Doing principle (e.g., Reese, 2011), a style of learning in which students learn from their own experiences and actions: “*I do that as a way, to learn, it helps me to remember how I typed it. It sticks.*” (Student L). However, due to the lack of methodologically sound studies on learning styles (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2009), the concept has been under scrutiny recently, mostly because not all possible versions of these claimed styles have been tested or proven. From a pedagogical standpoint, teachers should at least vary their teaching methods (Bruff, 2011; e.g., using SM and their affordances such as images, sounds and videos) to spice up their classes and, consequently, target their learners’ learning styles if the existence of these styles are indeed confirmed. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the presence of a teacher is still essential for learners who depend on face-to-face interactions:

*Using SM directly to teach language can work for some people, but for me and my personality I like face-to-face learning. I love discussing things I don’t get with the teacher. I can say what I want more clearly when we are physically on one place not through something, even if it was Snapchat (Student A).*

Participants reported some disadvantages due to the use SM for L2 learning. Advanced learners fear a lack of privacy, which corresponds to findings from An and Williams (2010), for whom the openness of Web 2.0 platforms made some of their participants uncomfortable. Advanced learners also expressed concerns that using SM for academic purposes will inhibit them from the fun and joy they experience in their social networks. This could explain why some pre-intermediate students in Ekco (2014) refrained from interacting with their peers and teacher on Facebook, as the “presence” of a teacher may have affected their interaction. The two proficiency groups in the current study expressed concerns regarding the accuracy of information as well as the spelling and grammar errors observed in SM, thus questioning its suitability for language learning. These concerns are similar to the ones discussed in Mitchell (2012). Participants also reported that SM can be distracting in the L2 classroom (e.g., students could be tempted to check their posts instead of engaging in class discussion), an issue also reported in Bani-Hani et al. (2014). Reported disadvantages such as lack of feedback can be avoided if teachers supervise the use of SM.

### **Conclusion**

Computer-based technologies, SM in particular, have the potential to address issues in the L2 classroom such as the limited amount of time (Cardoso & Collins, 2016) and opportunities for practice (Chapelle, 2009). For L2 learners, SM has the potential to address the aforementioned issues via its combination of mobile technology, digital gaming, and CMC, and it has grown in popularity globally over the past few years (Aloraini, 2015; Ekoc, 2014; Mitchell, 2012). A recent online article reported that Saudis’ use of SM has increased by around 73% in only one year (Kemp, 2017). However, studies regarding student perceptions of using SM as a pedagogical tool has revealed mixed findings. The current study therefore aims to address the

gap in the literature by investigating the perceptions of Saudi students towards using SM (particularly WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter) for learning English as a foreign language and to examine the factors that influence their attitudes towards this type of technology.

Statistical results indicated that there are differences in the perceived usefulness of SM as a learning tool between beginner and advanced students; however, the groups did not differ in their affective feelings towards SM use outside the classroom, nor their choice of application to use for learning. Twitter, on the other hand, was viewed positively by both groups for its learning potential. This study also revealed that students' SM preferences varied according to different language purposes and the targeted language skills to be learned: both groups favour WhatsApp for communication with family and friends, Twitter for reading, and Snapchat for learning aural skills (listening and speaking). As for vocabulary, grammar and writing, advanced students preferred Twitter while beginners chose WhatsApp.

A number of factors contributed to Saudi university students' preference for Twitter. First of all, Twitter is quick and easy to use, limits the length of user posts, and is accessed by a wide variety of users around the world regardless of age, cultural background, or profession. Secondly, qualitative analysis indicates that Twitter is a platform on which students can freely express their thoughts, state their opinions, and engage in discussions, activities which they do not usually engage in on any other SM platform. Participants also associate Twitter with receiving breaking news, accessing information, and communicating with experts (e.g., to ask questions). In addition, students use Twitter for formal practices, and they seem to behave more seriously on Twitter than any other SM application, given that Twitter is associated with intellectual discourse in politics, religion, and culture (see, for example, the current use of Twitter by politicians, royalty, and political figures such as Obama, Trump, Trudeau, King

Salman, and the Pope). Therefore, Twitter is an acceptable medium on which students can learn. Favouring Snapchat for listening and speaking can be attributed to the services offered by the application, as it offers instant, but temporary, video chat. Without the ability to review previous videos, learners probably feel less embarrassed if they make mistakes on Snapchat, as they will disappear with the videos within seconds.

There were several limitations to this study that should be addressed in future research. Firstly, the number of participants ( $N = 99$ ) is considered to be small for this type of analysis. Therefore, a larger number of participants would reflect a better representation of the population's perceptions. Secondly, participants were grouped as beginners or advanced according to the level assigned by their institution. Based on their perceived proficiencies, however, it was clear that some reported themselves as being more or less proficient than the level assigned to them by their institution. Adopting other proficiency determiners such as standardized tests (e.g., TOEFL) would greatly increase the accuracy of the results. Thirdly, an explanation of how SM could be used for learning (e.g., with or without teachers' supervision) should have been provided to the participants prior to completing the survey, as this difference only emerged after the analysis of the qualitative data. Thus, it is not clear as on which learning approach students based their perceptions. Fourthly, the surveys were presented in paper form, which gave students the freedom to skip parts or choose more than one option. Using online surveys would give researchers more control over the data entered, in addition to facilitating the process of data analysis. Finally, although the surveys were pilot tested with a small number of participants, further adjustments should be made to ensure the survey is reliable and efficient in answering the research questions.

Research has indicated that SM provides a number of benefits for language learners, such as promoting interaction (Cerdeira & Planas, 2011), enhancing learning attitudes (Cheng, 2012), and encouraging an ideal learning environment (Wang & Vasquez, 2012). Previous studies also reported students' positive attitudes towards using SM applications as pedagogical tools for language learning (e.g., Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, & Abu-Melhim, 2014; Borau et al., 2009; Cheng, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014). The results of this study reinforce the prevalence of Twitter among the other SM applications for language learning, and indicate that beginner students are more willing to use SM outside the classroom for pedagogical purposes. Advanced learners, on the other hand, claim SM as their personal space, thus disfavoured its use as it might interfere with their private lives.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Investigating Saudi students' perceptions of using SM for language learning purposes revealed that their SM choices vary according to the targeted language skills (e.g., Snapchat for listening and Twitter for reading). Anecdotal evidence (from personal experience and observations by colleagues) suggests that the research findings are not confined to the Saudi population, but can be generalized to other Arab populations, and perhaps even to other cultural contexts such as North America. In addition, the results of this study indicate that Saudi language learners are willing to use SM, particularly Twitter, outside the classroom; this attitude was strongest among beginners as they had fewer privacy concerns. Thus, teachers are encouraged to introduce the use of Twitter in their classes, particularly in the early stages of language development. Students should also be invited to discover SM and explore its potential for learning, especially for their own language practice. Qualitative analysis from the semi-structured interviews calls for teachers to recognize that the process of L2 learning and teaching

can be enhanced by social media, depending on who the target audience is, which applications are used, how they are utilized, and the type of lesson or materials adopted. For example, if the targeted audience is advanced participants and Twitter will be used for teaching vocabulary, then a lesson on explaining the meaning of an idiom and how it is used would be more effective than a lesson about adjective placement, as the latter needs details that are preferably explained in the classroom.

