Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool among Foreign Language Learners in Libya: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

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Social media have numerous positive benefits for students’ learning (Hwang, Kessler, & Francesco, 2004). Besides their easy access, social media platforms enable students to improve communications and language skills, because their different forms of interactive media facilitate interaction among users via the Internet. Recently, SNS users have increasingly availed of the advances and facilities that social media provide.

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to investigate the role of social media as an English language learning autonomy tool among foreign language learners (EFL) in Libya. Specifically, the thesis looks at the extent to which Libyan university students use and access social networking sites (SNSs) to learn English and determine whether these social platforms contribute to the development of their English language skills. Moreover, it explores the opportunities and challenges of integrating SNSs for English language learning in the Libyan context.

A mixed-methods approach was used in the research to examine the extent to which EFL university students access and use different social media platforms for language learning purposes. The data collection methods used were questionnaires, diaries and interviews. The data indicates that Libyan university students’ engagement with and use of SNSs and digital technologies is widespread, although at a less sophisticated level than in other countries, with this being partly due to the local context. Libyan university students highly value the importance of SNSs as a means to improve their English language skills. According to the English teachers, integrating the Internet and SNSs in the classroom have significant positive effects on learning English; however, it would appear that they do not implement the use of such tools in their teaching. This goes back to infrastructural, institutional and cultural factors, including teachers’ poor ICT experience of modern educational methods.
The data in the results indicate a much stronger trend towards undirected autonomous learning on the part of students, as a by-product of using social media, than directed autonomous learning, which is lacking in the current context.
DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented herein is original and a result of my own work.

Sana Bashir Hussein Altaleb
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ABBREVIATIONS

B.A: Bachelor of Arts
B.Ss: Bachelor of Science
CALL: Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CMC: Computer Mediated Communication
CPD: Continuing Professional Development
EFL: English as a Foreign Language
EL: English Language
ELT: English Language Teaching
GPA: Grade Point Average
GPCP: General Peoples’ Committee for Planning
ICT: Information and Communication Technologies
INSET: In-service Education of Teachers
IT: Information Technology
LLS: Language Learning Strategy
LTT: Libya Telecom and Technology
PC: Personal Computer
SNSs: Social Networking Sites
SLA: Second Language Acquisition
UAE: United Arab Emirates
US: United States of America
VLEs: Virtual Learning Environment
INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

This study is an in-depth examination of the integration of social media platforms as language learning tools in Libya. Due to the extensive advances and proliferation of digital technologies in recent years, the field of research into social media in relation to language learning has developed rapidly, while the use of technology and social networking sites have also gained increasing popularity amongst learners studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It is evident that such social networking sites (SNSs) provide learners with the opportunity to create personal profiles, to interact more authentically with their peers, and to form relationships (Thorne, 2010). In fact, the emergence and ease of access to both the Internet and SNSs, have fundamentally transformed the ability for people to communicate and interact with each other, as is particularly discernible among contemporary university students.

Social media enable virtual communities and virtual learning environments (VLEs) to expand (Hussain, 2005) and disseminate learning amongst users. By using social media university students may interact and communicate freely with various members of virtual communities as a means to “share information and study experiences, research projects and job opportunities with each other” (Hussain, 2012, p. 640). Through such activities as reflection and collaboration in virtual environments (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008), third-level students can harness the potential of diverse social media platforms to enhance and strengthen their learning. In this way, different SNSs can arguably improve student motivation to learn and better equip them to manage their own autonomous learning (Ushioda, 2006; Thorne, 2003; Ware, 2005).

This research study originated in a personal interest in SNS issues which ultimately gave rise to an exploration into the effects of digital technologies on English language learning. The main focus of my investigation was the role of social media as an English language learning tool among Libyan foreign language learners (EFL). More specifically, the primary research set out to determine the extent to which Libyan university students use and access social networking sites (SNSs) in order to learn English, and to ascertain whether such social
Platforms actually contribute to the autonomous development of their English language skills. The study also sought to evaluate the opportunities and challenges of integrating SNSs for English language learning in the Libyan context. A mixed methods research was deemed most appropriate to meet the targets of the study and a range of specific data instruments were devised accordingly. Subsequent analysis of the collated data confirmed that although access and use of SNSs occurs at a less sophisticated level in Libya, student engagement with SNSs and digital technologies is nonetheless considerable, and plays an intrinsic role in the improvement of learners' English language skills.

Objectives of the Study

This study investigates the connection between learners’ use of social networking sites (SNSs) and English language learning, since the use of SNSs has spread extensively among Libyan EFL learners. An additional goal is to examine the extent to which social media can be adopted as an autonomous English language learning tool, from the perspective of students in Sabratha University. Additionally, this study attempts to explore opportunities, challenges and barriers involved in using social media tools for learning English among Libyan EFL learners. In order to achieve these objectives, the research questions addressed are as follows:

Research Questions

In this study, there is one primary research question and five sub-questions:

Primary question

Question 1: What is the role of social media as an autonomous tool for English language learning in Libya?

Sub-questions

In order to answer the primary question, a study of Sabratha University will be carried out, and will focus on the following issues:

- To what extent do Sabratha University students access and use social networking sites (SNSs)?
To what extent do Sabratha University students regard themselves as skilful and confident in their use of SSNs as an autonomous learning tool?

Which social media are preferred by Sabratha University students to improve their English language progress?

What do students think of SNSs as a mean of English language learning?

Are there particular factors that are perceived to impact on the desire and ability of Sabratha University students to utilise social media, such as the following?

a) The availability of, and unrestricted access to, social media within society in general, and specifically within the university;

b) the use of information technology and social media by faculty members at Sabratha University in the classroom.

Organisation of the Thesis

This study is divided into seven chapters:

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study that is designed to investigate students' integration of digital technology, in particular social networking sites (SNSs), as an English language learning tool. It begins with a brief introduction to Libya (location, culture and language), the Libyan education system and the availability of the Internet, technology and social media, which are the main headings to be discussed below.

Chapter 2 presents the literature on autonomous learning and learning strategies related to this study. It reviews a number of key issues related to language learning strategies (LLSs) and strategy choices made by English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners. Accordingly, it highlights the major assumptions and practices underlying different paradigms, and their impact on English language progress; it also addresses different classifications of learning strategies, types of LLSs, variables affecting strategy choice, the concept of the good language learner and language theory. In addition, it discusses different aspects related to learner autonomy, and how learners can be supported and prepared to become autonomous learners. In addition, this section aims to examine in depth what autonomous learning is, how to promote learner autonomy, different concepts of learner autonomy and the teacher’s role in improving learners’ autonomy.
Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature related to integrating the Internet, technology and social media in education. It provides an overall understanding of integrating social media and digital technology to enhance autonomous English learning. In order to have a good understanding of how social media and digital technology can improve learners' English language autonomously, this chapter discusses social media in general, social media and the Internet, social media and higher education, the net generation and different types of SNSs used by learners, with a focus on Facebook, Twitter and blogs. In addition, this chapter focuses on students' experience of using social media, gender and age differences, students' confidence in using online technologies and teachers' use of technology in the classroom.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology and procedures that were used to investigate the current level of integration and the use of social media and digital technologies in Libyan universities. A detailed description of the research design, research methods and methods of collecting data are included in this chapter. In addition, it explains the process of selecting the population and the sample of the study to give comprehensive details about the process of data collection in the current study.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the statistical analysis of the data collected (questionnaire) in this study from participants based in Sabratha University. It documents response rates and sampling size. In addition, it provides a detailed thematic analysis of the results from diaries and interviews.

Chapter 6 links the data results with various theoretical backgrounds and different studies. It reviews the issues related to the use of SNSs and technology in autonomous language learning. These results will provide significant details from a wider range of educational backgrounds.

Chapter 7 discusses the conclusions and limitations of the current study, including the contributions of the study and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 1- BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief introduction to Libya (location, culture and language), the Libyan education system and the availability of the Internet, technology and social media in Libya, which are the main headings to be discussed.

1.2 Introduction to Libya: Location, Culture and Language

Libya is an Arabic country located in North Africa and bordered by Tunisia and Algeria to the west, Egypt and Chad to the East and Niger and Sudan to the south. Libya is considered one of the largest countries by area in Africa. Tripoli is the capital. Libya has a long coast, of about 2,000 kilometres, on the Mediterranean Sea. It has an area of 1.76 million square kilometres. The population of Libya is about 6.2 million, and includes around 2.7 million students; the number of university students is more than 300,000. The majority of Libyan people are Muslims. Figure 1.1 details the location of Libya and the distribution of the Libyan cities.

![Figure 1.1- Map of Libya](image)

Arabic is the official language of Libya, with different dialects spoken in different regions (Jones, 2008). It is also the language of education, although the importance of English is
widely acknowledged, and is being used as a medium of instruction in most Libyan colleges and schools. Almost all national and private universities use an English-based curriculum in pharmacy, engineering and medicine, as well as in English departments, with the exception of Arabic and Islamic studies programmes (Agnaia, 6991).

1.3 The Education System in Libya

The education system in Libya is extremely centralised, with the General Peoples’ Committee for Planning (GPCP) as the central authority. The GPCP has the full authority to make decisions on funding educational institutions, managing school distribution across the country, employing teachers in suitable educational institutions, developing and improving the curriculum, and planning and managing examinations for all institutions in the country (Orafi & Borg, 2009). In general, “the GPCE, the equivalent of the Ministry of Education, is the governmental body which is responsible for education management in Libya” (Embark, 2011, p. 9). The main focus of education policy in Libya is to “spread education” through a “comprehensive policy of education for all” (GPCE, 2008, p. 20).

The Libyan government is committed to developing and promoting education as a means of improving the quality of all citizen lives. As such, the three stage system of education in Libya is mandatory and free of charge from elementary school to university level inclusive. The Committee of Higher Education is responsible for the management of all curricula development and practice for all public schools. The primary or preparatory level applies to pupils aged 6 to 14. The secondary level is usually a three to four year stage and applies to students aged 15 to 19. At this juncture, students have the opportunity to opt for different academic disciplines within the parameters of the overall secondary level curriculum.

The third level is the university or commensurate educational stage. In 2011 the EACEA reported that approximately 57% of 340,000 students enrolled in Libyan universities in the 2008/09 academic year were female, and more than 90% were enrolled in public universities as Bachelor or Masters Degree students or Doctoral candidates.

i) The primary degree of Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.Ss) or equivalent, is awarded upon successful completion of four to five years of study at
the universities or higher institutes. At this level, content specialists arrange and design the syllabus for each course in the university (Gadour, 2006). In addition, students who have excelled in their studies may avail of opportunities to complete their higher education overseas, and more than 12,000 students have been awarded generous scholarships to pursue both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in a variety of third level educational institutions around the world. It is hoped this will enhance the development of the education system in Libya for future generations. In fact, according to the United Nations' Human Development Index, Libya already enjoys the fastest-growing rate of literacy compared to its neighbouring Arab and African countries.

ii) Building on the Bachelor's level, the Master's Degree is offered in a number of the main universities, such as Tripoli University, and is awarded on successful completion of two further years of specialist academic study.

iii) This time building on the Master's level, the Doctorate is awarded following several years of concentrated specialist research within specific academic parameters. Since only a small number of Libyan university departments offer PhD supervision in such fields as Islamic studies, Arabic, and the Humanities, students majoring in other disciplines travel abroad to complete their doctoral studies.

Figure 1.2, below, provides an overview of the Libyan education system:
In Libya, the teacher is the dominant person in the classroom who can ask questions, then select a student to give an answer and explain examples on the board to the rest of the class (Aldabbus, 2008). The teacher is the only person who has the authority to control the class and transfer knowledge to the learners. Students should not interrupt teachers, and teachers are expected to have a comprehensive knowledge of everything (Elmahjoub, 2014).

In the classroom, students usually sit in rows, and they should listen to the teacher carefully. If the teacher asks a question, students raise their hands to give an answer to the question. Then, the teacher picks one or more students to give the answer. The majority of teachers in Libya prefer to use traditional teaching methods, because they doubt the usefulness of communicative teaching and prefer teaching large amounts of vocabulary and grammar rules for students to memorise” (Aldabbus, 2008). In fact, this affects English language teaching in Libya in a major way and contributes to enabling the continued use of the grammar translation method rather than the communicative approach. Language teachers in Libya lag behind contemporary teaching methods, and they prefer to use traditional teaching
methods that rely on memorisation and recitation (The General Committee of Education, 2008). Although some teachers are nominated to attend various training courses to improve their teaching methods and to cope with the recent teaching methods, only a small number of teachers enrol in these courses and benefit from them. Actually, there are many obstacles that prevent the implementation of modern language teaching methods; for example, poor technological infrastructure, the unavailability of language labs to play cassettes for listening skills, a lack of time, the dominance of the first language in the classroom, teachers' preference for using traditional methods in teaching and the large number of students in the classroom (Elmahjoub, 2014). However, there are serious plans in Libya to improve the education infrastructure more rapidly to achieve higher educational quality.

1.4 The Internet, Technology and Social Media in Libya

The widespread use of computers, the World Wide Web (WWW), the Internet, and information communication technologies (ICTs) have contributed to change in the world over the last three decades. This major change in the world is known as the Digital and Technological Revolution, as named by historians and social commentators to distinguish it from previous eras (Freeman & Louca, 2001; Duff, 2003; Grazian, 2005). Recently, rapid technological change and intensified global competition have made the world very different.

The Internet and digital technologies have become ubiquitous in people’s daily lives, and they contribute to many aspects of their lives, such as work, play and study (Ito et al., 2009). Weldon (2012) reports that the arrival of digital technologies has made a noticeable shift in recent years, particularly with the advent of mobile technologies that can be accessed via the Internet at any time and from any place in the world. The significance of this shift can be seen in many aspects of life. For students, for example, the Internet is considered a potential source of a variety of information for both formal and informal learning. McConnell (2000) reported that the Internet gives learners the opportunity to access abundant knowledge resources which will improve self-development and professional development, just as it improves academic learning.

The Internet became available to, and spread among, most of the Libyan cities in 2000 (Eid, 2004; Free house, 2012; Gazzini, 2007). However, Libya is considered absent from the
scene, and has not benefitted from the business opportunities that can be gained by the employment of Internet infrastructure to the benefit of citizens. Sadly, the Libyan government, from the period 1969 to 2011 (the Gaddafi era), was struggling with the idea of providing unlimited Internet and information access, due to political issues. In a study by Reporters Sans Frontiers, Libya has been acknowledged as one of 20 countries that fight the availability and use of the Internet (The Tech Wiz, n.d.).

The fact that the Internet and technology were not utilised for educational purposes is related to the poor ICT facilities and weak technological infrastructure in most of the Libyan schools and the lack of ICT skills training. The implementation of ICT facilities in Libya is still lagging behind. Higher education institutes in Libya face various obstacles when introducing IT processes for learning and teaching. These obstacles relate to the teachers’ and students’ language and cultural background, their attitudes to learning, the poor technological infrastructure and the high cost of educational technologies, the lack of experience in educational development and the lack of educational equipment to improve education (Hamdy, 2007). Computer technology was taught as a theory, but there was no practical use of it in secondary schools (Elmabruk, 2008). Despite the attempts of the Libyan government to provide different technological infrastructures in all universities and for educational purposes, it faced many challenges in terms of the implementation of ICT and e-learning in teaching and learning. These challenges are associated with the students’ and teachers’ awareness of learning, the weak technological infrastructure, the lack of experience and educational management to support e-learning, and the fact that the majority of teachers lack the required knowledge and training in using e-learning for educational purposes. Elmabruk (2008) reported that, although Libyan English language teachers (ELT) are “aware of the Internet’s potential for improving professional development” (p. 180), online professional development cannot be implemented successfully, due to many reasons. For example, i) some EL instructors do not have sufficient skills in technology, ii) “the absence of school-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of any sort” (p. 181), iii) “the scarcity of organized In-Service Education of Teachers (INSET) provision” (p. 181), iv) “Internet facilities are non-existent at public schools” (p. 181), v) “teachers’ usage of the Internet appeared to be oriented more towards advancing language skills than professional development” (p. 180) and vi) “the low pay and lack of financial or promotional incentives” for public school teachers (p. 181).
The strict political censorship that was imposed on education and different educational activities also played a critical role in the delay in the spread of technology, and any teacher training or activity was reported to the government, and this was before the uprising in 2011. Any educational exchanges to share ideas and opinions were not allowed, and they were considered offensive actions against the government (Duncan, 2011; Elmaazi, 2013; Elmabruk, 2008; Loeb, 2012, 2012b).

According to the Internet World State (2014), 1,362,604 Libyans used the Internet as of 2014, which represented only 0.5% of the total population of Africa’s Internet users. In fact, this is considered a very small number compared to the rest of the world. RAND’s National Defense Research Institute reports that Libya is considered one of the countries that are “fearful” of the consequences of Internet development (Burkhart & Older, 2003). This means that the spread and availability of the Internet in Libya has occurred only recently, and has been slow.

Governmental control over Internet use was one of the reasons behind the delayed Internet development in Libya (Nusir, 2014). For example, before the Libyan armed conflict, some Libyan bloggers tried to use the Internet to uncover corruption and tyranny; however, they faced hard penalties from the Libyan government. In 2005, the Libyan anti-corruption journalist Dhaif Al-Ghazaly was the first Arab online blogger to be arrested and killed in Libya, and "his murderers cut off his fingers before stabbing and shooting him as a chilling message to the rest" (Pintak & Fouda, 2009). The Libyan government was unlikely to use the Internet widely, because of the possibility that it might be used for protesting purposes, and "Libya is likely to remain isolated and increasingly beset with internal strife” (Burkhart and Older, 2003).

The 2011 armed conflict in Libya completely changed different aspects of daily life, in particular communication and Libya Telecom and Technology (LTT) services. It halted progress in the country and disrupted education, economic growth, employment and infrastructure (Rhema, & Miliszewska, 2012). A report by the Libyan League for Human Rights has stated that the amount of material losses reached $575 billion (Aljazeera.net, 2011). In fact, Libya’s ICT networks, projects and adoption were considered poor even before the 2011 uprising. This is actually because of a political environment in which –the
ICT market has been controlled by a state-owned monopoly, except for mobile-cellular (voice) services, where two state-owned operators are competing with each other” (Rhema & Sztendur, 2013). Eventually, despite all the attempts of the government to block access to the Internet in 2011, Libyan people used different SNSs, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to upload images and videos taken by protesters to report the suppression of the armed conflict by the government and extend their voice and news to the world.

Since 2004, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and online professional activities have been introduced and developed in Tripoli; however, they are not common in English language teaching programmes (Nusir, 2014). Despite the availability of social networking sites, including blogs, they are non-existent in public schools (Elmabruk, 2008). However, after the end of the armed conflict, LTT started its maintenance work and carried out technical operations to restore its services in the affected areas in October 2011. ICTs and mobile phones have played a fundamental role in facilitating communication between people in the Libyan revolution, which occurred on 17th February 2011 (Libyan Ministry of Communication and Informatics, 2012; Jones et al., 2012). According to Jones and colleagues (2012), due to the extensive cellular coverage and high rates of mobile phone usage and ownership among Libyans, mobile phone devices played a vital role in election monitoring. The Libyan uprising in 2011 changed Libya from being the fifth most censored country in the world (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2006) to become one of the world’s fastest-growing countries on Facebook (Silverwood-Cope, 2011). Facebook pages spread extensively in Libya (Nusir, 2014), and the use of Facebook in Libya increased by 588.86%, with 316,000 Facebook users emerging within only six months in 2011 (Silverwood-Cope, 2011). Accordingly, Facebook pages have the potential to be an important resource for knowledge and interaction for Libyans in various areas, such as education, the economy, politics and social interactions. Since then, SNSs have been integrated as an important source of knowledge and information in the country and in various fields, including education.
1.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a general image of Libya’s location, population and culture. Further, general information related to the education system in Libya and availability of digital technologies in the educational institutes were discussed as well.

