

Primary Pupils' Use of Social Media to learn ESL



Teoh Ci Xin, Melor Md. Yunus

Abstract: *The next generation of school-going pupils of elementary level will soon be made up of children from generation Alpha, born from the year 2010 to 2025. These technology-savvy young children will soon be dominating the classrooms demanding for digitalised instructional experiences. Technology-infused learning experience has been a prevalent concept in the education field in recent years. Many studies have been carried out to explore how social media and technology assists second language learning in the contexts of secondary and tertiary education. However, little is known about how elementary pupils learn English as a second language (ESL) using social media platforms, primarily in the Asian context. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate how Chinese primary school pupils learn English on social media. Drawing on the original data from a questionnaire survey and document analysis, the findings revealed that the research participants lack the experience of learning English on social media sites although they have access and the necessary competency in handling those sites. The implication derived from this study is that it would be advisable for teachers to steer and plan suitable instructional practices on social media platforms for elementary aged ESL learners in line with their learning preferences and needs.*

Index Terms: *social media, English as a Second Language (ESL), primary school*

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to produce citizens equipped with the relevant knowledge and practical skills that will allow them to create, build and assist in sustaining a digital-information rich society, we have to accommodate the needs and abilities of the 'digi-tal natives'. [1] argues that if educators want to reach the digital natives, we would have to teach in their language instead of just focusing on the traditional way of teach-ing. In other ways, there is no way we can educate this new generation of learners inclusively without recognizing their different language practices and needs as a re-source for them to learn, apply what they have learnt and known as well as to extend these abilities outside the educational contexts. [1]

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contend that the early exposure of 'digital natives' to technologies has resulted in them acting and thinking differently as compared to the 'digital immigrants' from before the Information Communication and Technology era.

In line with the concept that learning should more learner-centered instead of teacher-centered,

Educators need to explore ways on how we can transform and encourage learning for this new generation of IT learners outside the four walls of the classrooms, as well as learning beyond the educational settings. With the advent of social networking sites, video streaming, blogging, instant messaging and many more, today's classrooms have entered a revolution with technology at its core. Despite the drawbacks like workload issues [2] and uncertainty of ownership and assessment issues of work produced [3] that social media poses, a few studies conducted have shown the positive influences of social media in the educational settings. For instance, Facebook could promote socio-pragmatic competence [4]; Twitter has been found to be able to facilitate and provide an immediate response to students' queries without a formal setting while blogs and wikis have been concluded to help students socialize, collaborate, learn, provide peer support and feedback through idea sharing for better understanding of concepts [5][6]. Hence it is clear that the use of social media has definitely brought about positive changes in the way teaching and learning is being carried out, as supported by [7].

Many studies have been conducted to explore how social media is being used for teaching and learning in higher education institutions and faculties and the positive outcomes that resulted from [6], [8], [9] and [10]. However, not many studies were carried out to investigate the use of social media among primary school pupils in the Malaysian context and the way social media is being used by these pupils, especially in the context of pupils of Chinese ethnicity where their first language is the Chinese mandarin language. Thus this paper will investigate the way Chinese pupils in a Malaysian national-type primary school use social media to learn English. This paper will attempt to answer the question on how Chinese elementary aged pupils learn English on social media.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Media and Children

Long before the Internet was invented, humans have been engaging in social networking, information sharing and collaborate on creative work using some forms of technologies life writing to calling cards to the Telegraph [11].



Fast forward to the mid-2000s, Friendster, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram launched social networking sites that allow users to create profiles, connect with other users all over the world, share and publish content. On the other hand, web services like Youtube and Flickr gradually integrated social networking elements and by 2010s were known as 'social media'. Although the definition of 'social media' is not entirely agreed upon with many researchers conceiving their own interpretations, it can generally refer to any application or technology where users take part in the creation and sharing of media resources and practice with other users through digital networking [12].

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported that the percentage of Internet users has risen from 76.9% in 2016 to 87.4 % in 2018 and 9 out of 10 children aged 5 to 17 were using the Internet [13]. The survey also found out that messaging, watching videos, social networking, and gathering information were among the top online activities preferred by children. However, no data was collected in terms of online educational activities carried out by this group of Internet users. Therefore this paper attempts to identify the educational usage of social media among elementary aged Chinese pupils, in line with the notion of [14] who highlighted that social media is a tool for educational purposes where learners can incorporate technology into their lives to maximise learning in ways that may not have been the original intentions of their educators.

B. Social media and English as a second language (ESL) learning

In the past, language learners might have to travel abroad or study language books to learn a different language but L2 learners today is a more privileged group in the sense that we have many other ways to improve our language skills, from watching movies, listening to audio recordings to reading stories written by native authors. Reference [15] stated that the books have to co-exist with the new revolutionary forms of learning that are taking place through the rapid spread of digital networking, information and communication technologies. This notion makes a remarkable point about the topic of language learning, especially second language learning (L2). Current L2 learners can experience the possibilities of learning a target language through the integration of books and social media. In support, language learning is inherently social and interactive [16]. Hence connecting interactive social media with language learning would enhance and facilitate the language learning process for the learners.