### Chapter Three

This chapter explores, in further detail, the pedagogical implications and applications of SM as language learning tools based on the results of this study. It concludes with a brief discussion of directions for future research.

#### **Pedagogical Implications and Applications**

The results presented in this thesis indicate that, overall, advanced and beginner participants are willing to use social media, especially Twitter, for language practice outside the classroom. This attitude is stronger among beginners, as they have little privacy concerns and, more importantly, they claim that using SM for academic purposes would not take away its entertainment features. Teachers should therefore be encouraged to introduce the use of SM in their classes, particularly for lower level students. As discussed previously, students view SM as a valuable form of practice, particularly in a *foreign* language environment, since the opportunities for using the language in such context are limited. Teachers should be aware of SM's learning potential and, more importantly, encourage their students to explore it, as they seem to be aware of its capacity to enhance L2 learning:

*Teachers never mention that we should use it, they always say read books, but they don't know that we read a lot in SM. Maybe teachers don't want to use it because they don't have the time for it (Student L).*

However, in order to set realistic learning goals, teachers should consider the following points when choosing an SM app for class use. Firstly, although some participants stated that SM is capable of improving all language skills, several advanced learners pointed out that improvement may vary depending on the skill targeted, which SM application is used, and how students use it. Beginner learners, for instance, highlighted that learning language through SM

may not be as effective for developing particular language features such as fluency and academic writing:

*“This does not mean we don’t need the language classroom any more. We still need it. And I guess it works for particular language features not all of them ... but [SM] does not improve fluency”* (Student K).

*“I think SM works best for listening, grammar, writing ... ummm maybe all of them actually. SM can benefit us in all those skills, except academic writing”* (Student L).

In addition, participants stated that learning grammar via SM would be the most challenging and that students should have knowledge of basic grammar prior to using the technology for learning:

*Yes, I believe SM is effective if used for language learning, I myself benefited from SM sources and use. SM can be effective in all language skills except grammar; you have to know some grammar before. Learning grammar in SM would be difficult, this has to be face-to-face* (Student G).

Learners also noted that language development is achievable if SM apps are synchronous with instant interaction features, such as direct messages and live chats, as these features facilitate communication with teachers and classmates. Teachers should also take into consideration the length and the complexity of the lesson they post before using SM with students. This is to avoid confusing students, especially in initial stages of SM use, as one beginner participant advised: *“I am with SM use for language learning but not a whole lesson or a new one; it has to be like part of a lesson or just to do homework”* (Student L). Qualitative data also revealed that SM can be a source of improper content and vulgar language; therefore, such applications should be used with *adult* students, not children:



*[In SM] you get exposed to inappropriate materials so its use should be controlled and for a certain age not children for example ... my concern is when SM especially Instagram is used with kids (Student N).*

The results presented here also indicate that Twitter is Saudi EFL students' favourite application for language learning; however, for learning aural skills, students seem to prefer Snapchat. Educators are invited to explore these applications to understand their features in order to take full advantage of their affordances. Twitter, for instance, can be used as a practice tool wherein students are asked to Tweet using new words or structures they have learned. Teachers can also Tweet extra materials related to classroom lessons to further explain language points (e.g., of a rare or difficult word or phrase). Although Twitter confines the user to 140 characters per Tweet, certain input enhancement techniques, such as capital letters, can be used to draw students' attention to the particular words or phrases. For example, in teaching pronunciation or vocabulary, teachers could capitalize the letters within a certain syllable to indicate stress placement (e.g., COMfort to indicate stress on the left-most syllable). They can also provide examples to illustrate that a change in stress placement changes a given word's meaning (e.g., REcord versus reCORD). See Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, and Griner (2010) for ideas on how to use orthography for pronunciation instruction.

Saudi students' preference for Twitter should motivate teachers (and students) to take advantage of this method of social interaction via language learning activities, particularly in the context of the target population. For example, to practice past tense markers, a teacher could start a story via Twitter by posting the first sentence and asking the students to continue it. One student would continue the story by contributing a sentence in the past tense, preferably re-using verbs and/or vocabulary discussed in class, such as "Last week, I visited my family" A second

student may then continue with “I traveled 6 hours by train to see them.” The story would continue in this manner until all students have contributed to it. The teacher could ask students to “hashtag” their tweets (#) with a hashtag created specifically for grammar practice (e.g., #grammar\_practice), as this allows users to track other posts using the same hashtag, providing them with additional input that is specific to their needs.

As for Snapchat, this SM application can be used to improve speaking skills. As such, it may be implemented so that it could be used to increase students’ confidence when speaking in the foreign language, since as our participants pointed out, it makes them feel less embarrassed when making mistakes, given that there is no face-to-face interaction. As research suggests (Arnold, 2007; Kern, 1995), peer interactions through or around a computer is less likely to make students feel shy and consequently increase their willingness to communicate (Grimshaw, 2016). In addition, the video exchanged between Snapchat users disappears after 10 seconds. To start using Snapchat with students, teachers could ask them to introduce themselves through the app (e.g., create a video bio) or tell a short story (e.g., to practice the use of past tense and related vocabulary). Another activity could focus on pronunciation, where teachers explain how to pronounce a challenging word/syllable and ask students to reply by incorporating it into a sentence, via a video or sound recording. Feedback can also be provided through Snapchat videos in a casual and friendly manner, by either peers or their instructors.

An interesting feature that both Snapchat and Twitter share is that they can be used as voting systems, similar to a “virtual” clicker (e.g., to vote for the focus of the next tweets/snaps). Educators can ask students to retweet (in Twitter) or screen capture (in Snapchat) their choice, as these applications inform the user (the teacher in this case) about the number of captures/retweets of their posts; these data can then be used as votes. Using these simple and easy-to-use voting

systems could help teachers to focus their attention on the challenges students face to guide their learning. In addition, teachers can also probe learners' progress and engagement in the course.

Even though Instagram and WhatsApp received lower ratings than other SM applications, they were still well perceived by participants, particularly at the beginner level. As such, Instagram and WhatsApp still have pedagogical potential if used appropriately, and they can help to add variation to instruction. Deciding on which SM applications to use, however, will depend on the teachers' and students' interests and needs. For example, Instagram posts and comments are not restricted to a limited number of characters (like Twitter) and can, therefore, be used to write paragraphs and conduct lengthy discussions and debates (e.g., after a number of tweets are compiled, students are asked to combine them into a large paragraph or text). Instagram can also be beneficial for visual learners, as users can provide pictorial explanations. WhatsApp, on the other hand, can be employed as a means to improve class interaction and participation through the utilization of chat groups. A class group can be created in which students interact in the target language to improve their communicative and pragmatic competence. WhatsApp can also be used for one-on-one follow-up, private feedback, and for sharing links to additional course materials.

Finally, instructors should consider using informal surveys (e.g., by the raising of hands) in the first class to decide with their students which SM application to use for learning. This will help teachers keep track of what students are actually using for social networking, given that these services and user preferences evolve rapidly, especially when new SM applications are introduced to the public.