It can be concluded that English language is widely acknowledged in education and it used as a medium of instruction in most of the academic disciplines. Internet and technology are available in Libya, but were not utilized for educational purposes and this is mainly because of the poor technological infrastructure in Libya. These details will be discussed in depth in the coming chapters.

The following chapter explored language learning strategies and autonomous learning as the main key themes that contribute to English language learning.
CHAPTER 2- AUTONOMOUS LEARNING AS A LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY

2.1 Introduction

Building on the opening remarks and contextualization set out in Chapter One, this chapter will provide an overview and further develop the discussion of language learning strategies and autonomous learning in the Libyan context. To this ends, the chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents a background to language learning strategies (LLSs). Since they play an elemental role in learning a second or foreign language, this section outlines the basic functions and conceptual framework of LLS definitions, classifications, LLS theory, and the many factors which influence learners’ choices of strategies. The second section focuses on autonomous learning, both as a key language learning strategy and as one of the key frameworks of this thesis. This section addresses the development of learner autonomy, along with the definitions and main features of autonomous learning. It also considers a number of approaches to promoting learner autonomy, training learners, and raising awareness of autonomous learning. This section further assesses the role of teachers in developing and enhancing learner autonomy.

2.2 Definition of Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies play a fundamental role in second and foreign language acquisition. Second language acquisition (SLA) is known as “the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom” (Ellis, 1998, p. 3). The main focus here is about language learning strategies since they play a fundamental role in learning a second or foreign language. Learning strategies necessarily determine the methods used, those preferred by learners may be deemed a significant reflection of their intention to assume control of their own learning. The importance of language learning strategies has been widely emphasized, as they represent tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence (Oxford, 1990). A number of scholars claim that language learning strategies are “an extremely powerful learning tool” (O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo & Kupper, 1985a, p. 43), while others assert that when combined with other techniques, they can exert a significant
positive effect upon language learning progress (Griffiths, 2004). For these reasons, research into language learning strategies has grown since the 1980s, an extensive studies have been undertaken to explore their effect on language learners’ usage of language and progress in acquisition.

Extensive research has underscored the pre-eminence of language learning strategies (LLSs) in relation to language learner competency. LLSs are the conscious or subconscious techniques used by all language learners when processing new information and performing tasks in the language classroom. Oxford (2011) claims that LLSs are the conscious steps taken by language learners to improve the acquisition, storage, retention, recollection, and application of new information. As such, LLSs may be understood as the specific actions, behaviours or procedures used by learners to help them achieve their language learning goals. Oxford (1990) contends that the adoption of appropriate LLSs help language learners to gain self-confidence and increase their proficiency in the target language.

Stern (1992) argues that the concept of a learning strategy is dependent on the assumption that learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals and learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional direction and learning techniques”, while O’Malley & Chamot (1990) define LLSs as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1).

Brown (2000) provides a more comprehensive definition:

Strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information. They are contextualized ‘battle plans’ that might vary from moment to moment, or day to day, or year to year. Strategies vary intra-individually; each of us has a number of possible ways to solve a particular problem, and we choose one – or several in sequence – for a given problem (p. 113).

It is evident that the classification and definition LLSs is not a straightforward task. Ellis (1994, p. 529) describes the concept as “fuzzy”, Wenden & Rubin (1987, p. 7) are wary of “the elusive nature of the term”, and Cohen (1998, p. 3) highlights the “conflicting views.”
2.3 Types of LLSs

Research has revealed a distinct correlation between language learning proficiency and LLSs (Bremner, 1999; Oxford, 1989). Oxford (1990) claims that successful language learners may apply particular learning strategies to dovetail with to their learning needs and thereby determine how students learn a second or foreign language (Oxford, 2003). Since students who are equipped to choose the most appropriate learning strategies can significantly increase autonomous learning, training learners how to learn more effectively may expedite the entire language learning process. However, the frequency and use of LLSs varies among different learners (Chamot & Kupper, 1989) and it therefore falls to instructors to explain and encourage the learner use of LLSs to promote language learning autonomy.

LLSs have been classified in a number of ways by various researchers (Rubin 1987, O‘Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Carter and Nunan (2001) consider the main types of LLSs to be cognitive, mnemonic, metacognitive, compensatory, affective and social. However, despite concerted efforts to distinguish between these six types, “the boundaries are still fuzzy [...] since learners sometimes employ more than one strategy at a given time” (Carter & Numan, p. 167). These six types must therefore be considered in closer detail.

2.3.1 Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are the most familiar of the LLSs. They enable learners to develop and maintain relationships between new and previously assimilated information, and assist in the mental re-formation of knowledge (O‘Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Straightforward and accessible cognitive LLSs used by learners to enhance their understanding of both the meaning and expression of the target language include activities such as searching for clues, analyzing and reasoning, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, systematic annotation, and reorganizing information (Carter & Nunan, 2001, p. 167). Lavasani & Faryadres (2011) divide cognitive strategies are divided into are four categories:

1. practicing: used when working with sound patterns and writing
2. receiving/sending messages: used when learners apply skimming and scanning techniques to form the main idea
3. analyzing/reasoning: used to understand the intended meaning of the L2
4. *shaping the structure of both input and output*: used to create unique expression.

Numerous studies (Kato, 1996; Ku, 1995; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford, Judd & Giesen, 1998; Park, 1994) have demonstrated observable links between cognitive strategies and second language proficiency. Maleki (2005) examined the influence of cognitive strategies on student progress across various school subjects, including English. The study was carried out in 270 high-school students and the results found that cognitive strategies were valuable when learning physics, but that this was not the case with regard to English.

**2.3.2 Mnemonic Strategies**

Memory-related strategies are specific devices used by language learners to enable them to link a new concept with an established one. While they are suitable for memorising information in an orderly string, they do not typically foster deep learner understanding. As such strategies are mainly employed to retrieve new information, particularly vocabulary, and to store it in the memory for a long period of time, learners need a clear understanding of them in order to make them work. An example of students using such learning strategies is placing certain words in the context of a sentence in order to remember them (Oxford, 1990). Most commonly applied in the initial stages of language learning, there are several types of mnemonic strategies, such as creating mental linkages, using images and sounds, certain body movements, reviewing well, and employing action. Once language learners progress to a higher level of language proficiency, they rely less on these strategies (Oxford, 1990).

**2.3.3 Metacognitive Strategies**

Oxford (1990) defines metacognitive strategies as “actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provides a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process” (Oxford, 1990, p. 137), while O’Malley and Chamot (1990) conceptualize them as exclusive skills which are used to organize, evaluate, or monitor the progress of any learning activity. Birjandi *et al.*, (2006) esteems them as a “seventh sense” and one of the most valuable mental features that positive learners can use as metacognitive strategies can enable learners to consciously elevate their metacognitive skills and abilities. For example, they can improve knowledge, control learning, correct errors, select appropriate strategies, and analyze the value of learning strategies (Ridley, Schutz, Glanz, & Weinstein, 1992).
Metacognitive learning strategies involve the identification of specific targets, since language learning can be hindered by unclear objectives. In addition, metacognitive strategies give learners the opportunity to deal effectively with various language tasks (Abdul-Rahman, 2011).

Metacognitive strategies enable learners to control and manage their own learning. Self-knowledge strategies include identifying one's own language learning style, interests, needs and preferences and are widely used in the field of L2. They take many different forms, including helping learners to manage their time, to identify their mistakes, and to repeating them. They are divided into the following three subsets:

- encouraging learners to pay attention to specific language categories or skills
- arranging learning to ensure learners benefit from any effort they exert
- evaluating learning to help language learners monitor their errors and assess their progress.

Metacognitive strategies help language learners deal effectively with the overall process of language learning and any given language task. Purpura (1999) found that metacognitive strategies had "a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion" (p. 61). However, many studies conducted by pioneering scholars in the EFL context, such as Oxford, Judd & Giesen (1998), and Dreyer & Oxford (1996), do not provide clear evidence that metacognitive strategies are accurate predictors of target language ability and progress (Mardi & Nosratinia, 2013).

2.3.4 Compensatory Strategies

Compensatory strategies usually help learners compensate for missing knowledge, particularly in spoken and written communication. When used in speaking, these include the use of synonyms, circumlocution, and gesturing to suggest meaning. Synonyms and circumlocution may be deployed when writing.

A number of researchers have advanced different opinions on compensatory strategies. For example, Cohen (1998) states that compensatory strategies must not be considered to be a language learning strategy, since they are used for speaking and writing, and are intended for language use only. Little (1999) and Oxford (1990, 1999a) also assert that compensatory
strategies do not promote language learning, even though they might be utilized in general language use. However, based on their study of native English-speaking learners of foreign languages, Oxford & Ehrman (1995) confirm that compensatory strategies have a significant relationship with L2 proficiency. Compensation strategies fall into the two main subcategories of guessing intelligently when reading and listening, and overcoming boundaries when speaking and writing.

### 2.3.5 Affective Strategies

Affective strategies play a critical role in the language learner progress. For instance, it is evident that negative attitudes and beliefs can decrease learner motivation and limit progress, while positive attitudes can do the reverse. Language learners can control these factors through affective strategies (Oxford, 1990) which acknowledge the learner’s emotional response to the process of learning English, and expressing feelings such as anxiety or anger. They also increase the awareness of how learning conditions may evoke such feelings.

### 2.3.6 Social Strategies

Learners use social strategies to gain a clear understanding of the culture and beliefs of the native speakers of the target language and become more aware of others’ feelings and thoughts. Social strategies facilitate language learning with others and help learners to develop a clearer cultural understanding of target language native-speakers. Examples of social strategies are asking questions for clarification, addressing confusing issues, and exploring social or cultural norms and values. Among these different categories, asking questions is the most beneficial, since it helps learners to obtain a clear understanding of meaning, and thus facilitates more effective conversation. A clear example of a social strategy is the sentence “I try to learn about the cultures of English speakers” (Oxford, 1990, p 296).

### 2.4 Main Classifications of Language Learning Strategies

Wenden, 1991, 2002), and therefore it has classified LLSs in numerous diverse ways (Rubin 1987; O’Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990). Several researchers concur with Oxford’s (1990) six-fold LLSs classification of cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensatory, social, and affective strategies. Ellis (1994) states that Oxford’s LLS classification is “perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date” (p. 539), while many herald it as “the most consistent with learners’ strategy use” (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002, p.368). However, a number of other scholars (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1999; Cohen, 1996) refer to the lower number of strategies available.

Macaro (2001) claims that classifications of LLSs have been mainly reliant upon the theory of cognition and how the mental system processes and recalls information. The classification of strategies helps researchers define the relationship between intellectual and strategic processes (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Gamage (2003) states that strategy inventories may act as a helpful guide for teachers to encourage autonomous language learning. Thus, research in the area of language strategies has resulted in in-depth analyses and taxonomies of specific language strategies. However, many researchers scepticism about such LLSs, since “they cannot usually be observed directly; they can only be inferred from language learner behaviour” (Griffiths, 2004, p. 11). The following section presents various viewpoints and discusses the LLS classifications in further detail.

2.4.1 Rubin’s Classification (1987)

Speakers use communication strategies when they encounter difficulties in understanding the other speaker, while social strategies contribute directly to learning and bolster learner attempts to improve and practise their language. Rubin (1987) claims that any learning strategy has a clear impact on the language that the learner constructs. She therefore divides them into cognitive and metacognitive subsets, both of which effect language acquisition. Her subsequent investigation concludes that they fall into the three categories which contribute either directly or indirectly to language learning. These are learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies. Communication strategies arguably have less of a connection to language learning, since they are mainly used to help learners communicate and construct language patterns correctly. Rubin & Wenden (1987) also
contend that social strategies do not contribute directly to the learning process, since they do not lead directly to obtaining, storing, retrieving, and using of language.

### 2.4.2 O’Malley & Chamot’s Classification (1990)

O’Malley & Chamot (1990) argue that strategies fall into the three main groups of *cognitive, metacognitive and social* strategies as shown in Figure 2.1.

1. *Cognitive strategies* are restricted to specific educational tasks, and involve direct use of the learning material. Moreover, they contribute to received information and deploy it in ways that improve learning. Examples of cognitive strategies are using dictionaries and grammar books, and retaining information through memorization, elaboration, transfer and repetition.

2. *Metacognitive strategies* involve the use of more executive skills, such as planning, assessing the success of learning activity, measuring individual productivity and evaluating learning.

3. *Social strategies* involve either student collaboration or ideational activities, such as cooperating with others in order to speak English. In fact, Brown (1987) attests that cooperation and asking for explanations are the core socio-affective strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metacognitive Strategies</th>
<th>Cognitive Strategies</th>
<th>Social/Affective Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• selective attention</td>
<td>• rehearsal</td>
<td>• cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• planning</td>
<td>• inferring</td>
<td>• questioning and self-talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>• monitoring and</td>
<td>• deducing</td>
<td>• they aid interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>evaluating</td>
<td>• summarizing and</td>
<td>with another person</td>
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<tr>
<td>• they are higher-order</td>
<td>elaboration</td>
<td>or ideational control</td>
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<tr>
<td>executive skills which</td>
<td>• they help to directly</td>
<td>over effect</td>
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<td>apply to a variety of</td>
<td>operate on and</td>
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<td>learning tasks</td>
<td>manipulate incoming</td>
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<td>information to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>enhance learning</td>
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</table>

*Figure 2.3: O’Malley & Chamot’s Strategy Classification System (1985)*
2.4.3 Oxford’s Classification of Language Learning Strategies (1990)

Oxford (1990) developed the strategy inventory of language learning (SILL), which also applies to language teaching. In this inventory, she named two types of strategies to be direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies consist of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective and social strategies, (Oxford, 1990) which offer indirect support for language progress as illustrated in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.4: Oxford’s model of language learning strategies (1990)**

**Cognitive strategies** help language learners to develop their language in many different ways, such as through summarizing or reasoning deductively.
Memory strategies have the very specific function of helping students to store and retrieve new information, like creating mental relationships and employing actions.

Compensation strategies help learners to use the language despite large knowledge gaps by guessing the meaning and overcoming limitations.

Metacognitive strategies are “actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process” (Oxford, 1990, p.136). Examples are learner focus on learning, arranging and planning.

Social strategies refer to learner intercommunication with others who use the target language, and include asking questions, cooperating with peers, and empathizing with others.

Affective strategies deal with emotion, attitude, motivation, and self-encouragement.

Examples taking one's emotional temperature and lowering one's anxiety or heartening oneself accordingly (Oxford, 1990).

Oxford’s six strategy groups are considered a highly comprehensive taxonomy of LLSs, yet may be subdivided further (Ellis, 1994). While her classification of the learning strategies is the most familiar taxonomy among those developed by different scholars, many scholars have compared Oxford’s classifications to those of other researchers. For example, Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford (2003) claim that Oxford offers the most detailed classification of strategies, while O’Malley & Chamot (1990) suggest that Oxford’s strategies are merely an extension of those devised in earlier educational works. However, Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995) argue that Oxford’s taxonomy directly connects many different strategies with language skills. Additionally, Oxford (1990) purports that:

There is no complete agreement on exactly what strategies are; how many strategies exist; how they should be defined, demarcated, and categorised; and whether it is – or ever will be – possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies [...] Classification conflicts are inevitable (p.17).

While Macaro (2001) claims that all LLSs actually lie on a continuum with no hard or fast lines of division, a study comparing different LLS classifications revealed that both O’Malley & Chamot’s (1990) and Oxford’s classifications are more consistent with learner use of strategies than direct and indirect classifications (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002).
2.4.4 Stern's Classification (1992)

Stern (1992) claims that language learning strategies comprise the five main subsets of cognitive strategies, management and planning strategies, communicative-experiential strategies, affective strategies and interpersonal strategies. Each subset is briefly summarized below:

1. *Cognitive strategies* refer to steps or processes used in learning or problem-solving which require analysis, transformation or learning synthesis. Guessing, deductive reasoning, practice, memorisation and monitoring are the main types of cognitive strategies.

2. *Management and planning strategies* relate to self-directed student learning following the initial help and direction of teachers. To this end, language learners set their own goals, and select optimum the learning assistance their learning and most suitable resources for them. Learners must also monitor and evaluate their language learning progress.

3. *Communicative-experiential strategies* are used to keep the communication flowing without interruption. These techniques are formulated by gesturing, summarizing, paraphrasing, and asking for repetitions to ensure clarity.

4. *Interpersonal strategies* are used by students in order evaluate their own performance and learning. Stern (1992) claims that language learners should interact and cooperate with native language speakers and become accustomed to their culture.

It is clear that despite the vast array of research in the field of language learning strategies, no definitive agreement or resolution has been reached. Gamage (2003) goes so far as to claim that “the exact number of strategies available and how these strategies should be classified still remain open for discussion” (p. 4). What is clear however, is that language learning can be exhausting and disappointing, and that students can all too easily develop a negative attitude towards the native speakers of the target language. Committed language learners usually try to overcome such emotional problems to make positive links between learning activities and the native-speakers of the target language. By immediately
recognizing them and deploying any combination of affective strategies language students can avoid these particular difficulties.

### 2.5 The Development of Language Learning Strategy Theory

Griffith (2004) states that, “over the years many different methods and approaches to the teaching and learning of languages to and by speakers of other languages, each with its own theoretical basis, have come into and gone out of fashion” (p. 5).

Yet while LLSs classifications remain indistinct and controversial, they increasingly attract the attention of many scholars. Various theoretical assumptions give rise to ideas on language learning strategies, such as the comparison between successful and less successful learners. As Griffiths (2004) states:

> Language learning strategy theory postulates that, other things being equal, at least part of this differential success rate is attributable to the varying strategies which different learners bring to the task. From this perspective, which views students as being able to influence their own learning, the learning of language becomes a cognitive process similar in many ways to any other kind of learning (Griffin, 2004, p.10).

However, Krashen’s monitor and acquisition / learning hypotheses which states that language is acquired subconsciously through natural communication, and cannot be learned consciously (Krashen, 1976; 1977) clashes with the above view. With the exception of the monitor and acquisition / learning hypotheses, Griffiths (2004) states that language learning strategies groove well with language learning theories and can be utilized in tandem with various methods and approaches. To provide clear evidence, Griffiths offers examples of how LLSs work with different theories (2004).

Memory and cognitive strategies are involved in the development of vocabulary and grammar knowledge on which the grammar translation method depends. Memory and cognitive strategies can be involved to make the patterning of automatic responses characteristic of the audio-lingual method more effective. Learning from errors (developed from inter language theory) involves cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Compensation and social strategies can easily be assimilated into communicative competence theory and the communicative language teaching approach. Methods such as suggestopoeida involve affective strategies (p.10).
2.6 The Good Language Learner

Various studies have elaborated upon the qualities of a good language learner. Rubin (1975) claims that successful language learners usually use the appropriate learning strategies to communicate, and guess when unsure. She defines strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p. 43). Rubin (1975), Reiss (1985), and Ramirez (1986) all agree that good language learners think about the way they learn. Active language learners are aware of, and understand why they choose to apply certain strategies (Lavine & Oxford, 1992). Contrary to their less effective counterparts, successful learners know how to tailor learning strategies to their personal language needs. They try to discover which knowledge works for them, and which does not, and are willing to ask for help when confronted by difficulties with a given topic.