Past studies have shown that social media increases the power of speech through online conversation other L2 learners and native speakers [17] and make L2 learning more social and enjoyable with reduced stress resulting in better comprehension of material and content [18]. In a more localised context, in particular in secondary and higher educations settings, the use of social media has been proven to promote interaction for ESL learners in an online discussion on Facebook [19]; increase pupils' writing skill in collaborative writing via Powtoon and Facebook [20]; improve pupils' writing skill and performance through Facebook [21], [22], [23]; and interact more confidently in Goggle+ ESL writing class [24]. In relation to all the empirical evidences illustrated, although the web has probably reached its maturity as a platform for language learning but the response to these digital innovations is still

lagging behind, especially in the context of Malaysian primary education.

III. METHODOLOGY

This survey research design study employed a questionnaire to gather the data for descriptive analysis. For the purpose of this study, 100 pupils from a Malaysian national-type primary school in the urban area were chosen to participate. However, only 61 (36 males and 25 females) were selected as samples. They were chosen as respondents of this study because their age range is between 10 to 12 years old. They also have spent a longer time in informal and formal learning environments and this is an advantage for them to participate in a task that requires more advanced thinking skills like analysing and evaluating. The respondents are also of Chinese ethnicity. Hence the result of this study cannot be generalised to all elementary aged pupils in the local and global contexts. The respondents are of mixed genders and they have different levels of English Language proficiency and confidence, distinct abilities, motivation, interest, and socioeconomic backgrounds, all of which could influence the choice of social media for learning.

The instrument used in this study is a set of questionnaire consisting of 4 sections (A-D). The items found in the questionnaire include aspects like the demographic profile of respondents (Section A), access to ICT tools (Section B), competency in social media (Section C) and English language learning activities carried out using social media (Section D). The items in the questionnaire were reviewed in terms of the aspects of clarity, redundancy, readability and completeness by two experts so that the items would be more reader-friendly to the primary school pupils. The two experts were an associate professor specialized in the field of the integration of technology in ESL teaching and learning and an experienced English Language teacher who has taught English in primary school for more than 10 years. Section D was given a four-point Likert scale. The neutral category was extracted from the scale to avoid participants from choosing the middle responses that are most preferred by Asian respondents [25]. The Cronbach's alpha value for Section D is .894. This shows that the 10 items have good internal consistency and high reliability. Data collected from the questionnaire survey were analysed using descriptive analysis. The mean scores, percentages of responses and level of frequency of individual items from the questionnaire are shown in the following tables.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE I. PARTICIPANTS' ACCESS TO ICT TOOLS

	ACCESS	YES	NO
1	Computer	53 (86.3)	8 (13.1)
2	Laptop	42 (68.9)	19 (31.1)
3	IPAD	40 (65.6)	21 (34.3)
4	Internet	56 (91.8)	5 (8.2)
5	Using Social Media	44 (72.1)	17 (27.9)



Table 1 shows that more than half of the respondents do have access to ICT tools such as computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.

A significant number of respondents, 56 pupils, have access to Internet services because they are from the urban area. Furthermore, 44 out of 61 pupils chosen as research participants are active on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Wechat, YouTube, Whatsapp, LINE, Telegram, etc.

TABLE II. PARTICIPANTS' SOCIAL MEDIA COMPETENCY

SOCIAL MEDIA	NOT APPLICABLE	WEAK	MODERATE	GOOD	VERY GOOD
Facebook	20	15	13	9	4
Twitter	48	4	4	4	1
Wechat	24	8	17	6	6
LINE	40	13	6	2	0
Instagram	36	10	5	4	6
YouTube	1	15	7	18	20
Whatsapp	10	4	16	21	9
Telegram	55	3	2	1	0
Tik Tok	24	9	9	8	12
Snapchat	54	2	2	1	2

Table 2 shows that the respondents are more competent in using YouTube (M=3.67), Whatsapp (M=3.28) and Tik Tok (M=2.59). The items with the lower mean scores are Telegram (M=1.16) and Snapchat (M=1.28). Hence more language learning activities should be designed on social media platforms that pupils have higher competency in usage to ensure more active participation from them. [9] explain how social media provides a personal learning environment that is fully controlled by a student for self-regulated learning while [26] suggest using social media as an instructional tool for learning purposes and both [9] and [26] discuss the benefit of social media in facilitating and connecting formal and informal learning. Additionally, [10] highlight that online learning through social media has advantages that are in line with educational purposes.

All these empirical evidences point to the fact that educators can opt to use social media for teaching and learning inside and outside of the classrooms, provided that we choose the social media platform that our learners have higher competency and are familiar with so that maximum learning outcomes can be achieved.