### **Future Research**

In addition to addressing the limitations found in this study, scholars are invited to further investigate the following topics in future research. As this study investigated students' perception towards using SM as a language learning tool in a foreign language setting, it is worth exploring whether students in a *second* language context also hold the same views and application preferences, bearing in mind that opportunities for practice outside the classroom are more readily available in their learning context. Since Saudi students are willing to use Twitter and Snapchat to extend classroom activities, it would also be interesting to investigate, through pre- and post-tests, whether significant learning improvements are achieved, and if there is a difference between the outcomes when using Twitter (for written skills) and Snapchat (for aural skills).

Based on Newgarden's (2009) claim that students reframe their identities in SM and the results observed in the current study, which show that advanced learners consider SM platforms to be their personal space (in which they express certain identities), an interesting area to explore would be the identities that these learners assume in SM environments and how they impact their own practices in the L2. Correlation studies should also be conducted to examine whether learning styles (e.g., visual or auditory) correlate with or predict student perceptions or preferences for SM applications as learning tools. Another area worth exploring is teachers' perceptions of SM use to complement and/or enhance their classroom teaching. This would verify whether there are differences between student and teacher attitudes, and whether the perceived challenges or difficulties students face coincide with those of their teachers. Finally, it is worth investigating (via reanalysis of the current data) whether differences in students'

perceptions (in terms of usefulness, affective feelings, or SM preferences) vary as a result of gender – another unexplored area in SM research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Initial Survey

**1. Which of the following social media applications do you use on a daily basis?**

**(Choose up to 4).**

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- Path
- Snapchat
- Youtube
- Pintrest

**2. What is your nationality?**

- Saudi
- Other

**Appendix B: The Study Survey****Section One: Demographic Information**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender:      ( ) Male      ( ) Female
3. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Native Language:  
( ) Arabic      ( ) Other (Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_)
5. Nationality:  
( ) Saudi      ( ) Other (Please indicate: \_\_\_\_\_)
6. University level: \_\_\_\_\_
7. According to your estimates, what is your **English proficiency** level:

<b>Writing</b>	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
<b>Listening</b>	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
<b>Speaking</b>	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
<b>Reading</b>	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
<b>Vocabulary</b>	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
<b>Overall</b>	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
8. What is the average **amount of hours** you spend using **social media** (such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat) on a daily basis?  
  
( ) less than 2 hours      ( ) 2-4 hours      ( ) 4-6 hours      ( ) more than 6 hours

## Section Two: Social media and Language Learning

(1) Please indicate how likely you are to agree or disagree with each statement below:

**A. WhatsApp**

Have you used WhatsApp? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Statement	Completely DISAGREE	Disagree	Somehow disagree	Somehow agree	Agree	Completely AGREE
1. WhatsApp is a good social media application for <b>learning</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. WhatsApp is a good platform to <b>learn English</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I <b>learn English</b> when I use WhatsApp.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. WhatsApp has <b>all the features</b> I need to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I would like to use WhatsApp to <b>complement what I do in the classroom</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Using WhatsApp will make me more <b>motivated</b> to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I would <b>enjoy</b> using WhatsApp for learning English language.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. WhatsApp is a <b>friendly</b> learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Learning English through WhatsApp is <b>effective/helpful</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I feel <b>comfortable</b> when I use WhatsApp for learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. WhatsApp is <b>easy</b> to use.	1	2	3	4	5	6



- Frequency of use

Statement	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Usually	Always
12. How often do you use WhatsApp to <b>communicate</b> with friends and family?	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. How often do you use WhatsApp to <b>communicate</b> in English?	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. How often do you <b>write</b> in WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. How often do you <b>speak</b> in WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. How often do you <b>read</b> in WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. How often do you <b>listen</b> in WhatsApp?	1	2	3	4	5	6

**B. Snapchat**

Have you used Snapchat? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Statement	Completely DISAGREE	Disagree	Somehow disagree	Somehow agree	Agree	Completely AGREE
1. Snapchat is a good social media application for <b>learning</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Snapchat is a good platform to <b>learn English</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I <b>learn English</b> When I use Snapchat.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Snapchat has <b>all the features</b> I need to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I would like to use Snapchat <b>to complement what I do in the classroom</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Using Snapchat will make me more <b>motivated</b> to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I would <b>enjoy</b> using Snapchat for learning English language.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Snapchat is a <b>friendly</b> learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Learning English through Snapchat is <b>effective/helpful</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I feel <b>comfortable</b> when I use Snapchat for learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Snapchat is <b>easy</b> to use.	1	2	3	4	5	6

- Frequency of use

Statement	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Usually	Always
12. How often do you use Snapchat to <b>communicate</b> with friends and family?	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. How often do you use Snapchat to <b>communicate</b> in <b>English</b> ?	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. How often do you <b>write</b> in Snapchat?	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. How often do you <b>speak</b> in Snapchat?	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. How often do you <b>read</b> in Snapchat?	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. How often do you <b>listen</b> in Snapchat?	1	2	3	4	5	6

**C. Instagram**

Have you used Instagram? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Statement	Completely DISAGREE	Disagree	Somehow disagree	Somehow agree	Agree	Completely AGREE
1. Instagram is a good social media application for <b>learning</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Instagram is a good platform to <b>learn English</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I <b>learn English</b> When I use Instagram.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Instagram has <b>all the features</b> I need to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I would like to use Instagram to <b>complement what I do in the classroom</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Using Instagram will make me more <b>motivated</b> to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I would <b>enjoy</b> using Instagram for learning English language.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Instagram is a <b>friendly</b> learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Learning English through Instagram is <b>effective/helpful</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I feel <b>comfortable</b> when I use Instagram for learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Instagram is <b>easy</b> to use.	1	2	3	4	5	6

- Frequency of use

Statement	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Usually	Always
12. How often do you use Instagram to <b>communicate</b> with friends and family?	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. How often do you use Instagram to <b>communicate</b> in <b>English</b> ?	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. How often do you <b>write</b> in Instagram?	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. How often do you <b>speak</b> in Instagram?	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. How often do you <b>read</b> in Instagram?	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. How often do you <b>listen</b> in Instagram?	1	2	3	4	5	6

**D. Twitter**

Have you used Twitter? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Statement	Completely DISAGREE	Disagree	Somehow disagree	Somehow agree	Agree	Completely AGREE
1. Twitter is a good social media application for <b>learning</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Twitter is a good platform to <b>learn English</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I <b>learn English</b> When I use Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Twitter has <b>all the features</b> I need to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I would like to use Twitter to <b>complement what I do in the classroom</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Using Twitter will make me more <b>motivated</b> to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I would <b>enjoy</b> using Twitter for learning English language.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Twitter is a <b>friendly</b> learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Learning English through Twitter is <b>effective/helpful</b> .	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I feel <b>comfortable</b> when I use Twitter for learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Twitter is <b>easy</b> to use.	1	2	3	4	5	6

• Frequency of use

Statement	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Usually	Always
12. How often do you use Twitter to <b>communicate</b> with friends and family?	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. How often do you use Twitter to <b>communicate</b> in English?	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. How often do you <b>write</b> in Twitter?	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. How often do you <b>speak</b> in Twitter?	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. How often do you <b>read</b> in Twitter?	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. How often do you <b>listen</b> in Twitter?	1	2	3	4	5	6

**(2) Rank social media applications by giving each application a number from one to four (1-4) according to the statement (1 = your LEAST FAVORITE; 4 = your FAVORITE)**

1. My **favorite** social media application to **interact** with friends and family (to socialize).

WhatsApp ( ) Snapchat ( ) Instagram ( ) Twitter ( )

2. My **favorite** social media application for **learning English**.

WhatsApp ( ) Snapchat ( ) Instagram ( ) Twitter ( )

3. My **favorite** social media application to **practice** English.

WhatsApp ( ) Snapchat ( ) Instagram ( ) Twitter ( )

4. My **overall favorite** social media application (for everything: to interact with friends, to learn and practice English, etc.).