Rubin (1981) identifies 14 practical and comprehensive strategies which characterize successful language learners as those who:

1. adopt the best learning methods themselves
2. are well-organised
3. have the ability to be creative
4. do their best to practice
5. use memorization
6. adjust themselves to uncertainty
7. learn from errors
8. use their knowledge of the target language
9. use the situation and atmosphere to increase understanding
10. guess the meaning logically
11. learn words and sentences
12. memorize the sentence forms
13. use expression skills
14. are able to use literary forms

While all students apply a variety of language learning strategies, depending on their different abilities (Chamot & Kupper, 1989), competent learners are distinguished from less proficient learners by their selection of the most appropriate learning strategy. In fact, as
learners take on more responsibility for their own learning, research confirms that efficient strategy use facilitates second language acquisition, develops learner performance, and supports autonomous learning, (McMullen, 2009, p. 419). However, less proficient learners can also improve their L2 skills by acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies used by successful L2 learners.

In summary, a good language learner is one with sufficient commitment and self-confidence to use English for communication purposes. Such a learner can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by interpreting contextual clues, uses appropriate learning strategies effectively, and is keen to learn from previous mistakes. Moreover, this self-motivated learner has curiosity and uses creative abilities when processing new information.

2.7 Variables Affecting Strategy Choice

A number of researchers have examined the relationship between the choice of language learning strategy and the factors influencing that choice, such as, gender, age, nationality, motivation, and experience (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Ok, 2003; Griffiths, 2003; Fazali, 2005; McMullen, 2009; Tercanlioglu, 2004; Wharton, 2000; Lan & Oxford, 2003). These different variables are discussed below.

2.7.1 Gender as a Variable Affecting Strategy Choice

Studies which have investigated the relationship between gender and strategy use have arrived at very different outcomes. Oxford (1996) states that females generally deploy more strategies than males when learning languages, and many more scholars have drawn attention to the divergent strategy uses of males and females. For example, Oxford, Nyikos & Ehrman (1988) confirm that females use a greater range of strategies than males, more particularly, metacognitive strategies, such as keeping records, planning, and monitoring (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1990).

In a comprehensive study of 520 language learners, Oxford & Ehrman (1995) confirmed that females use strategies more frequently than males. More recently, in a 2003 study of Taiwanese children’s strategy inventory for language learning (SILL), Lan & Oxford found that 11 out of 50 strategies demonstrated significant differences in strategy usage between males and females, with these differences being in favour of greater strategy use by females.
However, many other significant studies have revealed no obvious gender differences in strategy choice. For example, Ehrman and Oxford’s (1990) study failed to observe any evidence of different strategy use based on gender. In addition, in studies on Arabic-speaking learners, no strategy differences were discerned between students of different genders (Salem, 2006; Shmais, 2003; AlOtaibi, 2004; McMullen, 2009). McMullen (2009) further claims that no significant differences were observed between Saudi male and female EFL university students. However, in a study conducted by Gu (2002), it was reported that females are better strategy-users than males. Males preferred to use global strategies, while females used more local strategies, particularly in reading. Gu added that females had a tendency towards using a variety of strategies to learn vocabulary. In China, for example, female learners used strategies more frequently than males, because there is a high degree of learning expectation placed on females.

2.7.2 Nationality as a Variable Affecting Strategy Choice

In general, language learners tend to use different LLSs for different tasks, and in different situations. Nationality is another variable affecting strategy choice and use: “Nationality or ethnicity influences strategy use” (Oxford, 1990, p. 13), and in this context refers to a group of people originating from multiple regions and different language backgrounds, such as Libya, America and Italy. Research on nationality as a variable affecting strategy choice is hard to find. However, Griffiths & Parr (2000) state that European students are inclined to use strategies extensively and to work at a more advanced level than students of other nationalities. His 2003 study revealed a measurable difference based on the participants’ nationality. Furthermore, when exploring a group of Taiwanese students’ learning strategy use, Yang (1999) reported that although many were aware of different LLSs, only a few used them. Hispanic students also reveal more strategy usage than Asian students (Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; O’Malley, 1987). Wharton (2000) discovered that bilingual Asian students who were learning English as a third language preferred to use social strategies over other strategy types, and a Altan’s 2003 study reveals very few differences in overall strategy use between Hungarian, Chinese, and Turkish ELT learners.

It is theorized that students’ educational and cultural background may have an influence on the strategies they apply (Sheorey, 1999). Abdulrahman (2011) examined the relationship between nationality and strategy choice, and found that of the 13 strategies utilized in her
research study, 5 were used differently by the three nationalities represented in the study (British, Chinese and Libyan). She therefore adduced that factors such as learners’ educational background and type of instruction, play a critical role in strategy choice.

2.7.3 Motivation as a Variable Affecting Strategy Choice

Dörnyei (2001), a notable pioneer within the field of motivation, also reports that motivation can explain why people choose to do particular thing, how long they are willing to maintain the activity, and how they are going to achieve it. Therefore, motivation can be seen as an important factor that supports all language learning, and is deemed a key variable affecting the choice of language learning strategy. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) studied a large number of students in a Midwestern American university to determine the strategies students tend to use. They observed that learners with high motivation to learn a language exhibit the desire to use a variety of strategies.

Since motivation is considered to be an essential attribute of language learning, scholars have attempted to shed light on its impact in the classroom. This has resulted in various studies focusing on the connection between LLSs and motivation. For example, a study by Schunk & Prinrich (2002) emphasizes that motivation impacts on all classroom activities, and affects the learning of new and pre-existing knowledge. Mochizuki (1999) examined a group of Japanese learners, and found that they used compensation strategies most often and affective ones the least. This study reports that motivation plays an essential role in learners’ choice of strategy. Moreover, Yutaka’s (1996) study of 24 Japanese second language learners’ strategy use and their experience of studying and living overseas found that learner gender, integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, and experiences of both studying and living abroad, had a crucial impact on their choice of strategy.

However, there is an arguable correlation between strategy use and students’ pre-existing level of motivation, whereby highly motivated students use more strategies than less motivated learners. It is my contention that more motivated learners use more strategies than less motivated ones, and that this in turn improves learners’ performance in learning, and eventually leads to autonomous learning.
2.7.4 Age as a Variable Affecting Strategy Choice

Age also plays a significant role in the choice of language learning strategies, with learners of different ages employing different strategies. While there is a widespread belief that younger learners outperform their elders in terms of language learning (Bellingham, 2000), the impact of age is “far from clear or conclusive” in this regard (Spolsky, 1989, p.92). It is established that younger learners use social strategies including asking for help and making conversation, more than other strategies, (Lee, 2000; Wong Fillmore et al., 1985), whereas adult learners tend to use the metacognitive strategies of planning, organizing, and evaluating the learning process (Oh, 1992; Touba, 1992).

While many scholars support Bellingham’s (2000) claim that children are superior language learner to adults who find it more difficult to assimilate a new language (Burling, 1981; Schmidt, 1983; Schumann, 1978) others have challenged the validity of this assumption, particularly as “none of the studies investigating age-related differences in language development for speakers of other languages mentioned in this review deal[s] with this issue overtly” (Griffiths, 2003).

2.7.5 Experiences in Studying a Language as a Variable Affecting Strategy Choice

Experience in studying language is another key factor which may influence the choice of language learning strategy and a number of studies have been undertaken to examine the relationship between strategy use and second language proficiency. The majority of results concur that that proficient learners use strategies more than poor learners (Green & Oxford, 1995; Kaylani, 1996; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Oxford, 1996; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

When investigating the language learning strategies used by bilingual learners from Asian, European, and Arabic cultural groups, Purdie & Oliver (1999) found that students who had an opportunity to live in a native English-speaking country such as Australia, for a minimum of three years, attained higher mean scores in both cognitive strategies and memory strategies. These results confirm that experience in studying the English language in a native English-speaking country can affect the choice of LLSs.

Further studies have examined the connection between student language proficiency and strategy use. Wharton (2000) observed a significant link between these two aspects,
demonstrating that students with better language proficiency use strategies more frequently. In addition, Sheorey (1999) found that students who are more proficient in English use different learning strategies compared to those who are less proficient. This is consistent with similar studies of learners studying English in a typical English environment or in countries where English is the first language. The findings of Opper, Teichler & Carlson's (1990) study indicate that studying abroad in, for example, America or Europe, directly influences students' learning styles and ways of thinking, particularly in relation to language learning.

It is evident that various studies confirm the value of experience in studying a language abroad, since such experience improves the choices of appropriate language learning strategies.

2.8 Language Input and Second Language Acquisition

As a pioneering SLA researcher, Corder (1967) theorized a significant distinction between language input and language intake. The former denotes the body of language available for SLA learners to use, while the latter refers to that part of the input which language learners properly understand. More recently, Ellis (1985, p. 6) elaborated that the phrase ‘second language acquisition’ (SLA) addresses both the conscious and subconscious ways by which ‘people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom’ (Ellis, 1998, p. 3). Among the numerous internal and external factors which may influence second language acquisition (SLA), the language input received by learners is therefore axiomatic to linguistic competencies and fluency.

This section of the thesis aims to examine the realization of language input through a number of established theories pertaining to SLA development, and in particular, Krashen’s highly influential language input hypothesis.

2.8.1 The Role of Input in SLA

A review of the literature relating to language input and SLA reveals that a considerable volume of the research in this field has concentrated on the significance, role, and
processing of linguistic input (Doughty & Long, 2003; Ellis, 1994; Ellis, 1997; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Gass, 1997; Hart & Risley, 1995; Van Patten & Williams, 2007). From this well-documented bedrock of research it is patently clear that the processes of SLA do not place in a vacuum and that exposure to some degree of language input is necessary (Gass, 1997).

Ellis (1994; 2008) observes that while individual SLA theories may hypothesize the needs and utilities of language acquisition processes quite differently they all nonetheless acknowledge the value of language input. Yet, while diverse language learning theories accede to the importance of language input in principle, there is some debate between those attributing it with a minimal or non-existent role and those crediting it as a key determinant of successful language acquisition. Thus, a number of SLA theories propose language input as an imperative dimension of language learning while others relegate it to a secondary or even cursory role. In fact, the foremost evolution in language learning theorization concerns the reconceptualization of the way language input is processed by language learners (Doughty & Long, 2003).

Ellis (2008) based his analysis of the role of language input in SLA on behaviorist, mentalist, and interactionist formulations of language learning. Behaviorism ties language learning to the controls of various external stimuli and an exposure to feedback. As such, they purport a direct correlation between input and output, and dismiss the internal mental processes of language acquisition. Mentalist theories, on the other hand, argue that input is crucial for SLA, since learner “brains are equipped to learn any language with innate knowledge, language input is merely considered as a trigger that activates the internal mechanism” (Ellis, 2008). Interactionist SLA theories stress the importance of both input and internal language learning processes. As such, they conceptualize language acquisition as the discursive juncture between intellectual capacity and linguistic setting, and input as the impact of certain internal mechanisms (Ellis, 2008).

The information processing and skill acquisition theories of Nassaji & Fotos (2011) also accentuate the important role of language input in SLA. They propose that the role of language input in information processing theories is critical since the information embedded in the input and the frequency facilitate the assimilation needed to acquire the target language. Moreover, language input is essential in skill-acquisition theories because it
informs learners initial declarative knowledge of the language. A number of similar studies in spoken languages similarly confirm that language input and frequency are fundamental to the acquisition of language (Hart & Risley, 1995; Ellis, 1997).

Gass’s (1997) comprehensive enquiry into role of language input through a wide range of applications included the input-interaction model, the input hypothesis, the universal grammar model, and the information processing model which engages with the role of language input in several ways.

Gass (1997) contends that the basis of SLA in terms of the input-interaction model is that the language input received by learners is reinforced through interaction. In respect of Krashen’s comprehensible input hypothesis (1981) Gass elaborates that SLA occurs via means of comprehensible input which the language learners receive. Therefore, only such language input as is slightly above the learners’ language competency is useful for this purpose. The third model explored by Gass (1997) is the universal grammar which asserts that while language input is necessary, another important element must be brought to bear; namely, the innate capacity which helps language learners to acquire the second language. The last model is the information processing model in which the learner must first apprehend that there is something to learn. The learner’s attention is then drawn to those parts of the input which do not coincide with internalized competence. In this model, language input is necessary for providing information for language construction (Gass, 1997).

The role of input in SLA arguably constitutes the primary data for SLA (Long, 1983; Van Patten & Williams, 2007), and Patten & Benati (2010) considered that language input is a major source of data for language learners to construct their competence or mental representation of the language based on the examples embedded in the input. Grady et al., (2011) have also drawn attention to the fact that certain aspects, such as lexical development, are often directly shaped by the input. In other words, the process of language acquisition is explicitly dependent upon the appropriate language input.

While the role of language input in SLA has been assessed and interpreted from the various vantage points of different language learning theories and models, within certain contextual frameworks, language input has also been attributed with the initial function of generating
the necessary data for SLA. Among the numerous studies conducted regarding the role of language input in SLA, the research of Gass & Selinker (1994) and Ellis (1997) formulated two frameworks which particularly address and elucidate the importance of input in the SLA process.

The framework proposed by Gass & Selinker (1994) consists of five levels which convert input to output. They are apperceived input, comprehended input, intake, integration, and output which account for the SLA process. According to this configuration, language input refers to various sources of second language data to which the learners are exposed.

![Gass and Selinker’s Model for Second Language Acquisition, 1994](Image)

Figure 2.3- Gass and Selinker’s Model for Second Language Acquisition, 1994

The first stage of the SLA model addresses input utilization and is denominated as the apperceived input. During this stage, a certain volume of the language input is noticed by individual language learner due to specific characteristics such as frequency, prior knowledge, affect, and attention (Gass & Selinker, 1994). The second stage is the comprehension of that portion of language input which is apperceived. During the third stage of mental activity, the language input is comprehended and internalized by the language learners. The fourth stage is the integration of the intake with prior knowledge,
while the fifth and final stage is the output realized in the form of written or spoken language.

Ellis (1997) propounded a comparable basic computational model of SLA with an initial focus on language input (figure 2.3). In this configuration, language learners are first exposed to language input which is then processed in two stages. During the first stage certain parts of the input which are comprehended by the language learners are converted into intake; during the second, some of the intake, finds its way to the long term memory, and is then converted into knowledge which is realized in spoken or written output. While the SLA frameworks of both Gass & Selinker (1994) and Ellis (1997) concur on initial importance of language input, their respective matrices of the constituent stages of the language input process in the minds of language learners diverges significantly.

![Figure 2.4- Ellis’s Model for Second Language Acquisition, 1997](image)

In short, both of the aforementioned frameworks focus on the various steps involved in transforming language input is turned into language output. Thus, processing language input processing is the hub of both frameworks. However, this locus reveals that the significance of language input is also demonstrated by various SLA theories and theoretical frameworks. One of the most influential hypotheses in this particular area is Krashen’s input hypothesis (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1985). Indeed, the input hypothesis has triggered numerous studies in the investigation of issues related to this arena of academic enquiry (Ying, 1994) and it is fair to say that the majority of studies of the type of language input and SLA have been developed either to defend or dispute Krashen’s advocacy of comprehensible input for SLA.

### 2.8.2 Krashen’s Input Hypothesis and SLA

One of the most-eminent psychologically-oriented theories of language learning was originally proposed by Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985). He theorized a “monitor model” of second language learning which incorporated five distinct hypotheses: the input hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis,
and the affective filter hypothesis. As the input hypothesis is of direct relevance to this study a detailed outline is presented.

As previously discussed (section 2.8.1), language input is deemed a central component of the SLA process and the input hypothesis persistently resonates with claims respecting the role of language input and the necessity of exposure to comprehensible language input in SLA. Krashen identified comprehensible language input as “the only causative variable in SLA” (Krashen, 1981, p. 57). This effectively means that in order for SLA to take place, language learners must be exposed to a type of second language input which they can comprehend, including language structures which are above their current level (i+1).

Building on Krashen’s conceptualization of language input and SLA, the basic assumptions of the input hypothesis may be summarized as follows:

1. access to comprehensible input is the main feature of all cases of effective SLA
2. more quantities of comprehensible input seem to generate faster or better SLA
3. lack of access to comprehensible input generates little or no SLA

A number of researchers (Ellis & He, 1999; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Long, 1982) have promoted the input hypothesis by suggesting modified input, interactionally modified input, and modified output, as three rich sources of comprehensible input for SLA. Modified input refers to a type of language input which has been modified or simplified in some way before language learners are exposed to it, while interactionally modified input, on the other hand, originates from input modification which occurs when language learners experience difficulty comprehending a message in interaction with interlocutors. Modified output refers to language learner efforts to modify output in order to make it more comprehensible to the interlocutor (Ellis & He, 1999; Long, 1996).

A further aspect of the input hypothesis in relation to acquiring the language in informal settings (non-classroom environment) is the significance of direct exposure to a source of language input. According to Krashen (1981), language acquisition can best take place in an informal environment when language learners undergo direct and intensive exposure to language input. This aspect of the input hypothesis will be further discussed in order to examine how advocacy of exposure to language input for language learning to occur has, to some extent, been reinforced by Krashen’s critics. To date however, empirical evidence
related to the sources of language input, and verifiable data on the quality and quantity of
the input, remains unforthcoming from both Krashen and his critics.

Thus, second language acquisition cannot take place in vacuum. In fact, for successful
second SLA to occur, access to language input is critical. While the importance and the role
of language input have been unanimously espoused through various theories of language
learning, controversy still rages regarding the actual extent of its importance. Despite these
ongoing debates however, it is evident that the theoretical stances of various language
learning models with regard to SLA language input have recently undergone significant
changes and ultimately reconceptualized the way in which language input is processed by
language learners (Doughty & Long, 2003).

2.9 The Development of Autonomy in Language Education

This discussion focuses on the concept of autonomous learning, provides details of related
concepts and definitions, and also clarifies what autonomy does not involve in this context.
This section also considers how best to promote learner autonomy, the teacher’s role in
enhancing autonomous learning, and how to train learners and raise their awareness of this
concept.

For several years, the concept of “autonomy” has been the dominant focus of enquiry in the
context of foreign language teaching, and has attracted many educationalists (Brookes and
Grundy, 1988; Dam, 1988; Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Dickinson and
Wenden, 1995). In fact, learner autonomy in relation to learning English as a foreign
language (EFL) has received a huge amount of attention from scholars worldwide. Studies
have been conducted to examine the many different aspects of learner autonomy and to
carry useful suggestions for different language teachers to help promote autonomous
learning in their classrooms.

Autonomous learning was originally developed more than 30 years ago, in the wake of
World War II (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). Recently, and more particularly, during the last
decade, interest in learning autonomy has increased significantly, and the concept has been
promoted more widely than before. Since the goal of language instruction is to improve independent abilities, the emphasis here is mainly on student-centred education.

Promoting learner autonomy in the field of language education inheres various benefits which can be discussed and summarized in three main areas (Little, 1991). Firstly, since learners are responsible for their decision-making process, it is argued that “learning should be more focused and purposeful, and thus more effective both immediately and in the longer term” (Little, 1991, p. 8). Secondly, Littlewood (1997) emphasized the importance of learner-centred education and autonomy wherein “learner's responsibility for their learning process, [and] the constraints between learning and living that are often found in traditional teacher-centered educational structures should be minimized”. Thirdly, there is a strong belief that when learners are autonomous in their learning process, they will be responsible in other aspects of life become valuable members of society (Little, 1991). Thus, learners will be independent in their educational procedure, and in the way they think and behave (cf. Boud, 1988; Hammond & Collins, 1991).

The concept of autonomy affords the opportunity to reflect on these concerns and to analyze them closely and with more consistency. Moreover, these concepts also create a bridge between language teaching and extensive educational settings. Thus, support of this educational approach generates and directs a concomitant expansion in technology. For example, online resources, educational software and network services all lead to autonomous learning. Recently, the dissemination of mobile technology and exponential increase in social media use has underlined its level of importance.