TABLE III. ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE PARTICIPANTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

ITEM	S.D	D	A	S.A	MEAN
I communicate verbally with people in English.	19 (31.1)	6 (9.8)	23 (37.7)	13 (21.3)	2.492
I read stories, articles or news in English.	22 (36.1)	16 (26.2)	16 (26.2)	7 (11.5)	2.131
I write replies, comments or updates in English.	23 (37.7)	16 (26.2)	15 (24.6)	7 (11.5)	2.098
I watch English educational videos and listen	3 (4.9)	8 (13.1)	22 (36.1)	28 (45.9)	3.230

to songs in English.					
I answer English quizzes and play English-based activities or games.	13 (21.3)	10 (16.4)	20 (32.8)	18 (29.5)	2.705
I follow organisations, companies or teachers who share English Language advice on SM	38 (62.3)	10 (16.4)	12 (19.7)	1 (1.6)	1.607
I create a SM account to join English learning group.	41 (67.2)	9 (14.8)	9 (14.8)	2 (3.3)	1.541
I use YouTube to learn English pronunciation or words.	19 (31.1)	13 (21.3)	19 (31.1)	10 (16.4)	2.328
I connect with native English speakers.	39 (63.9)	12 (19.7)	7 (11.5)	3 (4.9)	1.574
I practice English pronunciation with friends on SM.	37 (60.7)	8 (13.1)	11 (18.0)	5 (8.2)	1.738

Even though Table 1 reports that more than half of the respondents have access to ICT tools, Internet connection, and social media platforms. However, the findings in Table 3 indicate that only 2 out of 10 items are of high frequency level with the mean scores of M=2.705 and M=3.230 respectively. The remaining 8 items in Table 3 are categorised under the lower frequency scale with mean scores ranging from M=1.541 to M=2.492. The items that show the higher mean scores are 'I watch educational videos and listen to songs in English.' and 'I answer quizzes and play English-based activities or games.' Similar findings were reported in other studies like [27] and [28] where the primary pupils' use of internet and computer applications, although not in the context of English, were accessing social networking sites, playing games, listening to music, watching videos, etc. This shows that the majority of the respondents still favour audio and visual learning styles that involve, for the most part, listening and reading skills in English. The findings also imply the need for the element of fun and interactive learning to be present in language learning activities on social media platforms.

On the other hand, the 2 items in Table 3 with the comparatively lower mean scores are 'I create a SM account to join English learning group.' (M=1.541) and 'I connect with native English speakers.' (M=1.574). In support of the finding for item with the lowest mean score, [27] explain that elementary aged pupils do not like to use technology for academic learning purposes like completing homework. They prefer to use technology for non-academic activities like playing games, chatting with friends on social media, sending and receiving emails or learning new knowledge not related to school work. This asserts the fact that a significantly lower number of respondents create accounts to join English learning groups on social media sites. For the item with the second lowest mean score in Table 3,



it should be highlighted that it may be due to the natural inhibition of Chinese children in the social contexts as compared to their Western counterparts [29], [30]. It has been found that Chinese children may display more shyness and anxiety when faced with challenging circumstances. [31] also propose that anxiety might be more strongly aroused during speaking activity than pure learning tasks for second language learners. It is understandable that the Chinese pupils are less likely to be the one who initiates a conversation with a native English speaker on social media platforms, given that English is a second or possibly, a foreign language to them.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

It is acknowledged that English is not the first language of the respondents in this study. Studies have shown that the process of second language learning can be challenging for non-native speakers [32], [33]. The classic example is how pupils learning a second language equipped with the content knowledge would 'freeze' during an informal or formal language test. In other words, they may not be able to fully demonstrate the information or linguistic skills that they have learnt. In the context of this study, aside from the innate shyness of Chinese children, anxiety and other affective variables are possible causes of differences in individual language achievement. As mentioned earlier, getting Chinese Children to respond or speak up is typically more challenging as they are generally considered to be more reticent and reserved [29], [30]. Hence this study found out that in the process of learning English as a second language (ESL), Chinese pupils prefer activities that focus on listening and reading skills as compared to speaking and writing on social media.

ESL teachers can consider exposing learners to more suitable language learning strategies, in particular, affective strategies proposed by [34]. Learners should learn to relax whenever they feel afraid of using English in any contexts, encourage them-selves to speak the target language even when they are afraid of making mistakes, reward themselves when they do well in English, be aware that they are stress or nervous whenever they are learning or using English and take constructive approaches to overcome these obstacles such as writing down their feelings in a journal or talking to someone about how they feel. When the anxiety and reticence levels are reduced and they have built the confidence they need, they will start to take up the learning opportunities they encounter voluntarily in the process of learning a second language, more so on the social media platforms that are familiar to them.

The truth is in the near future, generation Alpha, this group of internet-savvy and technologically literate generation, will soon make up a whole new batch of school-going elementary-aged children. They have the privilege of access to up-to-date ICT tools and gadgets, digital technologies, social media sites, and other online services because technology will be an integrated experience in their lives. Hence it would be wise for ESL teachers to leverage on this fact so that we can plan our instructional practices and create language learning activities that deeply integrate the use of digital learning tools and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, YouTube, etc. to maximise second language learning opportunities for this digital generation.

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