WhatsApp ( ) Snapchat ( ) Instagram ( ) Twitter ( )

**(3) General questions:**

1. What are the **advantages** of using social media applications for language learning?

2. What are the **disadvantages** of using social media for language learning?

3. Briefly explain **WHY** and **HOW** you use each of the following social media applications. If you do not use the application, please write N/A.

	<b>WHY do you use it?</b>	<b>HOW do you use it?</b> <b>(e.g., I post, I comment, etc.)</b>
<b>WhatsApp:</b>		
<b>Snapchat:</b>		
<b>Instagram:</b>		
<b>Twitter:</b>		



4. Choose **one or two of the discussed social media applications** (WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter) **to learn the skills listed below**, according to what you think is the most **effective** to learn that language skill.

**1. Listening**

WhatsApp ( )    Snapchat ( )    Instagram ( )    Twitter ( )

**2. Speaking**

WhatsApp ( )    Snapchat ( )    Instagram ( )    Twitter ( )

**3. Writing**

WhatsApp ( )    Snapchat ( )    Instagram ( )    Twitter ( )

**4. Reading**

WhatsApp ( )    Snapchat ( )    Instagram ( )    Twitter ( )

**5. Grammar**

WhatsApp ( )    Snapchat ( )    Instagram ( )    Twitter ( )

**6. Vocabulary**

WhatsApp ( )    Snapchat ( )    Instagram ( )    Twitter ( )

**Appendix C: Interview Questions**

1. What is your most used social media application? [Explain social media if the participant does not know the word] How do you use it and why?
2. What language do you usually use in social media? Why?
3. Do you pay attention to grammar and vocabulary when you post or read your friends' posts/tweets? Why?
4. Would you use social media to learn English? Please explain why/why not.
5. Do you prefer a particular social media application to learn English? Why do you choose this application?
6. What are the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of using social media such WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat to learn English? [If necessary, ask about these social media individually].
7. Do you think learning English language through social media would be only effective for particular language features? Which features (speaking, listening, vocabulary, grammar or writing) and why?
8. Do you think social media would be effective in teaching English? Why?
9. Any other comments about learning English through social media?

**Appendix D: Students’ Detailed Response to the First Open-ended Question, Organized by Theme**

Proficiency	Q3.1: Advantages & Disadvantages	
<p><b>Beginners</b></p>	<p><b>Advantages</b></p> <p><b>Educational</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learn anywhere anytime.</li> <li>2. Helps in learning new things.</li> <li>3. Supported with pictures and audio.</li> <li>4. All ages and levels can learn.</li> <li>5. Easy to transport and learn in the same time without carrying heavy stuff like books.</li> <li>6. Combines learning and fun.</li> <li>7. Expand knowledge beyond what is given in university.</li> <li>8. Learning in an effective way.</li> </ol> <p><b>On language learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. You learn new words.</li> <li>2. Listen to pronouncing words correctly.</li> <li>3. Easier way to learn language.</li> <li>4. Enjoy while learning language.</li> <li>5. Learn language in a beautiful fun way.</li> <li>6. Improves language.</li> <li>7. Ability to practice language.</li> <li>8. Changing the routine in learning language, which makes you more enthusiastic to learn language.</li> <li>9. Creative/non-boring way to learn language.</li> <li>10. Get you exposed to native speakers so you can learn language from them.</li> <li>11. You can find a lot of people who know English</li> </ol>	<p><b>Disadvantages</b></p> <p><b>Educational</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Easy to forget.</li> <li>2. Resources are not trustable.</li> <li>3. Total dependence on it for learning.</li> <li>4. Distracting.</li> <li>5. Not supervised which may lead to misuse</li> <li>6. No privacy (I consider social networks private therefore using them for learning inhibits privacy).</li> <li>7. Inability to deliver information comprehensively.</li> <li>8. Possibly of not understanding the information and you can’t ask about it.</li> <li>9. Used to kill time and have fun not to learn.</li> </ol> <p><b>On language learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not accurate.</li> <li>2. You learn bad words.</li> <li>3. Misspelling.</li> <li>4. Not comprehensive sometimes.</li> <li>5. No supervision.</li> <li>6. Hard to communicate with native speakers when you do not speak the language very well.</li> <li>7. The type of words/vocabulary we are exposed to is not formal or academic.</li> <li>8. You may encounter people who make fun of you for not using the language correctly and then you become demotivated.</li> </ol>

	<p>13. Opens opportunity for shy people to speak out (especially who are afraid of saying something wrong).</p> <p><b>General</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Availability (everyone has a phone).</li> <li>2. Not expensive (affordability).</li> <li>3. Most people love them.</li> <li>4. Easy to access and handle.</li> <li>5. Easier to use and faster.</li> <li>6. Widespread.</li> <li>7. Positive way of killing time.</li> <li>8. We are used to using them.</li> <li>9. Fun.</li> <li>10. Easy/fast to access information.</li> <li>11. Save time and effort.</li> </ol> <p><b>Communication</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communicate with family and friends.</li> <li>2. You find a lot of people you can communicate with in these platforms (enormous numbers).</li> </ol>	<p><b>General</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Waste time.</li> <li>10. Content cannot be saved.</li> <li>11. Misuse.</li> <li>12. Getting exposed to bad images and videos.</li> </ol> <p><b>Communication</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. No human interaction.</li> <li>14. Sometimes people misunderstand you.</li> <li>15. You do not know whom you are communicating with.</li> </ol> <p><b>Health</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not good for health reasons (sight).</li> </ol> <p><b>No disadvantages</b> 7 participants</p>
<p><b>Advanced</b></p>	<p><b>Advantages</b></p> <p><b>Educational</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continuous learning.</li> <li>2. A change and fun way of learning.</li> <li>3. Ability to learn anywhere anytime.</li> <li>4. Good for learning.</li> <li>5. Advanced, easy, simple, and more fun way for learning unlike traditional ways.</li> <li>6. Opens a new horizon for the learner.</li> <li>7. Distance learning.</li> <li>8. You do not feel embarrassed when you make a mistake.</li> <li>9. Speeds the learning process as the phones are</li> </ol>	<p><b>Disadvantages</b></p> <p><b>Educational</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can be distracting from learning as they are used for everyday matters.</li> <li>2. Information is not clear enough.</li> <li>3. You do not refer to books.</li> <li>4. You do not know if the info is valid/accurate</li> <li>5. It does not have a main reference.</li> <li>6. Sometimes it is difficult to get answerers from people in these applications.</li> </ol>