The concept of autonomy in education has become the primary focus of concern and debate for many researchers, and now is commonly regarded as an effective alternative approach to traditional educational methods. Gremmo & Riley (1995) delineate a number of factors that contributed to the spread and emergence of autonomy, of which the most important factors are:

1. The emergence of the minority rights movements which focus on education and learning rather than insignificant elements. Minor basics such as religion, ethics and language should be neglected among learners, and they should make learning and education their main priorities to achieve their goals.
2. A second factor was the reaction against behaviourism, which gave the opportunity to search for “alternatives” to every type; for example, finding alternative music, literature, medicine and politics. Many scholars, such as Paolo Freire (1972), Ivan Illich (1970, 1973), Bertrand Schwartz (1973), John Trim (1978), Douglas, B. (1976), and Holec (1979), have emphasised the importance of the learner's contribution and role in the progress of education. Moreover, shifts in educational philosophy have provided a good foundation for the communicative approach to language learning and teaching. This highlights communicative functions, personal needs, social customs, and autonomy. In addition, in the psychological field, both humanistic psychology and cognitive psychology opposed behaviourism (Ausubel, 1968; Bruner et al., 1966; Donaldson, 1978). Indeed, those two psychological approaches support learning as a result of individuals' capability to learn something rather than it being something done by someone else.

3. Interest in minority rights, which have an important contribution to the appearance of “autonomy” as an educational target, is another factor. The emergence of autonomous learning has a clear influence on European education, principally on adults. The learner autonomy concept first appeared in the field of language education in the 1970s, through the Modern Language Project of the European Council. The council’s main concentration was on the language needs of all learners. During recent decades, autonomous learning has gained vast interest because it has become the dominant element of the language learning environment.

4. The development of technology and its facilitation of learning and self-access are other factors in the spread of autonomy. Forms of technology, such as tape-recorders, smart phones, TVs, computers, fax and email, in addition to social media applications, all provide rich and various techniques for self-directed learning.

5. The development of “autonomy” as an educational model has had a clear effect on adult education in European countries. Due to the increase of internationalism, students prefer learning language for specific purposes, and to attain specific aims. Since adult learners have to contend with more constraints than children, the tremendous efforts made to circumvent adult obstacles, has led to the adoption of different learning programmes that support self-directed learning. Recently, it has spread widely to establish learning programmes, resource centres and establish self-directed programmes, without the need for a teacher to be present in the classroom.
Proponents of this idea have had a direct reaction to this notion, and the claim that all material used recently is valid for autonomous study. They also provided a wide range of material that supports autonomous learning in various forms, such as daily and weekly magazines and newspapers.

6. Lastly, the commercialization of language education is one of the group factors that affect autonomous learning progress. This has also impacted on the way student roles are perceived while learning the language as the learner is construed as a customer settling on educated decisions in the business. While this form of discourse may be of little use to many consumers, it nonetheless provides a clear view of peoples’ impressions and attitudes towards educational organisations.

The increase in school and university populations also plays an important role in the spread of learner autonomy. Extensive access to education in many countries has encouraged the growth of new educational structures for dealing with a large number of students. Some forms of self-directed learning have been followed by many educational institutions, because they believe it is helpful. Elmahjoub (2014) studied a group of Libyan learners, and found that “autonomy is not an alien concept within the Libyan context”. He also contends that, even though different constraints limit learner autonomy, such as insufficient time with classes, the unavailability of computers and lack of Internet access in the university, learners demonstrated significant readiness to take control of their own learning and to work independently, particularly when they collaborate together and with teachers. In addition, teachers can also provide learners with an autonomous environment and generate opportunities to actively work towards autonomous learning.

Due to the success of many autonomous projects in education, autonomy in learning has spread extensively and gained huge support from advocates as a target for education (Benson, 2011). Compared to the traditional pedagogies, autonomous learning offers flexible choices to learners. In autonomous learning, the learner is able to choose how to manage their time and their subject according to their needs. Adopting such approaches, autonomous learning helps learners to pinpoint anything vague or imprecise and ensure the learning process is valuable and meaningful (Gremmo 1995, p. 152). Conversely, Benson (2009) argues that autonomy is basically non-linguistic and antithetical to language
education, but is relevant to language learning and teaching fields from political philosophy and moral aspects, through educational theory and psychology.

The concept of autonomous learning is not new to the field of education, but there is no clear indication of the first time the term was used in relation to pedagogy. Created by Holec, autonomous education emerged in the early 1970s, via the European Modern Language Project. At present, the primary concerns of language education are to develop learning autonomy, cognitive learning, and self-directed learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Benson & Voller, 1997), while teachers increasingly encourage language students to be autonomous individuals.

Benson (2001) claims that learner autonomy is an important requirement to gain effective knowledge, and many language learners prefer to use methodologies and learning methods that support and enhance learning autonomy. ICT, for example, has provided a rich environment to help achieve these targets since “The mechanics alone of computer-mediated communication provide students with a much better opportunity for control and initiative in language learning” (Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996, p. 3). Once new technologies are incorporated together, they provide a rich atmosphere to attain and improve autonomous learning.

2.10 Definitions of Autonomous Learning

Autonomous language learning has been defined in several ways. The most widely accepted view is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” as defined by Holec (1981, p. 3). In short, autonomous learning refers to the ideal of individual responsibility for the decisions related to all aspects of learning. These include determining objectives, selecting methods and techniques to be used, defining contents and progressions, and evaluating levels of and monitoring the procedures of acquisition (Holec, 1981). Holec posits autonomy as a form of agency which can empower students to control both the strategies and content of their education. The definition proposed by Holec (1981) has four characteristics:

1. autonomy is an attribute of a learner rather than a process
2. autonomy is acquired through creditable and organised learning procedures
3. autonomy cannot be identified in single behaviours within specific learning situations
4. autonomy privileges individual learner “responsibility” and “capacity” in all matters relating to the learning process

Building on Holec’s broad-stroke definition, more refined designations for autonomous learning have emerged. Littlewood (1996) proposes “learners’ ability and willingness to make choices independently” (p. 427 as the cornerstones of learner autonomy. These categories are closely interwoven with each other, and are divided into subcategories of knowledge which help achieve appropriate skills and information. Willingness relies mainly on the learner motivation and self-confidence which enable them to assume responsibility for every critical choice they make. Littlewood further hypothesizes that for effective autonomous learning students must demonstrate the four subcategories of skills, knowledge, motivation, and confidence.

Dam (1995, 2008) claims that autonomous learners are individuals are able to assume responsibility for their learning, take independent action, and maintain motivation across the learning process, while Little (1990) suggests that autonomous learning is “essentially a matter of the learner’s psychological relation to the process and content of learning”. Little also considers learner autonomy an essential building-block for long-lasting success and Kenny (1993, p. 436) asserts that autonomy includes “the opportunity to become a person”. Wenden (1999) underscores the significance of metacognitive awareness, and claims that autonomous learning actually refers to students’ consciousness of learning and an awareness of how they can realize the effectiveness of their learning opportunities.

It is known that autonomous learning usually develops once learners become responsible and aware for their learning. In such a process, the learner has the ability to control and process his own learning. Consequently, the learner is seen as the only responsible individual entitled to make a decision and choose the resources and material that are suitable for the required knowledge acquisition (Holec, 1985; Little, 1991; Dickinson, 1995). Benson (2001) defines autonomy as “the capacity to take control of one’s own learning” instead of taking charge of individuals’ learning, as in Holec’s definition. He favours the
idea of control rather than taking charge, since it is more open to analysis compared to the notion of taking charge.

Perry, Philips & Dowler (2006) view autonomy as the procedure followed by learners who rely on themselves for obtaining and improving their levels of learning and the process that controls and assesses learners’ behaviour. Once students develop self-regulated skills, they can practise the knowledge they have learned, improve their understanding and better equipped to confront educational challenges.

Little (1991, p. 4) defines autonomy as → *capacity* – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular type of psychological relation to the progress and the content of his learning”. This definition infers an emphasis on the significance of cooperation and independence in the development of social autonomy. Consequently, learners should be responsible for their learning progress, and should take some of the actions engaged in the learning process (Little, 1996). He adds that in order to bring it under their conscious control, learners should take a positive attitude towards learning (Little, 1995, p. 175), emphasizes the significance of both social and communicative autonomy, and theorizes a strong connection between autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use (Little, 1997). Autonomous learning provides students with the opportunity to develop communicative skills in the L2 outside the classroom environment (Little, 1996). Recently, learner autonomy has been associated with cooperation and interdependence, while, in the first phases, autonomous learning was associated with individualisation (Benson, 2001). In this instance, interdependence refers to the individuals’ tendency to work as groups and to collaborate in learning. Dam Bergen (1995) states that:

> Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one’s own learning in the service of one’s needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person. An autonomous learner is an active participant in the social process of learning (pp. 1-2).

However, capacity and willingness cannot be considered fundamental to autonomy. In addition, this definition appears to ignore freedom from the restrictions which Trebbi (2008) illustrated as separate from autonomy. Complete freedom from restrictions does equate to autonomy. Therefore, it is more helpful if restrictions are organized, and not inevitable
treated as obstacles to learning autonomy. The availability of willingness and capacity may enhance and develop learner autonomy, while, without both components, the learners would not be able to be autonomous learners even if the appropriate environment is available. Legutke & Thomas (1991) emphasized much the same claims and asserted that fostering learner autonomy varies according to certain factors, such as experience, age and institutional restrictions. However, given the appropriate guidance and encouragement all students can become responsible and independent learners (p. 271).

On the other hand, Kenning (1996) advocates for collaboration and interdependence, since “the fully autonomous learner looks for opportunities to learn with and from other language learners, and seeks to communicate with speakers of the target language”. It is not advisable to depend on the instructors to facilitate all language learning, and in terms of social interaction, learners can progress their own learning through interaction with native language-speakers. Furthermore, researchers such as Holec (1985) and Little (1991) consider autonomy to be the capacity necessary to succeed at self-directed educational programmes. Dickinson (1995) has further extended this notion of capacity to imply an attitude to learning which can prevail in both classroom settings and self-access learning centres. In full autonomy, the learner is an independent individual, and there is no contribution from the “teacher” of an institution, and the learner is independent of specially prepared materials (Dickinson 1987, p. 11).

Sinclair (2000) defined learner autonomy as:

autonomy is a construct of capacity which is not inborn; autonomy consists of learners’ willingness to be responsible for their own learning; there are degrees of autonomy which are unstable and changeable; autonomy can occur both inside and outside the classroom; autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension; and that promotion of autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process. (p. 5)

It is clear that while is no limit to the various definitions of learner autonomy, there is conspicuous lack of clarity and agreement regarding its meaning and application. This has inevitably given rise to some misconceptions that must be set aside. In order to clearly demarcate what autonomy is not the following is a detailed description of certain fallacies which are prevalent in the literature
2.11 What Autonomy is Not

The numerous misconceptions about autonomy have been highlighted by many scholars. For example, Little (1991) identifies five such misconceptions to clarify what autonomy does not involve. Firstly, he states that “the most widespread misconception is that autonomy is synonymous with self-instruction” (Little, 1993, 1991) and underlines that autonomy is not to be confused with working without an instructor or where the teacher has no direct control in the process of learning (Dickinson, 1987). In fact, Little (1995) confirms the essential connection between the teacher and the student in the context of autonomous learning as not only does learner autonomy emphasize learners’ requirements and desires, but also considers the decision-making process. The second misconception about autonomy is that must yield control of the classroom to encourage autonomy, whereas teachers actually play a crucial function in promoting learner autonomy, and help students to be prepared for this undertaking. Thirdly, Little (1991) claims that as autonomy is a long term process it is not something that teachers can do to their students, nor a method that can be instantiated as part of a finite syllabus. He also clarifies that autonomous learning does not obtain to enforcing a certain way of learning (Little, 1999). Fourthly, Little maintains that autonomous learning comprises multiple facets and is “a simple, easily described behaviour” (Little, 1991, p. 3). As such, autonomous learners are usually recognizable by their behaviours, although these behaviours may take a range of forms. Finally, Little (1991) asserts that “autonomy is only achieved by certain learners” (p.4).

Learner autonomy has different degrees, but its durability cannot be guaranteed (Nunan, 1997; Little, 1999). Nunan (1997) argued that autonomy cannot be considered as an absolute concept. On the other hand, Esch (1997) has addressed three different misconceptions about learner autonomy which Little (1991) has not mentioned. The first misconception is the risk of reducing autonomy to a group of skills where “the promotion of autonomous learning is to reduce it to a series of techniques to train language learning skills leading to the display of autonomous behaviour” (p. 165). Esch emphasises the necessity of supporting learner autonomy and facing any radical aspects related to the notion of the teacher control versus learner control. The second misconception is that of “avoidance of language-learning specific issues” (Esch, 1997, p. 166) as features that need to be
considered in the context of learning autonomy, because learning a language is different from other forms of learning:

Becoming more autonomous amounts to realizing the extent to which language use constrains and restricts our views about language and language learning. If we want to encourage autonomy learning, we need to provide means to help learners talk and format where learners' attention attracted to these phenomena. (p.167)

Lastly, Esch (1997) agrees with Little (1991) in stating that autonomous learning does not mean “learning in isolation” (p. 167). Rather, learner autonomy focuses on the individuals' interests and on the relationship between the teacher and the learner. The main goal of increasing autonomous language learning is to produce autonomous individuals who can rely on themselves and become involved in the learning process easily. Language teachers should therefore help learners to improve autonomy in order to best achieve the long-standing objectives of learning. Tirm (1988) claims that:

No school, or even university, can provide its pupils with all the knowledge and the skills they will need in their active adult lives. It is more important for a young person to have an understanding of himself or herself, an awareness of the environment and its workings, and to have learned how to think and how to learn (p.3).

It is critical that language learners learn how to perform autonomously in learning to mature into autonomous adults (Little, 1990). Holec (1980) emphasizes how essential education is for developing the learners' ability to be free academic and independent participants in society. In addition, autonomous individuals are responsible and self-reliant decision-makers who cannot be affected by any external influences (Benson and Voller, 1997). Language learners have an important role as agents in society: “When learners succeed in developing autonomy, they do not only become better language learners, but they also develop into more responsible and critical members of the communities in which they live” (Benson, 2001, p. 1). However, Nunan (1997) claims that “most learners do not come into the learning situation with the knowledge and skills to determine content and learning processes which will enable them to reach their objectives in learning another language” (p. 201), and “fully autonomous learners are a rarity” (p. 201). Dam (1995) views an autonomous learner as:

an active participant in the social processes of classroom learning […] An active interpreter of new information in terms of what s/he already and
uniquely knows [...] how to learn and can use this knowledge in any learning situation s/he may encounter at any stage in his/her life (p.102).

Little (1995) defines autonomous learners as those with motivation and claims that motivated learners have the ability to use knowledge for further applications. Language learners are considered autonomous learners, since they can use the skills of the language in the real-life context. Benson (2002, p. 6) broadly states that learner autonomy is “whatever an autonomous person thinks it is”. However, in the past others consider autonomous learning to be an isolated activity. Contemporary researchers report that technology can support more social opportunities for both practice and interaction in autonomous learning (Benson, 2001; Healey, 2007; Schwienhorst, 2003). This perspective provided by scholars supports further studies into learner autonomy use in different settings.

2.12 Related Concepts

In this section, various concepts and terms that have a close relationship to learner autonomy, and which might lead to misunderstandings, are described in detail. The learner should consider different meanings of autonomous learning to have a clear understanding of it. Many people agree that self-direction, self-access, self-study, independent learning, distance learning, and self-instruction should not be construed as direct synonyms of autonomy and autonomous learning. Such terms merely denote levels or degrees of self-learning. Autonomy refers to the ability and capacity to control a learner’s own learning.

Various studies have distinguished between autonomous learning and other related concepts. For example, Holec (1981) explored the difference between learner autonomy and self-directed learning, and found that autonomy is the ability to take charge of one’s own learning, while self-directed learning is seen as a method where learners can accomplish their learning. Benson (2001) also finds that self-directed learning means the learning process that is carried out under the learner’s direction, while autonomy is seen as the ability that learners have to process learning to different degrees. He further qualifies that “self-directed learning can be considered as something that learners are able to do more or less effectively, according to the degree that they process this capacity” (Benson, 2001).

Dickinson (1987) adopts a different viewpoint about learner autonomy and self-directed learning and considers self-directed learning to occur where “the learner accepts
responsibility for all the decisions concerned with the learning but does not necessarily undertake the implementation of these decisions”, whereas, in autonomous learning, the learner takes complete charge of the choices related to learning. Self-instruction and autonomy have an obvious difference, although they mean the same thing (Little, 1991). In other words, self-instruction ideally follows and should occur as a result of autonomy, and as such, self-instruction is more a goal of autonomy than a synonym for it.

Rivers (2001) claims that autonomy is prerequisite to achieving self-directed language learning. In addition, the teacher's role is not relegated or denied in the classroom, but both teachers and learners are involved in the learning process. However, teachers should not be the main focus of the classroom, even though they are part of the learning process, and any type of teacher interference in the classroom is considered a contravention of learners' autonomy, and may destroy it. Autonomy is not a situation that learners can sustain or manifest, or a specific behaviour that learners can follow, since learners can be autonomous learners in various ways, according to their personal needs.

Pennycook (1997, p. 42) discusses the relationship between autonomy and self-access, and concludes they are interchangeable. Although self-access has an important role in language learning and provides learners with different styles and strategies of language requirements, this does not necessarily mean that autonomous learning takes place. In brief, he asserts that learner autonomy has a fundamental role in improving individuals' capacity to be free learners and agents in society. Thus, by developing learner autonomy within classroom environment, learners will be able to use and learn the language beyond the classroom, and become autonomous learners in society (O'Sullivan & Chambers, 2006).

2.13 The Main Features of Autonomous Learning

Benson & Toogood (2002) claim that learner autonomy is "a multi-faceted capacity that can be displayed in a number of ways” (p. 8). It follows then, that determining its main features is no easy matter. Throughout the have been various scholarly definitions and discussions of learner autonomy (Holec, 1981; Dickenson, 1987; Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Esch, 1996; Littlewood, 1996; Benson and Voller, 1997; Wenden, 1998), certain features are common to all. Littlewood (1999, p. 71) summarizes two features of learner autonomy which have proven central to any discussion related to autonomous language learning; namely, that:
1- Learners should make their own choices and be responsible individuals in the learning process. This is due to the reason that all learning can in any case be supported by the students themselves, and learners need to improve the ability to continue learning beyond formal education.

2- Taking responsibility involves learners making decisions in domains which have traditionally belonged to the teacher, such as deciding on the learning methodology, selecting methods of learning and assessing their progress.

Benson and Voller (1997) argue that most of the definitions of autonomy tend to reveal educational and socio-political factors. These aspects fall into five categories:

1. situations in which learners study entirely on their own
2. a set of skills which can be learned and applied in an autonomous way
3. an inborn capacity which is suppressed by official education
4. the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning
5. the right of students to determine the route of their own learning

(Benson & Voller 1997, p. 1).

Learner autonomy is not understood as a stable state, but one that entails a shift of responsibility and the transfer of control from the teacher to the learner which permits the learner to acquire the skills to make decisions related to the learning progress.

Holec (1980) points to certain aspects related to decision-making in which individuals can be responsible for their own learning procedures. The ability to be independent learners involves: i) outlining objectives; ii) determining contents and progressions; iii) choosing suitable methods and techniques to be adapted; iv) monitoring acquisition procedures and v) assessing what has been acquired (Holec 1980, p.4).