	<p>always on hand.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Easier to deliver information (sometimes delivering the information as short as possible is better than over explanation).</li> <li>11. Asking for things you want to know.</li> </ol> <p><b>On language learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Useful in learning accents/dialects more than language itself.</li> <li>2. Learn everyday English.</li> <li>3. Provides a way to learn language, which makes it easier to pick up and learn about its culture, which makes learning language easy.</li> <li>4. Practice English in your free time.</li> <li>5. Communicate with native speakers.</li> <li>6. You can find useful accounts especially for language learning as they provide pictures for the vocabulary; explain their meanings and how to pronounce them.</li> <li>7. Knowing what happens globally in English.</li> <li>8. Practice reading and listening.</li> <li>9. Practice language anywhere anytime.</li> <li>10. Practice communication in English.</li> <li>11. Specialized accounts in Twitter and Snapchat that are very excellent and useful as they teach common phrases and new/ popular vocab.</li> <li>12. Acquire new vocabulary and how to use them.</li> <li>13. An easy way to reach language experts to ask them.</li> <li>14. Follow experts in the language I want to learn.</li> <li>15. Learn about the western culture and its nature.</li> </ol>	<p><b>On language learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Impossible to learn academic language from these platforms except the formal accounts that use them.</li> <li>2. Learn bad words.</li> <li>3. Exposed to common mistakes.</li> <li>4. No effective feedback.</li> <li>5. Maybe most what is learned would be bad words, or the person who is trying to practice the language will be demotivated.</li> <li>6. Non-academic language.</li> <li>7. Acquire bad language.</li> <li>8. Inaccurate.</li> <li>9. Inappropriate for language learning it is more for fun than learning.</li> <li>10. Not suitable for learning language from scratch (and you get exposed to bad words).</li> <li>11. Abbreviations.</li> <li>12. Weakens your language as you get exposed to common mistakes, which makes you think this is the correct use.</li> <li>13. You do not learn from native speakers.</li> </ol> <p><b>General</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. You lose information.</li> <li>2. Getting distracted from doing daily duties.</li> <li>3. Wastes time.</li> </ol> <p><b>Communication</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disrespectful discussions.</li> <li>2. No direct/human contact.</li> <li>3. You encounter disrespectful ways of communication from some people.</li> <li>4. Bad manners and disrespect.</li> </ol>
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	<p><b>General</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Getting exposed to new stuff and being updated about many subjects.</li> <li>2. Available on hands all day and everybody uses them.</li> <li>3. Easy to access /communicate.</li> <li>4. Not expensive, affordable.</li> <li>5. Saves time.</li> <li>6. Available for all ages.</li> <li>7. A lot of available options.</li> <li>8. Variability of subjects/discussion topics.</li> <li>9. Easy and fun to use.</li> <li>10. Discover new things.</li> <li>11. Faster.</li> <li>12. Share what we have learned to benefit others.</li> <li>13. Easy to learn as everyone is using them.</li> <li>14. Variability of resources.</li> <li>15. You can learn, communicate, have fun and benefit from these applications in the same time.</li> </ol> <p><b>Communication</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communicating with people from in and out of your city while sitting at home.</li> <li>2. Easy way of communication with others.</li> <li>3. Communicate with family and friends.</li> <li>4. Connect with people from all around the world.</li> <li>5. Coping with the modern world.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Negative replies.</li> <li>6. No privacy.</li> </ol> <p><b>Health</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Using devices for too long (posture/sight).</li> </ol> <p><b>Technical</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Internet connection problems (if the network disappears you will not be able to access needed information).</li> </ol> <p><b>No Disadvantages</b> 4 participants</p>
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**Appendix E: Students’ Detailed Response to the Second Open-ended Question**

SM application	Q3.3 patterns of use	
Whatsapp	<b>Beginners</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
	<p><b>How:</b> Comment, communicate, write, speak, publish, read, watch videos, record voice notes</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Communicate, communicate with family and friends, useful, increase knowledge, easy to deal with application as an alternative to voice calls and save time, general use</p>	<p><b>How:</b> Discuss, comment, publish, communicate, speak, read, write, chat</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Communicate, communicate with family and friends, easy to use, browse and explore, news, benefit, be updated, fun</p>
Snapchat	<b>Beginners</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
	<p><b>How:</b> Post, comment, take pictures, write, browse, watch videos, watching native speakers use the language, chat, follow</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Fun and somehow beneficial, communicate, learn, communicate with family and friends, learn English, browse and explore, enjoy free time, share daily dairies, self-improvement, improve listening, more private, watch videos, take pictures, to kill time, and see friends’ updates, speaking about general subjects and express opinion, watching other peoples’ dairies, general use</p>	<p><b>How:</b> Take pictures and videos, share videos and pictures, publish, watch, follow, comment, download videos and images</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Fun, communicate, communicate with family and friends, and follow people who share interesting stuff, watch, to gat beneficial info, follow SM icons, browse and explore, kill time, get friends’ updates, get updates about new places and restaurants, and what happens in the world</p>

<b>Instagram</b>	<b>Beginners</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
	<p><b>How:</b> Post pictures, comment, take pictures, browse, read, watch, marketing, write, follow others</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Browse and explore, fun, communicate, learn, useful, watch photos and videos, explore, self-improvement, marketing, know information, follow professional photography pages, visit Instagram stores, watch pictures, share pictures, communicate with people from other countries, communicate with friends out of the country, get news, general use, practice my hobby, share my pictures and videos</p>	<p><b>How:</b> See pictures and videos, comment, publish, share videos and pictures, read, take pictures, search</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Explore and browse, fun, benefit from it, follow SM icons, watch, kill time, communicate with friends, news, search for something specific, share pictures I took, shopping, search for useful information, I mostly find what I need in it</p>
<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Beginners</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
	<p><b>How:</b> Browse, tweet, comment, post, write, read, to express views and share daily diaries, watch, retweet, follow, discuss</p> <p><b>Why:</b> browse and explore, fun and somehow beneficial, learn, read, get breaking news, learn language, share new information with people, explore, useful, see different points of view, for university use, freedom of speech, communicate, news (football, tech, and others), express my thoughts, exchange info, general info, know what happens in society and world, general use, express my opinion, getting updated with what happens in the world</p>	<p><b>How:</b> Comment, tweet, read, post, watch, retweet, learn, write</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Read, discuss, share my thoughts, follow people that discuss subjects I like, easy to use, get information, learn, get breaking news, beneficial, follow SM icons, general reading, very beneficial, follow, for everything (like learning language), fun, research and communicate and improve knowledge in many fields, share what I want to talk about/discuss with others, express my opinion, communicate with family and friends, practice language, communicate with the world, learn English vocabulary</p>



**Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interviews - Transcriptions****Advanced Level****Student A**

I mostly use WhatsApp. I use it for communication with friends and family. I use mostly Arabic because not a lot of people I know speak English. If I use English I try to use words I usually don't use. Yes, my sense of accuracy increases when I use English, this even happens when I write in standard Arabic because I don't use them very much and I don't like making mistakes. I guess I am with learning language from SM although haven't tried it but I think it can work and I would personally use/try it. I feel it can be effective especially when it comes to practicing. It could work better for reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar more than writing and speaking (Mainly reading as you acquire vocab and grammar form reading). And learning through SM applications depends on the type of teaching. If it is one to one teaching I prefer WhatsApp because communication is better there, instant, and has lots of features that can be used. Advantages: better, faster communication, saves time and effort, everything is faster and available, you can easily find people to help you, fun way of learning especially if there are pictures. Disadvantages: I might get distracted with other things in the phone, and the SM setting might not be favorable for learning (people talk to you when you are on your phone and you may get interrupted when you use your phone while you are surrounded by family members) unlike the classroom as it is an environment especially created for learning. Being exposed to the errors makes you think it is a correct use and acceptable. The sources are not always trusted. Using SM directly to teach language can work for some people but for me and my personality I like face-to-face learning I love discussing things I don't get with teacher. I can say what I want more clearly when we are physically on one place not through something even if it was Snapchat. I don't like SM to be the main learning source, it can be supportive or something I use in free time. As long as the SM applications are synchronous I think they work better than asynchronous. I like to end by stating that although I have not tried it but I think SM can be effective and offer more opportunities of practice because here in Saudi if I am not in the college I don't get other chances to practice English. I would create another account and not use my personal one for learning because it's my personal space and I get a lot of unfollows when I post in English and also don't want to mix education with my personal life.

**Student B**

I mostly use Twitter. It covers all ages. It benefits me more even for school. It has lots of advantages. The disadvantages include that people may not know how to use it or get carried away and not control themselves and has no limits. I mostly use Arabic. Most of my followers speak Arabic. But when I use English I pay attention to vocab and grammar because the followers know some English. Yes, my self-awareness increases when I write in English. But I don't pay attention to my friends' errors. The most important thing that I get what they are saying. I prefer SM as a supportive way but not main way. I am not speaking about all SM; I am talking about Twitter only. Sometimes when I have a question I ask it in Twitter if I can't find the teacher and I get responses from other specialists there. They explain for me so they are a good source of information. I prefer Twitter because it covers all ages etc. Disadvantages for learning include that no one is watching, anyone can participate and tweet and maybe post wrong information. Learning motivation will not be affected if the teacher uses SM. SM can be effective for learning but I am not sure about language because we have other things in the phone

like spell checkers. SM would work for some language skills in my opinion such as listening and writing and vocabulary but not grammar. My choice of app won't differ because of language skill. It depends on how you use the app.

### **Student C**

I mostly use Twitter. Because if I have something to say I don't need to say it to someone, I just write it there. I don't use it for something official or formal. I post general stuff not something related to school. I mostly use Arabic because I am Arab and most of my followers are Arab. But when it is something emotional I use English. I don't pay attention to grammar as much as spelling. I just write. And there is a spell checker for spelling. Sometimes if my friends' error is obvious I notice it but I don't usually notice. I don't pay attention to grammar because I think my grammar is good not like my spelling. SM might be effective but not that much. Communicating with students in writing makes me uncomfortable. So Twitter for learning or SM, I don't think they are good for learning. Maybe something like general information but not education and learning. I think it ruins it. It is fun for us. We don't want learning to ruin it as this is our personal space. Twitter can be a good source depending on the person using it and tweeting. It may add to your knowledge but definitely not suitable for learning. Advantages: easy access and increases knowledge, but I don't personally prefer using it for learning. Also easy access to information. Disadvantages: sources and not trusted, maybe WhatsApp or Snapchat will be suitable for learning not Twitter. If I don't personally know the person I won't use WhatsApp with him. We use WhatsApp groups in the university just to share exam dates and general class information, not lectures or learning. If I use SM for learning language it would be personal not supervised by teacher. Maybe I will not like it anymore if learning is involved. I am using SM and I guess I am learning from it but I don't want it to be something formal. I guess SM improves writing and reading skills most. Vocabulary and spelling are under writing. And it depends on how you use it. If you write a lot, you will improve your writing and if you read a lot, you will improve your reading. It could work for all language skills though.

### **Student D**

Twitter is the mostly used application. And I mainly communicate in English when I use it. I use English because I think it is like a lifestyle (using English in SM). Maybe because I am majoring in English and in order not to forget it, I use it there. It is like a way to practice English. Yes, I pay attention to grammar and vocabulary. My accuracy and self-awareness is very high there. And I detect others' errors. I am very meticulous. Ummm, No! I don't want to use SM to learn language. Actually I think SM is for fun I don't want to mix it with education or school. Although sometimes I tweet about translations and share links but I still think it is my personal space. Disadvantages: sources are not always trustable. Advantages: knowing other people cultures and communicating with them. Maybe it has more advantages than disadvantages but still I don't prefer using it for learning. I recommend using SM for language learning but only for the basics. However, to really learn the language and be fluent you have to do something else like going to the classroom or other stuff (something more accurate than SM). I don't think SM would work if used by teachers to teach the language. It has limits for the things we write. It will help a little but will not be very effective. If it something extra not main, I would use it. This is my opinion. Maybe it will help more with vocabulary and writing. It happened before. One of our teachers asked us to tweet about something but I did not like it. If it something for school I

will create another account and not use my personal one for schoolwork. My SM account express/reflects my identity so I don't want to mix that with schoolwork.

### **Student E**

I use Twitter, WhatsApp and Snapchat and I rarely use Instagram. I like Twitter the most. I use Twitter to express my mind and to know what is going around. Snapchat is for pure fun to communicate with family and friends. WhatsApp is to chat with friends and family. But Twitter is the SM app that aligns with education and knowledge in my opinion. I use Arabic in SM and sometimes English. But when I use English in SM I pay attention to what I write, and double check with another application or Google the term to see if this is a correct use to make sure there are no mistakes. I am very meticulous when it comes to writing; I even spot others' errors. I do that. And I follow a lot of accounts on Twitter that explain English and common mistakes of using some terms. Probably half of the people I follow discuss language, whether Arabic or English, and they are very useful in my opinion. I am with the idea of using SM for language learning purposes whether on my free time (on my own) or part of formal lectures. I guess this is fun. Something different from books and other traditional stuff. I prefer Twitter for learning structure and vocabulary. Instagram and Snapchat would work better with pronunciation, accent and speaking. SM can be useful in learning all language skills but would vary in the degree of effectiveness. SM will be more effective with vocabulary and grammar more than listening and speaking. Disadvantages: 140 characters limit in Twitter, maybe in SM when you say something it will not be well comprehended/ received as in face-to-face interaction. In addition, not all SM sources are trustable. Advantages: combines learning with fun and it is a change from the classroom atmosphere we usually learn in, and using SM for something beneficial because we spend a lot of time using them. However, if I have to post a lot of school related stuff when we use SM for learning, I will create another account that is especially specified for learning purposes. I can mix learning with SM but not too much. I want to add that language learning does not bother us in SM, everyone wants to improve their language and believe that language learning is important. But using SM to learn other subject like chemistry I guess this would be so bothering, you don't want to read that in your SM page.