Sheerin (1997) agrees with these responsibilities for learners, and adds one extra initial stage, namely analysing learners‘ needs. Learners based in the classroom are dependent individuals, and do not have the ability to manage their own learning. Teachers set the main goals for the whole class, and adapt those goals to the class, despite the differing capacities
and needs of the learners. Conversely, in autonomous settings, the individuals set their own objectives based on their own specific needs, and actively participate in decision-making. Holec (1981) states that these decisions are seen as the responsibility that forms bridge between learners and teachers:

[…] the —pilgrim’s progress” towards an objective based essentially on the field of learning, the same for everyone, is replaced by progressive steps (a succession of objectives) of a diverse nature fixed for and by each learner by reference to his personal needs and motivations, progressive steps which may be challenged and amended by the learner at any time. (p.12)

In addition, Breen and Mann (1997) offer an appropriate outline of the main features of autonomous learning. They provide various qualities which characterise learner autonomy:

1. Learners grasp their relationship to what knowledge is being gained, to how they will learn and to the material available as one in which they are in charge or in control.
2. Autonomous learners in the language-learning classroom are in a realistic relationship to the language they are learning. They have a sincere desire to learn that particular language.
3. The autonomous person has a strong sense of self.
4. Autonomous learners have the ability to step back from what they are doing and reflect upon this in order to make decisions about what they next need to do and experience.
5. Autonomous learners are thus both alert to change and able to change in an adaptable, creative and opportunistic way.
6. For the autonomous learner […] the locus for responsibility for instruction has shifted from the teacher to the learner.
7. Autonomous learners have the ability to make use of the environment they find themselves in a strategic way.
8. Learners never work in a social vacuum. […] the autonomous learner therefore needs to be able to negotiate between the strategic meeting of their own needs and responding to the needs and desires of other group members. […] they will need to negotiate and collaborate with the other members of the group in order to make best use of the potential resources available in the classroom.
From Breen and Mann’s (1997) study of key features of learner autonomy, four features of learner autonomy can be identified. These features are considered the foundations that help shape the framework of autonomy. In addition, they are seen as most important in the field of learner autonomy; namely, having the ability to control one’s own learning, developing cognitive and metacognitive skills, engaging actively in the learning procedure and developing awareness of the language learning process.

In autonomous learning situations, the learner makes the decisions regarding the core curriculum, unlike the directed learning procedure, where the teacher is the leader (Little, p. 1991). This means that the learners themselves choose the approach and technique they wish to apply. They can monitor the learning procedure they prefer and adapt the syllabus and style to their learning needs. Little (1991) claims that teachers can help learners to construct their main objectives and engage in a joint analysis of the syllabus. No concept related to educational procedures (such as courses, examinations, books and syllabi) should hinder the development of the progress of autonomy. However, they must be considered in pedagogical development for autonomous learning. As Little (1991, p. 4) claims, autonomy implies a “significant measure of independence from the control of others”, while Holec (1981, p. 1) suggests that certain degrees of freedom are involved in “the need to develop this individual’s freedom by developing those abilities which will enable him to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he lives”. On the other hand, this does not equate with full independence or freedom. Benson (2001) states that as a multidimensional concept and that no behaviour can absolutely identify autonomy. Nunan (1997) claims that autonomous learning extends beyond the classroom, and works on an individual level, without syllabus or teacher’s interference. He classifies the five levels of autonomy as awareness, intervention, creation, involvement and transcendence, all of which vary from insincere alertness to comprehensive autonomy (O’Sullivan & Chambers, 2006).

Teachers have the ability to enable learners to advance from one level to another, so that they may gradually achieve the autonomy that of fully independent learners (Nunan, 1997). Nevertheless, he notes the clear connection between the learner and the level which may make the learner move back and forth between levels. Littlewood (1999) formulated and drew distinctions between “proactive” and “reactive autonomy. Proactive autonomy is that in which learners take responsibility for the total process and set the goals themselves, whereas reactive autonomy refers to those learners who only takes charge of the process and
who autonomously organize resources in order to reach a specific goal. Thus, learners begin to control aspects of the learning procedure in gradual steps until they achieve a stage where they can manage their own learning.

Another study about the main features of learner autonomy was conducted by Dickenson (1992) highlights the importance of active engagement in the educational process in five ways:

1. they are able to identify what has been taught
2. they are able to formulate their own learning objectives
3. they are people who can, and do, select and implement appropriate learning strategies
4. they are able to identify strategies that are not working for them
5. they are able to monitor the effectiveness of their own learning

It is important to highlight the significance of active engagement in the educational process in order for learning to take place (Van Lier, 1996). As exposure to the language provides only the learning material and is insufficient for full language development, learners must be receptive in order to achieve cognitive progress (Van Lier, 1996). This requires both the ability and willingness of the learner to take responsibility for the learning process.

Successful learner realization of these autonomous characteristics is supported by the development of the necessary cognitive and metacognitive processes. Learner autonomy helps to improve cognitive and metacognitive knowledge, and develops awareness of language acquisition progression. Benson (2001) claims that the notion of autonomy does not entail mere planning, monitoring and evaluating learning, but also requires a further level of control over the cognitive process. According to O'Malley & Chamot (1990, p. 44), cognitive strategies “operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning”. This implies that to enrich their knowledge learners need to take control of the learning development, be responsible for what they learn, and must consciously reflect on the learning process. Such metacognitive skills contain the facts required by learners for their cognitive process, which is used to gain knowledge (Wenden, 1998). Cook (1993) states that metacognitive strategies are not simply learning strategies, but rather skills related to learning. Little (1996, p. 204) claims that metacognitive skills are important in the
learning procedure as learner autonomy has both affective / motivational and metacognitive dimensions. It presupposes a positive attitude to the purpose, content and process of learning on the one hand and well-developed metacognitive skills on the other”. He also argues that learning awareness is a significant factor that facilities the learning process. Little (1991, p. 52) states that:

“It is fundamental to autonomous learning that the learner should develop a capacity to reflect critically on the learning process, evaluate his progress, and if necessary make adjustments to his learning strategies. […] learning how to learn is thus a central component of all autonomous learning schemes (Little, 1991, p. 52).

Oxford (1990) also supports the use of cognitive / metacognitive skills. She considers metacognitive strategies to be crucial in helping students regulate their learning progress, while cognitive strategies provide students with a complete sense of their learning. However, many real-life students’ learning behaviours are ill-adjusted to the perfect standard of self-regulated learning illustrated in existing theoretical models (cf. Perels, Gürtler, & Schmitz, 2005; Winne & Hadwin, 1998; Zimmerman, 1999, 2002). In fact, Weinstein & Mayer (1986) contend that various cognitive strategies, such as the organisation of learning subjects through the identification of primary thoughts and interweaving of ideas, or the generation of concepts to demonstrate theoretical thoughts, are rarely employed automatically. In addition, many language learners avoid using metacognitive strategies, such as monitoring and evaluating one’s learning, to overcome complications (Nückles, Schwonke, Berthold, & Renkl, 2004).

It is important to know how to learn, since such knowledge has a critical role in developing learners’ cognitive and metacognitive knowledge. This gives students the desire to reflect positively on the learning process, improve learning awareness and assist learners in gaining the expertise to become effective autonomous language learners. Due to the rapid growth of knowledge and technological development, new methods to handle data and knowledge of how to manage it are required. It therefore follows that learners may apply useful strategies to achieve valued learning and attain better understanding in order to avoid and reduce potential problems (Paris & Paris, 2001; Schraw, 1998; Zimmerman, 2002).
2.14 Promoting Learner Autonomy

It is important to understand how learner autonomy is actually fostered. Scharle & Szabo (2000, p. 4) highlight the need to develop a sense of responsibility and also, encourage learners to take an active part in making decisions about their learning. It is difficult to distinguish between responsibility and autonomy. Learners usually act responsibly and consciously to contribute to the learning process while in the classroom. In addition, they are autonomous since they act independently from the teacher.

Promoting learner autonomy in second language learning falls into three arguments:

i. **psychological**: we learn better when we are in charge of our own learning

ii. **ideological**: the individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices, in learning and other areas, and not become a victim [...] of choices made by social institutions.

iii. **economic**: society does not have the resources to provide the level of personal instruction needed by all its members in every area of learning (Crabbe, 1993, p. 443).

Despite psychological, ideological and economic justifications, the main complications with autonomy as an educational objective are the absence of a sound theoretical base (Benson & Voller, 1997, p. 3), a lack of accurate studies and the difficulty of determining to what extent autonomous learners apply the knowledge in the long term (Hill 1994, p. 214). Educators are advised to take a gradualist approach to encourage learner autonomy, because, if learners are not encouraged to be autonomous, inappropriate learning might take a place.

It is argued that autonomous learning is more significant than non-autonomous learning, and usually leads to more effective language learning (Benson, 2001, p. 2). Many studies have assessed the importance of promoting learner autonomy, and examined how it leads to more effective learning. Researchers have discovered that motivation plays a significant role in the language progress. Dickinson (1995, p. 165) claims that active learners are more highly motivated, a claim that has also been supported by Knowles (1975), who alludes to:

> convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things and learn better than do people who sit at the feet of teachers, passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners)
Learners are active agents in the field of education, and they have the ability to set their own targets. As they also have a sense of responsibility such students are more motivated, and the process of learning is more purposeful (Knowles, 1975; Holec, 1981; Little, 1995; Sheerin, 1997). Crabbe (1993) also draws attention to the importance of the learner’s responsibility while learning is taking place, claiming this can result in high-quality learning:

If learners are partly responsible for their learning process, and are allowed to shape it according to their cognitive preferences and developmental competence/capacity, both the stressful feeling of dragging along and the fossilizing one of being faced with unchallenging tasks may be avoided, thereby increasing motivation and, ultimately, chances of success in language learning (p. 443).

Nunan (1997) claims that learners will not be active language users and that successful learning will not happen without some degree of autonomy. This suggests that autonomy is of great significance and that, without it, language learning cannot occur correctly. Thus, “it appears that effective and worthwhile learning may actually depend on the extent to which learners achieve autonomy” (Little, 1991, p. 14). Most studies support the idea that autonomy can help learners to become autonomous users of the target language. This in turn leads to the development of communicative autonomy and the binding of language learning and use together. The primary rationale for the promotion of autonomy in language learning is to help learners use the target language with confidence (Little, 1995, p. 176).

Promoting learner autonomy inheres many benefits for learners, not only in the educational field, but in all areas of life. Little (1991, p. 8) claims that these benefits can be divided into three categories:

1. Since learners set their scheme, learning should be more organised and focused to obtain more effective learning;
2. The barriers between learning and living that were often present in the old education system should not arise, since learners have the full responsibility to manage their own learning process;
3. Learners should make more useful relationships in society in order to make autonomy useful and transfer it to all aspects of life.
According to McGarry (1995), autonomous learning prepares learners for the future and helps them to be effective members of society:

Students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, are more likely to be able to set realistic goals, plan programmes of work, develop strategies for coping with new and unforeseen situations, evaluate and assess their own work, and, generally, to learn how to learn for their own successes and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future (p. 1).

In addition, Ellis & Sinclair (1989) focus on the importance of learning autonomy in the education process, and claim that helping learners to be more responsible for their own learning can be beneficial for the following reasons:

1. learning can be more effective since learners are able to control and manage their own learning process, because they are ready to learn
2. once learners have the responsibility to learn, they can carry out learning outside the classroom
3. learners who know about learning have the ability to transfer the strategies of learning to other subjects.

Autonomy prepares learners to achieve their aims, use the target language confidently and successfully, and consequently supports enhanced long-term learning in various subjects. The foregoing discussion has elaborated upon the importance of autonomy for language learning and the presented the reasons it should be promoted in the classroom and in real life.

2.15 The Teacher’s Role in Developing Learner Autonomy

Settling on the best teaching method to use is actually an extremely difficult decision. However, there are various means that both teachers and their students can adopt and develop to create a learning environment which promotes engagement, learning, and success. In traditional teaching classrooms, the teacher is considered the knowledge-holder and the only person who can reliably provide proper knowledge to the learners who
memorize and repeat it back on the exam day (King, 1993, p. 30; Tella, 1996, p. 13). Recently, the spread of ICT and online communicative facilities has changed the role of teachers from this transmittal model (King, 1993) to learning facilitators (Warschauer and Healy, 1998). In such scenarios, the teacher is no longer the sole knowledge-provider, since learners can also provide some knowledge and information. Evaluating the teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy has become the focus for many scholars, although it has a short history in the field of second language education.

Teachers play a significant role in helping learners to gain the knowledge necessary to become autonomous. In other words, teachers are in a position to create an appropriate environment and structure which promote learning and achievements and enable learners to be autonomous in the field of education. Since the learners' ability to be responsible for their own learning is not inborn (Holec, 1981), it requires the development of skills. These skills can be mainly honed in schools, as Nunan (1997) claims that "encouraging learners to move towards autonomy is best done inside the language classroom" (p.201).

Supporting the awareness that teachers play a critical role in developing learners' autonomy, Sheerin (1997) points to the "paradox of independent learning that almost all learners need to be prepared and supported on the path towards greater autonomy by teachers" (p. 63). She defines the teacher's role in enhancing learner autonomy as "a difficult one requiring great skill and sensitivity" (p. 64). In addition, Sturridge (1997) claims that teachers in learner autonomy programmes should be "aware of their new role as facilitators", and should be "trained to stop teaching students" (p. 71). Reed and Beveridge (1996, p. 39) claim that the more controlling the teachers are, the less free and interactive learners will be, thus indicating how significant the teachers role is in fostering learner autonomy.

Recently, teacher roles in learner autonomy have undergone inevitable changes, from a focus on guidance in relation to the learning material to more complex learning issues and individual education. Riley (1997) alludes to the various terms that have been used to refer to "a person working with learners but whose role, behaviour and objectives differ from those of the traditional teacher" (p. 115). Many researchers (Benson, 1997; Dam, 2008; Little, 1991; Nunan, 1997; Voller, 1997) have underscored that the role of teachers in an autonomous classroom is completely different from that of a traditional environment, and scholars largely agree that teachers in autonomous environments usually act as a counsellor,
helper or facilitator to the learners, and involve them in the learning processes of planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating learning.

Therefore, numerous terms have been used to refer to teacher autonomy, including ‘counsellor’, ‘helper’, ‘knower’, ‘mentor’, ‘facilitator’, ‘adviser’ and ‘consultant’. For example, Voller (1997, p. 101) asserted that ‘the idea of the teacher as a facilitator of learning is as a helper whose role it is to facilitate learning’. The main psychological-social idea behind being a facilitator includes ‘personal qualities (being caring, supportive, patient, tolerant, empathic, open, and non-judgmental), a capacity for motivating learners, and an ability to raise learners’ awareness’ (p. 102). Thavenius (1999) provides a succinct definition of teacher autonomy as follows:

The teacher’s ability and willingness to help learners take responsibility for their own learning. An autonomous teacher is thus a teacher who reflects on her teacher role and who can change it, who can help her learners become autonomous, and who is independent enough to let her learners become independent (p. 160).

Benson (2003) states that autonomous teachers are those who make use of the curriculum in ways which enable them to create opportunities for negotiation and make it easier for learners to practise autonomy. Little (1995, p. 178) claims that the key factor in developing learner autonomy is ‘the nature of the pedagogical dialogue’, and that in order to conduct such a discourse successfully, teachers need to engage in a ‘probably protracted process of negotiation by which learners can be brought to accept responsibility for their learning’ (p. 178). In addition, teachers also need to decide the extent to which learners can manage their learning goals, contribute to the learning procedure and assessment, and consider factors related to age, institutional framework, and the educational background of the learners. Therefore, in order for teachers to achieve all of these requirements, they should be autonomous in relation to their work. In support of Little’s claim, Voller (1997) argues that the key point in fostering learner autonomy underlies the teacher’s strong ‘view and attitudes that underpin our view of autonomous language learning’ (p. 112). He proposes that negotiation is another means of developing learner autonomy. In negotiated approaches to language learning autonomy, learners are able to identify what to learn and what is important to learn. In addition, they play a part in making decisions on the syllabus and in the classroom. While teachers also participate in the negotiation, all negotiations can take place among learners and not necessarily between teachers and learners only:
the teacher’s role in autonomous learning can be characterized essentially as one of negotiation, both with learners and external authorities (representatives of the educational institution, and professionals from the discourse communities to which learners are trying to gain admittance) about the syllabus, and, as a participant in and facilitator of the learning process, with learners in the classroom and self-access learning activities (p. 109).

This negotiation process and the transfer of control from teachers to learners as a way to help improve the independence system of learners are essential in developing learners’ autonomy. As a pioneer of such educative issues Little (1995) claims that:

Genuinely successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring the freedom that this confers. (p. 179)

A 2001 study conducted by Carter reported that, despite the tendency of learners in Trinidad and Tobago to rely on teachers and their dominance inside the classroom, autonomy can be fostered through appropriate forms of group work and negotiation. A similar study carried out on Egyptian English learners by Hozayen (2011) to investigate the effects of their previous language experience and their readiness for autonomy. It found that more than two thirds of students showed high levels of confidence and willingness to be autonomous learners, while the remaining minority still adhered to the cultural beliefs that the teacher should be at the centre of the classroom and be responsible for planning their goals, mapping their pathway, and leading them towards successful learning (Hozayen, 2011, p. 122). The study also reported that the majority of students preferred being surrounded by peers, and allowed to work and interact with each other. Dişlen’s (2011) study of a group of students learning English at one of the Turkish universities reported that, although students highly value the importance of teachers’ guidance, they demonstrated readiness for autonomy and the ability to work without teachers and in groups.

Thus it can be concluded that teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are interwoven, and interdependent. Learner autonomy requires responsibility for the learning process, while teacher autonomy requires responsibility for teaching and control over the teaching process. Thavenius (1999) defines an autonomous teacher as one who reflects on her teacher role...
and who can change it, who can help her learners become autonomous, and who is independent enough to let her learners become independent” (p. 160). The majority of English language teachers view autonomy as having a positive influence on language learning, and they attest to the power of autonomy to engage learners in having the freedom and/or ability to make choices and decisions” (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 286).

A study conducted in Libyan secondary schools by Eidwieni (2012) investigated the practice of, and attitudes to, autonomy. She explored methods to improve learner autonomy and the teacher’s role in autonomous learning, in addition to the students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards autonomous learning. Her study reported that all Libyan students revealed high levels of eagerness, interest towards autonomous learning, a noticeable practice of autonomy, and a positive attitude towards learning autonomy. However, it was found difficult to implement due to a number of obstacles, such as the system of examination, the need to cover the required teaching curriculum, and the centralization of the education system. To overcome such obstacles, Eidwieni recommended allowing teachers to select educational material that best suits student needs, reviewing the examination system, using new criteria for assessment, and providing schools with better ICT facilities and teaching resources.

Although teacher autonomy is now widely deemed a significant factor to develop language learning autonomy, many teachers feel worried that their role in the classroom may be eroded. However, the reverse is true. As Holec (1981) explains, “The teacher will find his role becomes more varied rather than constrained, strengthened rather than weakened (not in terms of authority but in terms of competence) and much greater demands will be made on his creativity than on his highly developed knowledge of teaching techniques” (p. 25). Therefore, any role that teachers play has a critical function. The following section considers different aspects related to how to help learners to become autonomous learners.