### **Student F**

I use Twitter, Instagram, Path and Snapchat but it is mostly Twitter that I love because it replaced newspapers so I know news from Twitter. I tweet and retweet and read a lot in Twitter. When I write I use Arabic but when I read I read in both Arabic and English. I write in Arabic because it is easier and it gets faster to the audience, but however when English is used it is to practice the structures and the forms or the vocabulary I learned so I don't forget them. Because when I write it, it sticks more than when I read it. I pay too much attention to my grammar and vocab when I write in SM in English that I even double check with Google. Yes, my self-awareness increases a lot when I use English in Twitter. But I mainly focus on my writings, and sometimes detect other people's errors. Yes, I follow accounts that are specialized in teaching English grammar and read for native people (native speakers) so yes I support learning language from SM but it has to be on our own on free time, not something academic or official schoolwork. I am not a fan of doing homework in Twitter. I don't like the idea. Because my tweets are sometimes funny or personal I don't like mixing school with them. I can use it on my own in my free time for indirect learning but not something formal or direct. This problem can be resolved if I open another account to learn not use my personal account. I don't want other

people to see my schoolwork. All skills can be improved through SM but like I said it has to be indirect. Advantages: maybe it has more advantages than disadvantages like it keeps me updated with news, it improves my vocabulary and my English in general, and I acquire new forms and structures and even improved my standard Arabic especially that I am a translator because Twitter gives you more exposure. Disadvantages include that it wastes time and steals family time and might distract me from doing homework. I accept WhatsApp for doing homework not Twitter. And if lessons are simple they can be explained on WhatsApp but not complicated ones. I feel that a board and face-to-face traditional way is better. For self-learning Twitter comes first because I use it most, then Snapchat and Instagram come second. WhatsApp comes last with path. I want to add that SM is useful and plays an important role but should not be used for direct teaching it should be on free time.

### **Student G**

There is no application that stands out as the mostly used one, I guess I use them equally. I use WhatsApp, Twitter and Snapchat. How I use them differs by the features they provide like writing or audio. I guess I used Snapchat the most maybe. I use it for personal purposes and follow different Snaps, and some of them provide language lessons like how to use a word. I like Snapchat because I am a visual person so when I see something it sticks and it is fun. I am not against SM for language learning as long as it is not the main learning source. I guess it should be supportive. And it is ok if we learn through SM and interact and participate with our teacher there, it is a good idea. For example, if we do a homework on Snapchat I don't think it will be a complicated one, it will be simple and something we can do in Snapchat that goes with the features and specifications of the application. Learning through SM is a change in the learning method and would be fun. I mostly use English when I use SM because we don't use English a lot here in Saudi. It is a way to practice we don't have a lot of language use opportunities. I try to use the new vocabulary terms I learned and it is fun to use and apply what you've learned. Yes, I pay attention to grammar and vocabulary when I use English in SM, my self-awareness become high I have to make sure the things I send are correct. I can even detect other people's errors sometimes. Disadvantages: for Snapchat there is a time limit within which you have to see the content or it is lost forever, and sometimes I have to see the same Snaps at least twice to understand them, but when we are talking about WhatsApp, you don't lose the materials, they stay which is good. The disadvantages differ by application. Yes, I believe SM is effective if used for language learning, I myself benefited from SM sources and use. SM can be effective in all language skills except grammar; you have to know some grammar before. Learning grammar in SM would be difficult, this has to be face-to-face. I am totally with the idea of using SM for learning; I am already using these applications a lot so why not use them for learning.

### **Beginner Level**

#### **Student H**

Mostly used applications are WhatsApp and Twitter. They are used for different purposes. WhatsApp for chatting (communicating with family and friends), Twitter for writing dairies (personal space). I mostly use English in both applications. I choose to use it for practicing and it expresses my feelings more than Arabic. Yes, I pay attention to grammar and vocabulary (but not too much), detect my errors and others' errors. I am strongly with SM for learning English. I

support the idea of using SM as a supporting tool in free time, not as a part of a formal lecture or used supervised by the teacher. It should be used independently for self-improvement. If teachers give us only an activity or something extra, it is ok to use SM but not the whole lecture or lesson explained in the platform. Because I prefer face-to-face learning. It is vital to attend the classroom. Any application would work for this purpose (posting extras). Some applications are designated for learning I prefer to use those over SM. It bothers me somehow to go to that application and log in to find the materials. So yes, I am with using an application I use daily for learning purposes. I like the idea but it bothers me because SM is my personal pace. We should keep education away from the platform; it is going to ruin the platform. Advantages: we use them every day, we regularly check our mobiles. Disadvantages: personal space and get totally dependent on SM that they forget the platform. I am OK with it but I don't prefer it. Does not change my motivation for learning. Can cover all language skills like vocabulary, writing, grammar, reading and lots of stuff. I myself improved my English through SM. Although SM works on improving all language skills, I still prefer it my own way on my own time. It is effective but it has to be on our time. Yes, we use it as supportive to the classroom not supervised by the teacher. But still prefer apps for learning language not modify SM for learning.

### **Student I**

Generally, WhatsApp is the mostly used application, and Snapchat comes after. I use both Arabic and English when I use them (English for WhatsApp and Arabic for Snapchat). The reason is that I mainly use WhatsApp to communicate with friends and I use English with them. I use English with them because we study together and we try to use English as much as possible as a way to practice. In Snapchat, I have friends that don't go to the same school as I do (College of Languages and Translation) so we use Arabic. When I use English in WhatsApp, I pay very close attention to my grammar and vocabulary even if it is everyday chatting. I believe if I say it right, I will improve my English not like if I don't care and say whatever. I have a problem with spelling because I learned most of my English through speaking and listening. To improve my spelling when I am chatting, I write the word then use the "replace" feature then the "define" one. I find it very helpful. That is why it takes a while for me to reply on WhatsApp. I even know if my friends wrote something incorrect. I don't like SM accounts that claim teaching the English language. They usually explain something simple, and sometimes they over explain to the extent that they give you a headache. I don't think they are effective especially for beginners. You don't give them a phrase and then explain all of its 15 uses. Give them the prototypical one, the mostly used one. I am with the idea of using SM with the teacher for learning purposes. That would be so exciting! I can't wait to try it with my teachers. Sometimes they send us links through blackboard and emails, but honestly, few of us check them. But I guess when I get the links or extra materials through an application I am already using daily, the situation will be different. It will even stick because I received it in an environment different from the classroom. However, I prefer face-to-face interaction to improve speaking. I don't prefer something electronic. But SM is more effective when it is supportive to the classroom like for extra materials, not the main learning source. SM is very effective and helpful for language learning because language needs interaction, and this is provided by SM. All applications can work because I think they are all similar, the difference depends on which application is trending this year. SM works better for grammar (grammar is absorbed easily) and writing, not speaking, vocabulary and listening. When it is a real face-to-face interaction is totally different. For example, I thought I am good in English but when I went to preparatory year where I was taught

by native speakers I felt the difference, they would correct my pronunciation and I really improved and I am no longer afraid of speaking. SM can give you vocabulary but you need interaction to overcome fear of speaking. It has to be a supportive role not the main one. If you are beginner I don't think SM is good for you, it will confuse you. If you know English but you have some troubles, SM can work for you. Disadvantages: no real-life interaction, no feedback (unless supervised by the teacher). Advantages: improves communication and confidence in writing.

### **Student J**

WhatsApp is the mostly used application, to communicate with family and friends. I like it because of its features (sending images, groups, voice notes) and use the internet in case you don't have enough minutes in your phone plan. I have not used it for learning though. The second most used application is Snapchat. When I use Snapchat I use both Arabic and English. The switch between the languages depends on the person I am communicating with. I follow some accounts that teach English on Snapchat, although I don't participate with them but I capture the screen so I guess this way of learning is somehow useful. WhatsApp and Snapchat are used for everyday communication, but Twitter is the most suitable one if we are talking about learning. I personally view the accounts on Twitter as more professional and Twitter helped me improve my speaking and grammar. I categories vocabulary under speaking because I acquired new words and terms through those Twitter accounts. I pay attention to my vocabulary in Twitter and use a lot of abbreviations. Using SM improved my language and I think it is important and I am with the idea of using SM for language learning. Advantages: We are using those applications anyways so why not use them for learning instead of going to blackboard and other formal websites. Making use of those applications we are already using makes more sense and more fun. I can share what I learn. SM is important and I am with using it for learning as a supportive tool not the main one for learning. Disadvantages: it depends on the Internet availability and speed. I believe Twitter is the most suitable platform prone to learning. SM will improve speaking and vocabulary (grammar included) and would be less effective in reading and writing. But generally, SM is effective in language learning, not because of its use but because it gives people opportunities of practice. But still, practice opportunities are a big deal for language learning improvement. SM can combine learning and entertainment and I would use my personal account not create a new one to use for learning, but actually I will not log in SM to do homework. I prefer learning through activities and practice in SM, not do homework there.

### **Student K**

Snapchat and Instagram are the most used applications daily. Mainly to communicate with family and friends. I follow Snapers that teach English language. Like they explain idioms and stuff. I use both Arabic and English when I use them. It depends on the person if he speaks the language. Sometimes I intentionally use English on Instagram when I write comments because I want to improve my English. I pay attention to grammar and vocabulary and I try to apply what I learned. I want to be as accurate as possible, and I notice it when people use incorrect English, I don't tell them though. I use English because I don't use English elsewhere, its rare in real life here. Even the English we use here (in Saudi) like in ordering in restaurants is not that complicated, so I try to use vocabulary we don't use that much. I am strongly with the idea of using SM for language learning with the teacher. It is like learning and having fun in the same platform. Plus, it is something new. Advantages: fun, things we learn will stick, I will be more

motivated and a new way of learning. However, this does not mean we don't need the language classroom any more, we still need it. And I guess it works for particular language features not all of them. No particular application stands out as the most effective, maybe Instagram would be more suitable because we can see each other's comments and we don't lose content. Advantages: easy access, I can reach content whenever wherever not like when we have to open the laptop to access the PPT slides. Disadvantages: no disadvantages I can think of. I love the idea. I believe SM is effective for language learning but it works best with reading, vocab, grammar, listening but not speaking, so it helps in some skills not all of them. But does not improve fluency. These days and this generation, we use our devices a lot so it is good to use them for learning as well. I would use my personal account, not create another one for learning. I don't think learning ruins the platform or take away from the fun we experience there. Actually I would feel less guilty if I used the apps for learning because sometimes I feel like I am just wasting time.

### **Student L**

Mostly used application is WhatsApp to communicate with family and friends. I use both Arabic and English when I use it. I use Arabic and English with family and friends and use English only if the person I am communicating with does not know Arabic. Sometimes I use English only with one of my friends because sometimes I think English expresses my ideas more accurately. I also use Snapchat and communicate with Arabic when I use it. But when I use other SM like to comment or post something I use English. Yes, I pay attention to grammar and vocabulary when I use English in SM. I do that as a way to learn, it helps me to remember how I typed it there. It sticks. I consider using English in SM and correcting myself when I use it as a way to practice the language, especially when it comes to writing. I also detect my friends' error because I love to correct. I am with SM use for language learning but not to teach a whole lesson or a new one; it has to be like a part of a lesson or just to do homework. I don't think it will work if it is a brand new lesson or an entire lesson posted there. Advantages: Easy to share links, easier from paper homework, easier to write, you don't have to decode bad handwriting, also while I do something in SM, I can access other online resources. Here in Saudi we do not use English a lot and they say in order to learn English very well you have to study abroad, so I think SM environment gives us that feeling. I use my English in those applications more than everyday interactions in Saudi. Practicing is very important for language development. This helped me a lot in learning English I have been doing this for 3 years. When I got into preparatory year I was not afraid of the English test to determine my level because I am already exposed to the language through SM. Here they always tell us listen to the radio or watch movies I also add that SM helps you learn English. SM is the second best tool to learn in my opinion after watching movies if you are learning independently. Disadvantages: you always need the Internet. Also those apps are not for language learning, maybe you get addicted to using them and health wise it affects the vision. The materials are always interesting there, you can only trust the source if the user was an expert or a professional in the field. I think SM works best for listening, grammar, writing ... ummm maybe all of them actually. SM can benefit us in all those skills, except academic writing. I believe that using SM is effective and something important, the classroom is not enough. To conclude I say SM is important as a supportive tool to language learning, not the main and only one. It becomes effective only if it is supportive. Teachers never mention that we should use it, they always say read books, but they don't know that we read a lot in SM. Maybe teachers don't want to use it because they don't have the time for it.

**Student M**

Snapchat is the mostly used application to share videos and pictures and mainly to communicate with family and friends. I follow some accounts that teach English language; sometimes they share valuable information. I use Arabic in Snapchat mainly, and I rarely use English. In Twitter I also follow some accounts that teach language and they are very useful especially for reading. I make sure I check my writing before posting in SM. I don't like to have mistakes. Sometimes I can tell if my friends make errors. I don't mind learning through SM. I think it is ok and they work best with students' time. Advantages: they work when the classroom time is over, fun, make use of phone features like taking screen shots and using the notes, it is quick access and use instead of grapping a pen and paper. Maybe Snapchat would be the most suitable application for language learning. You can write and talk in Snapchat, also Instagram can work. The idea application in my mind is the one that can make you write/read and speak/listen. Twitter can work, but I don't think it would be that effective. You need a lot of space to explain. WhatsApp also is a good idea and I don't mind if my number is visible there. I don't think learning through SM ruins the platforms. I can have fun and learn in the same time, and I will even use my personal account to learn. Disadvantages: I think it is health matters like vision problems and headache. Also technical problems like when the battery dies and losing the Internet connection. Maybe the advantages outnumber the disadvantages. I think SM can improve all language skills on the same degree. I believe that SM would be effective for language learning, but it should be a supportive role (like an hour a day) not the main one. Language classes are still valuable.

**Student N**

Instagram is the application I mostly use. I use it mainly for pictures but I follow accounts that teach English especially expressions and idioms. I love Instagram because it has features that are not available in other applications such as the direct messages and comments features. I mainly use English on Instagram because I try to improve my language so I practice my English on Instagram. Yes, I pay attention to grammar, vocabulary and the accuracy of my spelling but I don't care about punctuations. Because I focus on the language, I sometimes detect other people's errors. I love the idea of learning through Instagram and SM and I am excited to use it, even if the teacher supervises us. I would love to do homework on Instagram too. I don't think people will post wrong information on SM because it is public and others will tell them about it and criticize it (she does not have a concern over SM sources and whether they are trustable). Disadvantages: you get exposed to improper materials so its use should be controlled and for a certain age not children for example. I guess I am more supportive of learning through Instagram than WhatsApp. I don't think WhatsApp is suitable although I don't mind if my phone number appears. I also have a Snapchat account but still prefer Instagram over it for learning if I had to choose. Snapchat is for family and private use. I think Instagram is better if used to teach grammar and vocabulary but not writing. If I am going to write a paragraph, how they can correct me? But they can correct sentences and phrases. I strongly believe that Instagram is effective for learning because already people use it and you get more exposure. My concern is when SM especially Instagram is used with kids.