2.16 Learner Training

The aim of learner training is to help learners become more active and independent in their learning (Dickinson’s, 1992). This section therefore focuses on learner training, and how it can be employed to help learners achieve and develop autonomy. Furthermore, it presents
techniques that can be employed to help learners take control of their own learning process. In order to make language learning effective and successful, it is important to help learners learn how to learn (Brown, 2007). Smith (2003) claims that autonomy is a capacity that learners lack, and which can only be developed when students are trained and prepared for it, while Kumaravadivelu (2003) states that it is possible to make learners responsible for their own learning only if they are trained to use and apply the appropriate strategies. Encouraging of learners to become responsible for their learning is generally known as _learner training_ or _learning to learn_ (Sinclair, 2000, p. 7). In this case, the main purpose of learner training is to provide learners with the alternatives from which to make informed choices about what, how, why, when and where they learn”, as well as to provide learners with the ability, that is strategies and confidence, to take on more responsibility for their own learning” (Ellis and Sinclair, 1989, pp. 2-3). In addition, learner training guides students towards better performance and achieving greater success by engaging learners in empirical and reflective activities (Jiménez Raya, 1998). Moreover, it produces good academic results by enabling learners with different styles to apply different strategies in learning, and heightens learner consciousness and management of their language learning process.

If autonomy is not innate it is necessary to train learners to hone these skills. Otherwise it may work as a consolidating factor for learners to improve autonomously only by taking steps towards autonomy and exercising that autonomy will the learner be and become autonomous” (Ho & Crookall, 1995, p. 242). Whether innate or not, a degree of training helps learners to improve their autonomy and keep them on track.

However, there is some opposition to training learners to be autonomous and control their learning. Ellis & Sinclair (1989) argue that the process of learner training might be partly learner-directed and partly teacher-directed. The role of the teacher is to provide students with information about language learning, act as a counsellor, and assist learners by suggesting alternatives when they seem unable to proceed. Therefore it is my contention that teachers and students should collaborate in training to be autonomous learners, rather than teachers imposing strategies which learners may or may not utilize.
2.17 Raising Learner Awareness

Raising learner awareness of their roles and the abilities they may use to implement learner autonomy can be one of the best ways to enhance autonomy. Without proper awareness of how they learn, learners may persist in using and following traditional patterns, beliefs, and behaviours (Wenden, 1991). Thavenius emphasises the importance of awareness as a fundamental element of teacher autonomy and claims that the process of being aware of the individual’s role in the development of autonomous learning needs “not only recurrent in-service training and classroom practice, but also a radical change of attitudes and a good insight into introspection” (p. 161). This entails the teachers being aware of different learners’ learning processes and the strategies applied in learning. This boosts awareness of the different elements necessary to encourage and develop learners’ autonomy and assists an understanding of their strategies. Kumaravadivelu (2003) avers that “clearly, learners’ ability to take charge of their own learning can be made possible only if they are trained to identify and use appropriate strategies” (p. 137). This type of support provided to learners is known as “learner training” or “learning to learn” (Sinclair, 2000, p. 7).

The purpose of learner training is to “provide learners with the alternatives from which to make informed choices about what, how, why, when and where they learn”, and “to provide learners with the ability, that is strategies and confidence, to take on more responsibility for their own learning” (Ellis and Sinclair, 1989, pp. 2-3). Learner training is significant because it leads to “improved performance and greater effectiveness by involving learners in experiential and reflective activities” (Jiménez Raya, 1998, p. 24).

Scharle et al., (2000) argue that students need to recognize and understand the importance of their roles in learning in order to become active agents in learning. That is to say; to achieve learning success, learners need to become responsible for their learning. However, it is still considered the teacher’s role to cultivate in their learners a sense of responsibility and to help them to accept their learning responsibilities. To foster autonomous learning then, it is necessary to promote and develop learners’ apprehension of responsibility when making decisions about their learning (Scharle et al., 2000). In this regard, Trebbi (2008) insists that teachers are responsible for raising learners’ awareness of their roles in learning autonomy.
Little (1991) argues that teachers need to adopt a new role in order to “make the transition from purveyor of information to counsellor of learning resources” (p. 45). Both teachers and learners have to work together and share responsibility and students also need to shoulder this responsibility and adjust themselves to being responsible learners. This process should be presented early in the educational field to gain better results (Little, 1991). As learning depends a great deal on the appropriate use of language, and the scope of learner autonomy is always influenced by what knowledge learners have about the target language, in order to best foster learner autonomy, the teacher should do the following (Little, 2009, p. 2):

- use the target language as the preferred medium of communication in the classroom with the same learners
- involve learners in good learning activities that are shared, discussed, analyzed and evaluated with the whole class in the target language
- assist learners in being independent in terms of setting their own targets and choosing their own learning activities in the target language that help them in discussion, analysis, and evaluation
- involve learners in classifying and identifying their own goals but track them through collaborative teamwork
- require learners to keep a written record of their learning in the form of vocabulary lists, lessons plans and projects, or any type of texts they use
- engage learners to evaluate their learning progress as an individual and as a group in the target language

To foster learner autonomy in second language teaching and learning Little (2009) claims teachers should encourage learners to use the language more and “to give learners access to a full range of discourse roles” (p. 153). Dam (2011) also highlighted “the development of learner autonomy as a move from an often totally teacher-directed teaching environment to a possible learner-directed learning environment” (p. 41).

He emphasized the teacher's role and suggested that they must encourage and support students to be responsible for planning, monitoring, and evaluating. In addition, the teacher
should be the person responsible for “introducing activities” which help learners to acquire the “target language” and “differentiate” between input and results for learning (p. 47).

It is my considered opinion that creating such an atmosphere enables learners to become aware of the strategies they apply, and improve their learner autonomy by discovering and negotiating a range of different learning models. However, while raising learner awareness of the different roles that they may play in taking responsibility for their learning, it can be also be argued that learners may also apply strategies which are recommended to them by teachers. For this reason, learners should be encouraged to develop their learner autonomy skill-set through support, encouragement, and guidance (Sinclair, 2000; Victori & Lackhart, 1995).

Reeve’s 2006 study of teacher autonomy found that teachers are categorized as high or low in relation to autonomy support. He claims that “students can be curious, proactive, and highly engaged, or they can be alienated, reactive, and passive. Just how engaged students are during instructions depends, in part, on the supportive quality of classroom conditions in which their learning take place” (p. 225). The teachers’ role in creating the autonomy-supporting classroom is clearly considered vital and is achieved by “nurturing students’ inner motivational resources” and using “informational, non-controlling language” (p. 229). Reeve also adds that autonomy-supportive teachers tend to apply and design their teaching according to learner needs. Thus, teachers should provide learners with a foundation for the activities requested to engage them in the learning procedure and also “acknowledge and accept students’ expression of negative effect” (p. 230). As a result, “students benefit when teachers act as facilitators […] who structure the learning environment” (p. 234) in ways that assist them to be able to control their learning.

Learner autonomy is not something that is supplied to learners, but rather, is developed and encouraged by teachers. Sheerin (1997) suggests that “almost all learners need to be prepared and supported on the path towards greater autonomy” (p. 63). However, Pennycook (1997) cautions against thinking of autonomy in terms of control and power which could be handed over from teacher to student. Rather, he considers the idea that autonomy involves a “struggle” for empowerment on the learner’s part. Conversely, Cotterall (1995) claims that students’ readiness for change needs to be tested before any modifications which might affect learners’ behaviour are implemented. In fact, teachers’
awareness of learners’ readiness to be responsible individuals is “an essential foundation of learner autonomy” (Cotterall, 1995, p. 203). Forearmed with this knowledge, teachers can move directly towards helping students learn the skills required to adopt responsibility for their learning in a number of ways including raising awareness of autonomy, motivating them, encouraging learners to analyze their needs, evaluating progress, selecting the proper material and activities, and (re)assessing their targets during the learning process. In so doing, learners can be involved in the decisions made in the classroom, and engage in negotiation which helps them to become autonomous.

Sheerin (1997) points out that teachers should take care to achieve the proper balance and not make all decisions on behalf of the learners. It is imperative for the teacher to choose the proper level of support and advice for students: too much support may threaten learner autonomy; too little may lead to learners who are not yet ready to assume this responsibility losing direction. To avoid these problems, Sheerin (1997) claims, teachers have to “wean them, however gradually, away from teacher dependence” (p. 63). The watchful teacher can determine when learners are ready for responsibility in their learning lest they discouraged and frustrated.

Autonomous language classrooms are completely different from the traditional classroom in various aspects, such as “telling and showing”. Both teacher and the learner are engaged in “negotiation, interaction, and problem solving” (Little, 1991, p.48). Esch (1996) argues that it is important to consider developing awareness for language learners and to help learners to hone a clear image of the target language. Learners’ comprehensive abilities obviously vary; some have the ability to develop in an autonomous manner independently, while others require the teacher’s assistance. For this reason, I propose that teachers raise learners’ awareness of autonomy by engaging them in practices which explicitly encourage them to take control of their learning, motivate them to make use of appropriate learning strategies, and involve them in negotiations that promote autonomy.

Benson (2001) has classified these practices into six approaches to foster learner autonomy:

1. **The resource-based approach** places a focus on independent interaction with learning materials and resources.

2. **The technology-based approach** emphasizes the relation between independent interactions and educational technologies.
3. **The curriculum-based approach** emphasizes the idea of learner responsibility to the curriculum as a whole.

4. **The classroom-based approach** highlights the importance of classroom learning for learner autonomy.

5. **The learner-based approach** places a focus on training learners’ behavioural and psychological changes.

6. **Teacher-based approaches** emphasise the role of the teacher’s autonomy and education, and the teacher’s role as a facilitator.

Since the research highlights the importance of the Internet and technology in developing learner autonomy, the technology-based approach will be discussed in further detail. The technology-based approach has a fundamental role in developing learner autonomy through the use of technological applications. It advocates the use of educational technologies as a way of learning independently. For example, social media is one of the forms of educational technology that encourage independent interaction among learners. Since the research studies the impact of technology on developing and enhancing learner autonomy, the technology-based approach will be given more considered attention than other approaches. The following will furnish more details about the technology-based approach, and its role in the educational field.

### 2.17.1 The Technology-based Approach

The technology-based approach has a vital impact on developing learner autonomy (Kenning, 1996; Warschauer et al., 1996; Littlewood, 1997; Sheerin, 1997; Healy, 1999; Shield, 2002). There are different forms of this approach, mainly computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Aston, 1997; Klaus, 2012; Milton, 1997), computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Ankan & Bakla, 2011; Dang & Robertson, 2010; Hamilton, 2013) and e-tandem learning (Little, 2001). Kenning (1996, p. 135) claims that technology helps to foster autonomy, explaining: “There is no doubt that [...] IT has much to offer to the fostering of autonomy thanks to its capacity for providing plentiful and varied opportunities for self-directed learning and to the possibility of using computers to deliver strategy training”. This claim has been supported by Gremmo and Riley (1995, p. 153) whom concur that technology is undoubtedly a support to learner autonomy. Moreover, Little (1996) specifies that information system and information technologies can promote the development of learner autonomy to the extent that they can stimulate, mediate and extend
the range and scope of the social and psychological interaction on which learning depends” (p. 203). Thus, learners will have other resources that help them ensure success in language learning in an autonomous way. In this way, and based on their personal needs, learners can easily engage in the learning process which finally situates them at the centre of their own learning. Although technology plays a crucial role in enhancing learner autonomy, Benson (2001) notes that learners need not necessarily become autonomous as an outcome of engaging in technology-based learning. In other words, technology does not automatically improve learner autonomy. Kenning (1996) states that:

While it is quite clear that improved and immediate access to an ever wider range of pedagogical and non-pedagogical language resources cannot be other than beneficial to self-instruction, the potential impact on autonomy is a more complex issue. (p. 122)

However, success in enhancing and developing learner autonomy is deemed reliant on technology usage. This means that learners can gain good learner autonomy once they use the technology properly.

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has a basic relationship with independent language learning rather than learner autonomy. Kenning (1996, p. 121) points out that the association between ICT and learner autonomy is an issue that has only recently emerged in the educative field. Prior to this, the main concern was creating a productive learning environment for learners against a tacit undercurrent that learner autonomy was developing due to computer taking over the teacher’s role and acting as an instructor or substitute teacher rather than a resource or device. However, Kenning (1996) clarifies that the use of a computer alone does not ensure that autonomous learning is taking place, since “the increasing opportunities for self-instruction offered by information technology do not make IT automatically favourable to autonomy” (p. 121). Nonetheless, ICT does address the issue of promoting learner autonomy, as it affords learners the ability to manage their learning and control it by choosing the material of most personal interest, working independently or in groups, building their knowledge, and evaluating their progress. Thus, in the educational field ICT clearly reinforces the potential for enhanced learner autonomy. Recently, computer technologies have advanced more rapidly than ever. The increased processing capabilities and innovative pedagogical methods which were unavailable before provide learner with ever greater scope to control and properly manage their own learning.
However, EFL learners still require proper guidance and training in the use of such devices, since proficient technical and cognitive skills are needed to engage in the learning procedures and attain the best results.

Dang & Robertson (2010) evaluated the impact of computer technology on learner autonomy. In their study, they reviewed learner autonomy from a socio-cultural prospective which stressed the relevance of interaction between learners and their surrounding environment. Their findings conformed to a measurable connection between CMC (computer-mediated communication, or online technology) and learner autonomy which suggest that EFL learners should also consider the advantages of students' social e-habits for educational purposes.

Another model of technology is the use of social media as a means to foster learner autonomy. Joosten (2012) views social media as a number of technological systems related to collaboration and community. However, it seems that an accurate definition remains elusive (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media comes via different applications, such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, Facebook, Twitter, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Barnes & Lescault, 2011; McEwan, 2012). These websites help users to make content, create personal profiles, and exchange messages among users in the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Many researchers use the term “Web 2.0” more when referring to SNSs and social media (Gruzd, Staves, & Wilk, 2011; Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009; Kaplan & Haenline, 2010).

Blogs are one kind of virtual application that can be used as a way to foster learner autonomy as studied by Ankan and Bakla in 2011. They maintain that the use of blogs helps to lay the main foundations of learner autonomy, including decision-making, independent action, critical reflection, and detachment. Once learners are familiar with blogs, they can write on their blogs, and be read by others. Moreover, young learners are motivated to use blogs because they offer a free and interesting writing atmosphere. Many skills can be developed by blog usage, such as being “able to make decisions on one’s own, be less teacher-dependent, and be involved in critical reflection” (p. 241). In a study involving 17 EFL learners to test the use of blogs, Ankan and Bakla (2011) found that most learners face difficulties with the use of technology and language proficiency, although students had the opportunity to make decisions and develop positive attitudes towards blog use. Therefore,
teachers should endeavour to give students more opportunities to make decisions, as by
\textit{being guided by a knowledgeable teacher, learners can study a second language autonomously}” (p. 241). This study gives attributes much to the teacher's role in fostering learner autonomy and overcoming the complications involved in using blogs as autonomous learning applications.

\textbf{2.18 Chapter Summary}

This chapter explored different aspects of language learning strategies (LLSs) and reviewed a number of key issues related to English language learning and strategy choice by foreign language learners. Accordingly, it highlighted the major assumptions and practices underlying different paradigms, and their impact on progress in language learning. It also addressed different classifications of learning strategies, types of LLSs, variables affecting strategy choice, the concept of the good language learner, and language theory. In addition, it discussed various aspects of learner autonomy, and how learners may be supported and prepared to become autonomous learners.

This chapter further aimed to provide an in-depth examination of autonomous learning, from what it entails and how to promote it, to the different concepts and definitions of learner autonomy and the teacher's role in improving this aspect of learning. It concluded that teachers continue to play a central and critical role in promoting these skills and that they may also introduce strategies that help learners to fully develop their autonomy. In fact, by establishing a sympathetic environment teachers are uniquely placed to help learners to embrace responsible for their learning, rather than being seen as managers or figures of authority. Teachers can further cultivate the learning atmosphere by using introducing digital technologies in order to promote and enhance the educative ethos of the classroom. If this can be achieved, learners can be aware of applying the proper learning strategies that enable learner autonomy.

Bearing this in mind, I strongly advocate for teachers to adapt to the role of active and committed learning facilitators. The next chapter therefore examines social media and Internet use in higher education, and the extent to which these tools can be used by teachers and EFL students as a means to successfully learn English.
CHAPTER 3- SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET

3.1 Introduction

As seen in Chapter 2, different aspects related to English language learning strategies and autonomous learning have been discussed in detail. Here, this chapter discussed a variety of topics related to social media, including background to social media, definitions of social media, different types of social media, social media and higher education, Net generation, different types of SNSs used by learners and teachers‘ use of different SNSs. Further, it outlines and discusses the use of social media in higher education, and the extent to which they can contribute to improve English language learning to EFL students, with a focus on Facebook, Twitter and blogs. The main barriers related to the poor integration of social media platforms and technologies in education were discussed as well in the chapter.

3.2 Background to the Social Media and Internet

In recent years, ‘being literate no longer only involves being able to read and write. The literate of the twenty-first century must be able to download, upload, rip, burn, chat, save, blog, Skype, IM, and share’ (Mullen and Wedwick, 2008, p. 66). In fact, the use of social media platforms gives an opportunity to people to connect, communicate and interact with each other. Within the last decade, Internet use among individuals has developed significantly. Previously, people used the Internet to obtain information and read; however, there are now many different opportunities for Internet users to contribute to creating their own work, participate in online activities and communicate with others.

Due to the rapid progress of the 21st century, people are creating new technological facilities and lifestyles. Shirkey (2008) claims that the latest web technologies are generally causing a ‘tectonic shift’ in the world because of what they allow people to do after they publish material. These technologies can ‘be used as a powerful educational tool that can facilitate learning in students by providing great visuals and enhancing their imaginations’ (Elshaikhi, 2015, p. 1). In order to create a group that makes modifications to the learning methods used, ‘we create the potential for connections’ (Richardson, 2010, p. 3). In addition, society
will be influenced by making use of most of the new things that transform the way individuals achieve their goals. The actual transformation includes technological aspects that “will transform the world everywhere with groups of people come together” (Shirkey, 2008, p. 3).

The spread of social media and Web 2.0 technologies is unprecedented, and developed very recently (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010); these technologies have become a fundamental part of personal life. They enable people to communicate, interact, upload and download information in various formats, such as sharing photos, videos and making content for the purpose of social interaction. Furthermore, once individuals use social media technologies, they can sustain good relationships with friends and make new friendships with colleagues and family members. These applications help users to engage actively in these websites and provide individuals with access to different sets of information from various sources (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

3.3 Social Media and the Internet

The phenomenon of social media has spread extensively in the world, as individuals can now be connected to each other through the Internet on various social media websites, such as Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, blogs and many other interactive platforms. Social media platforms help users to upload and download information in different formats, such as videos, texts and images for networking and interaction.

The concept of “social media” has been applied interchangeably with different Web 2.0 tools and other information and communication technology (ICT). In this study both information and communication technology (ICT) and social networking sites (SNSs) were used interchangeably; therefore, it is important to clarify the relationship between these two terms. ICT is the umbrella referent for diverse sets of technologies which enable users to create, access, disseminate, store, manage, and communicate information in a digital format. This includes computer hardware and software applications which encompass mobile phones, computers, network hardware, internet, telecommunication systems, telecollaboration, along with the numerous related services and applications. Recently, there
has been a groundswell of interest can best be connected to advance social communication in various levels. This has fuelled ICT and research and innovation in the areas of both ICT and social media leading to the emergence of participatory technologies’ such as Web 2.0.

As an emerging phenomenon, social media are specifically devised for social interaction and enabled by globally accessible communication technology, participatory technology, mobile technology, and web-based applications. They combine social interaction and technology for value co-creation, the user-generated content corollary of which takes a wide variety of forms, including ideas, text, videos, pictures, and so on.

It is widely known that forms of Web 2.0 technology have developed from Web 1.0 platforms, mainly broadcast methods, by allowing users to write, connect, share and work together via different web methods. Levin (2013, p. 11) offers one of the best explanations of the differences between these two conceptions; he refers to social media as a cultural phenomenon, enhancing interpersonal communication and changing the nature of the relationship between the individual and a society”, and Web 2.0 as the technological basis of social media”. Wu Song (2010) states that Web 2.0 technologies give users the opportunity to interact and enable them to create new content and make comments. The flexibility of using Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook, blogs, Wikis, telecollaboration ‘virtual exchange’ and other social media sites indicates how democratic these technologies are. Web 2.0 technologies have changed the way the Web was used, from being a space where users liked to view content only to becoming a space where active individuals can contribute content through various social tools, and this underpins the significance of Web 2.0 (Blank and Reisdorf, 2012). Web 2.0 has five basic characteristics: collaboration, creativity, conversation, community and control (Hicks and Graber, 2010). Hicks and Graber (2010) claim that the open participatory and democratic nature of Web 2.0 helps users to cooperate and to be creative individuals, providing content in novel ways. The active and creative use of Web 2.0 changes users from inactive recipients of information to energetic producers that are eager to develop the future of learning.

Social media have been defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of
connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). The nature and categories of these social networking sites are usually different from site to site. For example, websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn help their users to discuss, collaborate, and explain via different tools that help them to chat, evaluate and share with other individuals. Another example is the use of blogs as online journals where individuals can discuss specific themes. Blogs allow users to post particular content, to communicate and comment on others’ websites and to observe other individuals’ posts. Moreover, Twitter, which can be considered a micro-blogging service that places a limitation on posters’ character count, allowing them no more than 160 characters (Du and Wagner 2006). According to Java et al., (2007), the average blog may be updated daily, while the average micro-blog may be updated a few times a day.

Moreover, telecollaboration, or as it is known recently as “virtual exchange” or “online intercultural exchange” are important online application since it links classes in geographically distant locations to work together on collaborative tasks to develop their language skills, digital skills and intercultural skills (O’Dowd, 2017). This online application facilitates collaboration between groups of students to work on common tasks and this involves teachers as well to improve and develop the tasks by integrating various activities into the classroom. However, there are many challenges that teachers come across when using telecollaboration in the classroom. For example, some teachers find it difficult to find a partner that is teaching the same subject. Time differences is another factor affecting the use of Skype to exchange and link classes from different countries such as United States and Africa. This lead teachers to end up doing asynchronous exchanges. Therefore, people prefer to use e-mails or online discussion forums instead of interaction together online (O’Dowd, 2017).

Greenhow et al., (2009) offer a comprehensive view of social media and different Web 2.0 technologies:

Web 2.0 includes social networks, such as MySpace, Facebook, and Ning; media sharing, such as YouTube and Flickr; social bookmarking, such as Delicious and Cite ULik; collaborative knowledge development through wikis (e.g., Wikipedia); creative works, such as podcasts, videocasts, blogs, and microblogs (e.g., Twitter, Blogger); content aggregation and organization, such as RSS (Really Simple Syndication)
feeds and tagging tools; and remixing or mash-ups of content from different content providers into new forms, such as combining geographical data with transportation or crime data (p. 247).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), several of these technologies are referred to as “social media”, in that they aid the foundation and exchange of user-created content. These new media allow users to exchange ideas and communicate about related content.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) also give a detailed definition of social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Since social websites have unlimited forms, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classify them into six categories:
1) Collaborative projects such as Wikis and SNSs that enable users to make new content; for example, Deliciou and Symbaloo;
2) Blogs consisting of personal web pages which enable sharing or publishing from others; for example, Twitter;
3) Social content management tools which facilitate media sharing among users; i.e., photo or video sharing tools like Flickr and YouTube;
4) Social platforms that enable users to join by creating personal profiles, contact friends via email and send instant messages, such as Twitter and Facebook;
5) Virtual game worlds – 3-D (three-dimensional) environments that give users the opportunity to interact as if they are in the real world: for example, World of Warcraft; and
6) Virtual social worlds, such as Second Life, that permit users to live a virtual life and select their behaviour without restriction (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

The above-mentioned technological tools play a significant role in users’ lives. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) discuss the social processes of self-presentation and self-disclosure in their categorisation of social networking sites. Both researchers also discuss three stages of social existence, as viewed in the chart below. These categories are classified as low (blogs), medium (content communities and SNS, such as Facebook and Youtube) and high (virtual social worlds and game worlds).
Table 3.1- Classification of social media, by Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure</th>
<th>Social presence/ Media richness</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)</td>
<td>Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)</td>
<td>Content communities (e.g., YouTube)</td>
<td>Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, Moran, Seaman and Tinti-Kane (2011, p. 4) claim that the term ‘social media’ is a ‘hazy’ concept relating to ‘user created, user controlled, flexible, democratic, and both very transparent and very not’. In short, while ICT and social media are conceptually separate entities they are nonetheless connected and inextricably intertwined. In fact, they are destined to converge whenever either is mobilized as a resource to advocate for, or used as a force for social changes which rest upon fundamental overhauls of hegemonic social patterns pertaining to economic development, political progress, cultural change, social revolution, and so on. Many scholars acknowledge that the term ‘social media’, ‘ICT’ and ‘Web 2.0’ have been used separately, together and interchangeably in research studies (Gruzd, Staves and Wilk, 2012; Hemmi, Bayne and Land, 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

To sum up, the concept of social media refers to many social media applications, such as Wikis, blogs and social networking sites. Furthermore, the term ‘Web 2.0’ refers to the technologies supporting and enabling social media, while the term ‘online technologies’ is considered to refer to all of the different online technologies, including social networking sites, Web 2.0 technologies and other media platforms. Recently, the sheer proliferation of social media applications has illustrated how important these social media sites are for both teachers and learners, and when we consider the number of users of these sites, the significance become obvious. A study conducted by Nelson in 2012 claims that Internet users spend more time with social media platforms than any other sites. The time spent on social media sites in the US across PCs and cell phones increased dramatically by 37% within one year. In addition, in a study conducted by Ferriter (2010), it was reported that
61% of adults regularly use the Internet to interact with one another on social networking sites, and 73% of teens commonly use the Internet to interact with friends and peers via social media sites. In fact, “social media leads towards cognitive approach, socio cognitive approach, computer-mediated communication in a classroom” (Kalasi, 2014). As a result, social media becomes part of our lives.
3.4 Social Media and Higher Education

As can be understood from the discussion above, social media are generally known as a collection of websites, services and methods that are used to support different forms of collaboration, sharing and discussion. It is therefore not surprising that these interactive technological methods attracted and fascinated the interest of higher education faculty members searching for better educational environment to attract learners’ attention and become more active individuals (Hughes et al., 2009). These networking sites are considered a form of learning practice for many university students, since the learners in the university interact in a social way within an academic framework (Hwang, Kessler, & Francesco, 2004). It has been observed that social media tools have been totally rooted in the daily routine of young people, mainly university students, because they occupy a large percentage of the online social media platform population (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Subrahmanym, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Social media are now ingrained in our culture, utilised broadly by college students (Rainie L., 2012), as well as becoming a common theme among academic teachers and researchers (Giordano C, Giordano C, 2011). Multiple studies indicate that the use of social networking sites has increased dramatically, from 8% of adults being Internet users in 2005 to 35% in 2009.

Students’ use of social networking sites can be seen to help them to be more independent learners and improve their learning autonomy, mainly when learners create a plan and specific systems that support and develop personal links. Integrating digital technology in schools helps students to be independent learners. Students’ independence enables them to work independently at their own rate, and allows them often to exceed expectations; particularly in writing and mathematical subjects (Boysen, 1994). Technological integration means using technology seamlessly to support and enhance curriculum objectives and to improve learners’ engagement in the process of learning. Thus, technology can be used as a method to enrich activities and give students new ways to express their understanding (Dias, 1999). In addition, proper technological integration impacts positively on students’ learning. It can increase students’ motivation to learn, enable learners to communicate easily, assist higher-order thinking skills, construct valuable skills that are needed for schools and in work, and expand learners’ understanding, from being a novice to becoming a master.
Many researchers have presumed that college students who are already using social networking tools in their daily lives are usually more motivated to apply these technologies in the academic context, and will acquire the essential technical skills (Dohn, 2009). Research conducted in a northern Taiwan university reports that university students with certain self-regulated abilities tend to interact and communicate with peers via social networking sites to get feedback, and thus gradually develop their performance (Wang & Wu, 2008). Dohn (2009) claims that the effective use of social media sites is certainly a required skill for the contemporary world, and a ‘life-long, life-wide’ group of skills weakens the boundaries between formal and informal learning. Additionally, college students could acquire responsibility for their university education and start to raise the role and engage in peer-supported online communities for different academic tasks (Selwyn, 2009).

It is essential to integrate digital technology in the educational field, particularly in higher education. The use of these technologies may lead to the achievement of many educational objectives within a short time by making qualitative enhancements in learning and teaching. The importance of information technology in today's world cannot be denied, and educators are aware that information technology is already an important force in modern education. Technology is found in schools everywhere, represented by different tools and instruments” (Al-Alwani, 2005, p. 2). For example, interactive games improve students' skills and encourage them to learn, since these games provide feedback through participation, communication and working as teams (Barnett et al., 2005; Lyons & Milton, 2002; Lyons, 2012). Furthermore, implementing different social media tools, such as blogs, YouTube, Wikis and social networking, into the education process is therefore an attractive idea (Grosseck & Holotescu 2009; Rankin, 2009; Ebner et al., 2010; Schroeder et al., 2010). Rivero (2011) asserts how important the social media phenomenon is to education: “It might very well be a huge classroom distraction, but why can't social media become a bigger boon for education than we’ve ever seen? New and emerging technologies have largely sought to bring us greater freedom, and, with freedom, comes responsibility. Schools that nurture this will do just fine”. Greenhow (2011) summarises how using social media tools in learning promotes a more student-centred course. These tools allow students to interact and collaborate with each other and instructors, and this promotes personal choice, customization and student familiarity” (Hoffman, 2009, p.23). Students are better able to create their own understanding of content when creating with these tools.
Social media have been viewed as most valuable in engaging learners and connecting them like never before. Despite the worries and fears of the phenomenon in the beginning, both teachers and academic organisations have recognised that the power of social media in the academic field would enable any negative sides to be more dominant than the positives. Thus, there should be adequate arrangements made to make the case for more academic uses of such social networking sites. Hoffman (2011) claims, “It’s commanding the attention of technology-minded educators and school administrators of all stripes as they grapple to take advantage of social media tools and to understand and mitigate the fears and safety issues that may arise when kids and teachers use these tools”.

The changes that Web technologies have meant for education have initiated calls for studies into new and innovative ways of looking at both teachers’ and learners’ needs in the educational environment within this new technology-based surrounding. Reigeluth (1991) states that,

> When we look at the ways society is changing as we evolve deeper into the information age, we can see definite paradigm shifts in the workplace and the family […] from those changes we can see that a new paradigm of education is essential to meet the new educational needs of both learners and the supra systems that sponsor the educational systems (p. 43).

However, in 2012, Reigeluth (2012) made a new call to revisit this instructional paradigm:

> While much instructional theory has been generated to guide the design of the new paradigm of instruction, much remains to be learned. We need to learn how to better address the strong emotional basis of learning (Greenspan, 1997), foster emotional and social development, and promote the development of positive attitudes, values, morals, and ethics, among other things (p. 8).

Social networking sites facilitate interaction and communication between learners and their teachers by using different platforms, locations and methods. The use of social media has a major impact on academic education among university students; it supports communities and virtual learning environments (VLEs) for the purpose of expanding (Hussain, 2005) distributed learning among users. Learners can shape communities and contact other members of society freely. In addition, they can share knowledge, research projects and study experiences with other individuals. The implementation of social networking sites among university students helps to shrink the gap between learners (Smith & Caruso, 2010).
A comprehensive study conducted by Armstrong and Franklin (2008) showed that learners use social networking sites in various ways to help enhance and strengthen teaching and learning via different collaborative activities in personal situations. Although several online social media applications are used regularly by university students (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008), very little research has been conducted about implementing them for educational purposes (Greenhow, 2011). According to Greenhow et al., (2009), learners tend to use specific social media applications in their daily life, and others feel that they would benefit from applying such technologies in the classroom. It is known that today’s college students have never imagined a life without the Internet and its applications, and they have been labelled the “Internet class” on the 2011 Beloit College Mind-Set List (Troop, 2011). Therefore, it would be better to keep in mind the prediction of Armstrong and Franklin (2008, p. 27) that “universities will lose their privileged role as a primary producer of knowledge, and gatekeeper to it, as knowledge becomes more widely accessible through other sources and is produced by more people in more ways”.

Certain factors related to higher education have been investigated, including faculty use (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Chen & Bryer, 2012; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010), student engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Hsu & Ching, 2012; Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2012) and the impact on, as well as the relationship with, educational success (Junco, 2012; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). In a study conducted by Yang and Cheng (2011), they concluded that higher education students have more positive attitudes towards peer interaction and academic accomplishment via interactive blogs. In addition, the use of Twitter for social interaction among learners has a significant effect on the GPA of undergraduate college students (Junco et al., 2011). However, Junco (2012) claims that time spent on Facebook has a negative impact on the GPA of university students, because of the short time spent preparing for classes. In a study conducted by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), they found a negative relationship between Facebook use and academic performance. Unfortunately, Facebook users reported spending less study hours per week and lower GPAs compared to non-Facebook users. Malaney (2005) also reported that SNSs affected students’ GPA negatively as a result of long hours spent on the Internet and SNSs.

Many researchers have investigated the progressive ubiquity of social networking sites among university students. Higher education students tend to use social networking sites
such as Facebook and other similar technologies to sustain teaching and learning more than faculty members do, who tend to keep up traditional methods and technologies (Roblyer et al., 2010). In an observation on social media and its impact on students, Tess (2013) concluded that teachers are slow at implementing social media for educational purposes, although most educational institutions have the infrastructure and support for it. Additionally, while social networking sites have the ability to support personal learning environments, such as new educational methods to improve autonomous learning (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2011), some concern against implementing social media for educational purposes has been raised. This concern against the use of social media in educational institutions was due to the "commercially contoured" nature of social networking services (Friesen & Lowe, 2011, p. 193) or simply "an academic form of a 'moral panic' without empirical evidence" (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008, p. 775).

The utilisation of social media facilitates communication and collaboration between university students to support the implementation of social media sites for well-constructed classrooms (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010). It can be applied to enhance education and to fill the learning gap easily between "digital native" students and the "digital immigrant" faculty (Bull, Thompson, Searson, Garofalo, Park, Young, & Lee, 2008). University students usually use these social sites for academic purposes, both formally and informally. In addition, faculty members encourage the use of social media for educational activities (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2007). For example, some faculty members encourage students to use different social platforms, such as Wiki software, to motivate students during collaborative work (Hazari, North, & Moreland, 2009), and encourage the use of Twitter to support learners' engagement in the classroom (Rankin, 2009). These efforts made by faculty members and learners help to generate novel educational procedures that lead to the appearance of constructive e-learning 2.0, faculty 2.0, education 2.0 and learners 2.0. The theme 2.0 has many characteristics, such as openness, collaboration, social work, the generation of personal content and the demarcation of areas of higher education that are necessary for educational practice (Alexander, 2006; Dabbagh & Reo, 2011b; Jones, 2008; Lindstrom, 2007; Norton & Hathaway, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005; Sessums, 2006). Hilton (2009) claims that higher education is being challenged by the perception that social networking sites are empowering learners to be responsible for their own learning, which resulted in some claims that there is no arbiter of
the learners’ work, publications, knowledge or beliefs. Furthermore, Dunlap and Lowenthal (2011) believe that using Web 2.0 technologies with which students are already familiar can help to support lifelong learning by considering these objectives: (i) Develop student autonomy, responsibility, and intentionality, (ii) Encourage reflection, (iii) Enculturate into a community of practice, (iv) Encourage discourse and collaboration; and (v) Provide intrinsically motivating learning activities (p. 5).

To sum up, social networking sites can guide learners toward innovation in four different dimensions. Firstly, different forms of social media help learners to access an immense range of learning content that helps and supports the learning process and specialised development in the life term, in addition to putting pressure on educational institutions to improve and enhance the quality of education and learning material. Secondly, social networking sites allow learners to create digital content themselves and start publishing material online, improving an enormous number of resources, usually through user-generated content which benefits both learners and instructors, encouraging different active approaches to learning. Thirdly, social media play an excellent role in connecting learners together, and to teachers and professionals, and allowing them to get access to valuable knowledge regarding the topic of interest. Fourthly, social media support collaboration among learners and teachers on different learning projects and topics, gathering resources and working together as a team (Redecker, Ala-Mutka and Punie, 2010). Thus, it can be stated that social media can be used as a communication facilitator among learners, and students wish to adapt these technologies to enhance educational access and interaction (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010).

3.5 The Net Generation

_The Net Generation‘ designates the generation born after 1984 onwards in the wake of the widespread proliferation of the Internet and ICT. First used in Donald Tapscott’s 1998 social commentary, Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation, the term specifically alluded to the diverse ways in which young people had begun to incorporate the use of digital technologies and social media in their lives. Tapscott substituted _Net
Generation’ for the previously established ‘Generation Yes‘ in consideration of the connotative power of language, explaining that:

Terms acquire meaning and they shape our thinking […] N-Generation is a better term in that it codifies in a unified term the power of demographics with the power of a new media analysis […] The N-Gen is […] breaking free from the one-way, centralised media of the past and are beginning to shape their own destiny. And evidence is mounting that the world will be a better place as a result (Tapscott, 1998, p. 33).

Tapscott’s observation of young people and children indicated that frequent exposure with digital technology from an early age improved overall user confidence and ability going forward, and suggested that cognition, reasoning, intelligence, personality, and autonomy, could be significantly enhanced and developed through interactive media. Tapscott (1998) claimed that “when children control their media, rather than passively observe, they develop faster” (p. 7). While acknowledging that certain problems require ‘management’ he minimized issues such as online bullying, appropriate use, and cyber safety, explaining that “kids are doing most of the managing themselves” (Tapscott, 1998, p. 9). His stance emphasizes the higher-order thinking, advanced decision-making, and autonomy of contemporary youth. He further asserts that they are more “comfortable, knowledgeable, and literate than their parents/adults” (Tapscott, 1998, p. 2) with digital technology. In short, the axiomatic tenet of the Net Generation concept is that young people are more proficient in using digital technology due to life-long familiarity and acculturation to the technological environment.

Self-confident engagement with digital technology is a hallmark of a Net Generation who are undaunted by the ever-evolving technologies which they understand as “a force for social transformation” (Tapscott, 1998, p. 2). On the contrary, they have embraced the Internet capability to network and exchange ideas and views with people from all over the world (Tapscott, 1998, Dorman, 2000) and this amplified exposure to ideas and information on the Internet has both equipped them with global knowledge and facilitated independent learning. Connectivity and social engagement are also considered important aspects of this generation (Tapscott, 1998). Tapscott claims that such factors help the Net Generation to internalize values, improve the critical thinking skills of evaluation, interpretation and judgment, and produce more self-reliant learners (Tapscott, 1998).
The post-1984 generation has revolutionized the social landscape with the belief that everything is possible (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Prensky, 2004). Now variously referred to as _digital natives_ (Prensky, 2001), _the Net Generation_ (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Tapscott, 1999), _Generation Y_ (McCrindle, 2003), or _millennials_ (Howe & Strauss, 2000), they are presumed to be conversant with a broad spectrum of ICT tools, including social networking technologies, while at the same time having a high level of involvement in social networking activities. In 2010 _The Economist_ basically defined the Net Generation as those born between the 1980s and early 2000 and who used computers from the age of five years old and used Web searches for school assignment research in their teenage years (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Learners from this period usually prefer to apply different tasks and to translate this knowledge for use in the real world. They also prefer a flexible learning environment in which more abundant information and feedback can be obtained (Westerman, 2006).

The Net Generation is differentiated from previous generations of learners by a very precise set of characteristics, which include direct challenges to traditional pedagogical approaches. In fact, the traditional classroom is no place for these students. Net Generation students are more visually literate and interactive than their predecessors, and are confident to express themselves through images, and to text and call each other. Learners’ ability to move between the real and the virtual is therefore direct and extends beyond the limits of mere text (Frand, J., 2000). However, due to the abundance of visual technologies, learners’ textual literacy may be less sophisticated than earlier cohorts. Moreover, it is evident that while learners are competent to use different technological tools without direct instruction, their overall understanding of technology may be relatively poor (Oblinger, D., Oblinger, J., & Lippincott, J., 2005).

The emergence of the ―Internet Generation‖ has created something of a challenge to the higher education sector. As today’s Net Gen students have grown up habitually surrounded by, and exposed to, computer-based technology, they demand greater independence in their own learning process (Prensky, 2005), utilize technological devices for social interaction, and like to work in groups (McNeely, 2005). It is arguable that the so-called ―Internet class‖ (Troop, 2011) could not even conceive of an Internet-less existence since ―technology is like air to them‖ (Bingham, 2009, p.57; Tapscott, 2009). This generation is
also unique, in that familiarity with the Internet and technology has given rise to an inclusive generational view which "expects work to have deeper personal meaning" (Gogoi, 2005).

Rather than using the library to conduct research, the Net Generation prefers to apply various forms of IT. Additionally, these students thrive better in a less rigid learning environment (Westerman, 2006). Although aware that the Web cannot be relied on to meet all of their information needs (Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), 2002) large volumes of learners reported the Internet had enabled them to locate important research documents and related resources. The Net Generation "have always experienced digital media and Internet access; use mobile devices; prefer to work in groups and teams, want augmented reality and use hyper learning models as opposed to linear acquisition of information" (Billings, 2004, p.104).

Prensky (2001) goes so far as to claim that the current generation of learners is addicted to technology, and must therefore be regarded as "digital natives". How maintains that as these learners have been surrounded by different computer games, music players, cell phones and all methods of technology, they are typified by the ability to learn independently through discovery. It is estimated that the age of 20 the average Net Gen learner will spent:

- 10,000 hours playing video games
- 200,000 hours on emails
- 20,000 hours watching TV
- 10,000 hours on cell phones
- less than 5,000 hours reading (Bonamici et al., 2005).

Many scholars agree that the Net Generation exerts great influence on higher education (Strauss and Howe, 2000) as the diverse technologies of digital games, mobile phones, email, and many other tools, are recognized as essential aspects of learner lives and are now widely available on most university campuses. Prensky (2002) therefore states that it is imperative to "invent Digital Native methodologies for all subjects, at all levels, using our students to guide us".

Since most students are already implicated in social media on a daily basis, it seems logical for those digital learners from the educational field to improve their teaching and learning
goals among learners. Their fluency and confidence with digital technology makes them extremely competent and natural mentors for older employees (Sujansky, 2009). Internet technologies encourage students and teachers to collaborate, which in turn, promotes a more student-centred approach (Andersen, 2007). As students become increasingly more constructive learners, more emphasis has been placed on student-based discovery learning. In this way, learning is becoming more student-centered, with the teacher in role of facilitator. However, the relevant literature (Biasutti, 2011; Boulos & Wheeler, 2007; Crook & Harrison, 2008) reveal that few teachers actively seek to achieve this goal, and that student experience is highly variable (De Gagne & Walters, 2009; Lao & Gonzales, 2005).

Net Geners’ learning habits tend towards independence and autonomy. This impacts across an extensive range of educational selections and behaviours, from “what kind of education they buy” to “what, where, and how they learn” (Carlson, 2005). This generates more learner self-confidence in terms of realizing learning goals in the classroom. In addition, they can consciously decide which learning methods are most useful to them, such as for instance, applying interactive media such as digital images or PowerPoint, working in pairs or groups, or reading lectures online.

Tapscott (1998) observed that the range of shifts which has latterly occurred in the education sector is the result of the recent implementations of numerous technological tools:

- from linear to hypermedia
- from tutoring to construction and discovery
- from teacher-centered to learner-centered education
- from absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn
- from childhood/youth schooling to lifelong learning
- from one-size-fits-all to customised learning
- from learning as torture to learning as fun
- from the teacher as transmitter to the teacher as facilitator (Tapscott, 1998, p. 229).

Several scholars and educators support the idea of using these assessments to gauge greater motivation for active, engaged learning experiences among Net Generation learners. Tapscott (1998) himself claims that contemporary learning has become more interactive and independent in style and asserts that the learners of today are no longer passive recipients in
 Unlike previous generations of learners, who tended to receive knowledge in this way:

*The Net generation children [...] are beginning to process information and learn differently than the boomers before them. New media tools offer great promise for a new model of learning – one based on discovery and participation (Tapscott, 1998, p.127).*

In fact, the Net Generation gain knowledge through discovery and connectivity. However, although connected to technology, their learning does not concern technology per se, but rather promotes using technology to facilitate learning (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Oblinger and Hagner (2005) further note that digital learners who are inclined to engage with a diversity of Internet communication platforms, easily disengage from traditional learning techniques. Glenn (2000) observes that the Net Generation require self-directed learning opportunities, different forms of feedback, an active environment, and multiple projects entailing diverse resources to create meaningful experiences. On the other hand, Hay (2000) claims that in addition to inquiry-based techniques for learning, the Net Generation need more assistance to comprehend all that is available to them.

In summary; global internet technology has become an intrinsic and indispensable part of the Net Generation's learner life and education in terms of supported learning and realizing educational goals. Due to the rapidly evolving nature of Web 2.0 there is limited research in this area. However, it is my contention that the use of digital technologies in third-level education can increase learners’ self-confidence and enable them to become more autonomous learners, while the role of the teacher should be adapted to that of a facilitator who supports and encourages students to become more active in directing their own learning. I agree that digital technologies can increase learners’ self-confidence and help them be more autonomous learners. Therefore, the role of the teacher must be changed to one of a facilitator, and students have become more active in guiding and directing their own learning experiences.

### 3.6 Types of Social Networking Sites Used by Learners

The rise of new technologies has a massive effect on all levels of people's life and education. Millions of people around the globe now use social network sites (SNS) every
day to establish their existing networks of acquaintances and friends, and to create new
networks with people.

Since the year 2000, social networking sites have become mainstream, with the expansion
of many sites, such as MySpace and Linkedin (2003), Flickr (2004), Bebo and Ning (2005),
215). These social-networking sites are the latest online communication tools that help and
allow users to make a private or public profile to communicate with people in their networks
(Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Among different SNSs, Facebook is considered the leading online
social site in the majority of countries, with Twitter and LinkedIn following in popularity
(comScore, 2011).

Hall (2009) investigated the need to balance formal learning, such as structured learning,
with informal learning, such as learning without direct instruction and technologies. The aim
of his study was to determine how to help learners use and traverse these concepts and how
to use social networking sites to support and enable them in particular. He discovered that
the collection of different social networking sites in relation to the formal system of the
institutions can be considered a “<em>personal learning environment</em>”, or “PLE” (Hall, 2009).
Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can obviously impact upon their
progress (Hall, 2009; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2011; Kassens-Noor, 2012). Adopting such
tools helps learners to address the “blurring of the boundaries” between personal, social
areas and formal education contexts (Hall, 2009). Hall claims that a personal learning
environment can help in terms of integrating both formal and informal learning, which leads
to the improvement of learning (Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2011). However, the emphasis
upon learner choice in the improvement of such environments might face some challenges if
the universities push and restrict participation to specific programmes.

Various studies have identified Chickering and Gamson’s Seven Principles for Good
Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering and Gamson, 1999) as ideal principles for
the use of social media tools in education. The seven principles of valuable practice in
undergraduate education include the following:

(1) Encourages student-faculty contact  (2) Encourages cooperation among
students (3) Encourages active learning (4) Gives prompt feedback (5)
Emphasizes time on task (6) Communicates high expectations (7) Respects diverse talents and ways of learning (Junco, Heiberger, and Loken 2011; Roblyer et al., 2010).

The following is an investigation of the most utilised social media tools, namely Facebook, Twitter and Weblogs, since they are considered the most commonly used social tools among the new generation. These SNSs are the focus of this study to examine the extent to which these online tools can contribute to autonomous language learning.

3.6.1 Facebook

Facebook may be considered the face of online social networks. A study conducted by IAB and Elogia (2012) reports that Facebook is the most heavily used social online site, with an average of 85 percent of social networking users being members of Facebook. Originally, Facebook was created in 2004 by the Harvard undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg. It is the “dominant” social networking site (Lenhart et al., 2010). Facebook was originally limited to Harvard online networking sites, but these sites opened to the public in 2006 (Sheldon, 2008a; Urista, Dong and Day, 2009). Among various studies related to Facebook use and implementation (e.g., Hargittai, 2007; Jones and Fox, 2009; Lenhart and Madden, 2007; Salaway and Caruso, 2008), Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that more than 94 percent of their university students were users of Facebook, and spent at least 10-30 minutes on the site, and sometimes having 150-200 friends. Harvard (2011) reported that 90 percent of undergraduate university students have Facebook accounts. The number of active Facebook users increased dramatically from 350 million in 2009 to one billion users in 2012 (Facebook.com). Facebook is known as “an online directory that connects people through social networks at colleges and universities” (Zuckerberg, 2005, p. 1).

Facebook is fundamentally an online social network site that allows users to share photos and personal details, and join friends with each other (Buckman, 2005). Individuals who have a Facebook account usually register themselves online and create a profile using an official email address (Cain, 2008). Once users join Facebook, they can look up other friends and see others’ profiles and information. They can exchange messages and send friend requests to each other (Kolek and Saunders, 2008). In addition, individuals can join groups and become fans of other pages of interest. Furthermore, Facebook can be used as a tool for entertainment and interest, because various games and applications are included.
Although there are many other social networking sites that are designed to connect people, such as Twitter and Myspace, Facebook is considered the leading social online site that is used extensively among college students (Educause, 2006; Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman, 2007; Stutzman, 2006). In a survey conducted in the USA about Facebook use and adoption among learners, more than 90 percent of undergraduate learners were reported as using it. In addition, Facebook has now become ubiquitous, and is one of the most popular online sites used among British students (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009).

Advocates of using Facebook as an excellent online platform (e.g., Munoz and Towner, 2009) claim that Facebook influences undergraduate students positively. For example, learners can use Facebook to contact others regarding course homework or group work, and teachers can contact learners concerning the course work. Many studies related to Facebook claim that it can have a great impact on individuals' academic performance, although learners consider it a social tool rather than a teaching tool (Madge et al., 2009; Usluel and Mazman, 2009; Selwyn, 2009). Godwin-Jones (2008) states that social networking sites and platforms such as Facebook — that enhance communication and human interaction can potentially be harnessed for language learning” (p. 7) and become an interesting field of research (Bloch, 2008). Although there are various pieces of anecdotal evidence about using Facebook to improve learners’ writing, only a few researches have been conducted on how making a Facebook account improves their writing. Similarly, Haverback (2009) claims that her students were highly motivated towards using Facebook for reading as a group, and the developed better understanding compared to when they read independently.

In other studies that discuss and investigate how Facebook can enhance the development of socio-pragmatic competence in language learners” and the sense of community in language classrooms”, Blattner and Fiori (2009) point out that Facebook can be used to increase motivation for learners, which leads to authentic language communication and improves learners‘ use of the English language. They also claim that Facebook is a unique social platform that offers constructive educational experiences while maintaining privacy and safety” and that the potential of FB is growing everyday with new applications” (p. 8) that are yet to be studied and observed.
Facebook has many good features, such as helping learners get used to university life, leading to a higher level of confidence and becoming familiar with the university culture, which can help get higher results (Wang & Wu, 2008; Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Kwok, 2010). Selwyn (2009) concludes that Facebook has become an essential online site for the informal cultural learning of “being a student”. In a study conducted about the impact of Facebook on the learning progress of certain courses, Kabilan et al., (2010) found that college students consider Facebook a useful online site that helps and supports their learning of English. Others, such as Schroeder and Greenbowe (2009), explored the usefulness of Facebook as an interaction tool among learners; they found that Facebook promotes and increases students’ communication and participation.

On the other hand, opponents of Facebook use among university students claim that Facebook has a negative impact on learners’ progress. Various studies found that faculty members are reluctant to incorporate this social online tool into their teaching strategies (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Cloete, de Villiers, & Roodt, 2009; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010). Furthermore, an ECAR survey of university students and information technology (Smith & Caruso, 2010), along with other surveys (Garcia & Qin, 2007; Jones & Shao, 2011; Lohnes & Kinzer, 2007; Schulmeister, 2008), state that although learners increasingly apply technology in their personal life, they tend to use traditional learning forms and are moderate in relation to using ICT in their study. Facebook users may post improper photos for them on their Facebook profile, which might result in unemployment in the future. Others suggest that learners overuse Facebook and spend less time studying, which might negatively affect their academic progress and performance (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Along these lines, Kalin (2012) claims that we have to understand how our students use technology before we realise the usefulness of it. However, no empirical study on the implementation of Facebook by learners or their teachers has been published yet (Hew, 2011).

3.6.2 Twitter

Twitter is another form of social media site that has been used widely in recent years. Among “micro-blogging” forms of social networking sites, Twitter is considered one of the popular social platforms. It was launched in 2006 by a well-known company, which has
been valued at over one billion dollars (Corkery and Vascellaro, 2009). Twitter users increased dramatically from 1.6 million in 2008 to 32.1 million in 2009 (Vascellaro, 2009).

People use Twitter for many reasons, such as to communicate, to ask for directions, find guidance, get helpful information or suggest ideas by chatting and discussing together. Twitter has combined user publications and communication, which resulted in a completely new sort of direct publishing.

Twitter allows individuals to update their account details with brief messages known as "tweets," which are short and limited to 140 characters. Other users of Twitter can follow these updates and post tweets under the original tweet, which gives credit to the creator. Twitter users have a profile page that shows their followers and others that they follow. This service is growing quickly, and recent statistics in 2010 showed that Twitter attracted 73.5 million viewers, with an average annual membership growth rate of 1105% (TechCrunch.com, 2010). Within the last three years, Twitter has exceeded 500 million users (Marketing Magazine, 2012). Twitter may be considered the most interesting social networking site, since its focus seems to be on the sharing of details and opinions (Kwak et al., 2010) rather than on reciprocal social communication (Huberman, Romero, & Wu, 2009).

Twitter offers the opportunity for users to reinstate some of the anonymity previously sought in online networking sites (Huberman et al., 2009). Twitter users do not need to post any details and information related to them, and the focus of Twitter is on "what you have to say" rather than "who you are" (Huberman et al., 2009).

From an educational viewpoint, Kassens-Noor (2012) claims that those who have experience of using Twitter in teaching and learning concur that it can enhance and improve learners‘ engagement. Kassens-Noor’s (2012) research investigates how college students apply, generate and save information when using Twitter, with leading query: "Does the use of Twitter aid students in learning a particular subject matter? And, if so, in which learning contexts does Twitter offer advantages over more traditional teaching methods?" (p. 12). In this study, the use of Twitter was structured, and students were required to tweet about certain topics in order to complete the assessment. The researcher asked participants to
tweet daily and respond to other tweets related to the main concern. Although the sample size used for this study was small, Kassens-Noor (2012) states that implementing Twitter has positive impacts, and is a “powerful collaboration tool between students” which is “better suited for creating and sharing large amounts of information”, and is useful for “informal, out-of-classroom assignments” (p. 16).

Another study, by Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2011), investigated the impact of Twitter on student engagement, with two main questions:

What effect does encouraging the use of Twitter for educationally relevant purposes have on student engagement? What effect does encouraging the use of Twitter for educationally relevant purposes have on grades? (p. 121)

To investigate the importance of Twitter usage, researchers ran a training course on the use of Twitter through mini-assignments that need to be accomplished within a specific period of time. Then, researchers captured data depending on the number of tweets sent by students. As a result of the study, researchers found that “Twitter helped students feel more comfortable asking questions they may not be comfortable with asking in class” (Junco, Heiberger, and Loken 2011, p. 127), in addition to a positive effect on students’ engagement and GPA.

Conversely, Twitter has many drawbacks that might affect learning progress. Grosseck, G., and Holotescu, C., (2008) state some bad points related to Twitter:

- Using Twitter in the classroom might be distracting for some learners
- Twitter is a time-consuming task
- Twitter can lack courtesy, and students have to listen to what the teacher is saying, and not be twittering to their friends
- Only students in one’s account can see messages
- It can be addictive
- Short writing, of up to 140 characters, could lead to bad grammar skills
- It sometimes lacks social and educational value
- The disadvantages for teachers who are twittering is that they are “on call” virtually 24/7, and students can intrude into their personal life (Grosseck, G., & Holotescu, C., 2008).
In order to adapt Twitter to the educational field, certain factors should be considered, such as the following:

- Learners should know the language of Twitter before implementing Twitter in the classroom;
- Teachers and learners need to learn self-discipline;
- Teachers who call for the use of such tools in their didactic activities should be very open and flexible about what worked or did not;
- Allowing one’s network time to respond is very important;
- Teachers have to be motivated, to enjoy their jobs and to work together;
- Shaping the learning experience carefully: “it’s not about the nodes in the network; it’s about the connections you can form between information” (Parry, 2008);
- The network should be available to make Twitter effective.

From the discussion about Twitter as a social tool, including its good and bad sides and how it can be adopted to be effective in education, we can conclude that Twitter can be a useful tool for professional development and collaboration with learners. In addition, Twitter affords us a social online site and micro-blogging platform in the educational field.

### 3.6.3 Weblog

A Weblog is a free user technology that can be easily created, customised and regularly updated (Noytim, 2010). Jorn Barger, in 1997, was the first to use the term ‘Weblog’ (Blood, 2000), in his Robot Wisdom website (Downes, 2004). Subsequently, the term “Weblog” was abbreviated to “blog” by Merholz in 1999 (Loving, Schroeder, Kang, Shimek, & Herbert, 2007). Kress (2003) asserts that the attractiveness of Weblogs is improved by its ‘multimodality’, which has various forms, such as texts, colours, video files, images and hyperlinks to different websites related to the admin’s interests (Smith & Baber, 2005; Du & Wagner, 2007).

Blogs may be seen as personal web pages written in reverse chronological order and run through specific software about a particular topic. Blogs are widely used by companies, and
usually within their intranets, and separate from the web, to attract and record staff knowledge (Oravec, 2002). In addition, blogs are considered the home for many academics, and are sometimes separate from the Internet and the web, and available only for learners and teachers (Du & Wagner, 2006). Some researchers see blogs as a significant tool for online communication; however, others claim that it is not more than professionals’ viewpoint to a specific issue and provide unprofessional viewpoints on specific issues (Herrera & Celaya, 2006).

Weblogs are organised in a reverse chronological sequence; that is, the latest-published Blog is the top entry, and each published Blog has a date that indicates when the Blog was published. This feature allows the reader to identify which is the most recent post (Zhang, 2009). The posts can be edited by the author, and the Blogs can be archived, and are searchable through a database (Pinkman, 2005).

In recent years, the growth of blogs seems to have been unbridled, and they have become familiar in all knowledge areas (Jenkins, 2006). In a report conducted by Cohen and Krishnamurthy (2006), it was found that more than 75,000 new blogs exist daily, while there are more than 60 million blogs available. Every six months, the population of the blogosphere doubles, which has resulted in a huge rise in the numbers of users compared to three years ago; additionally, blog writers produce around 1.3 million articles daily, and almost one per a second (Gordillo, 2007).

Weblogs come in three types that are basically used in language classrooms. These are the tutor Blog, the learner Blog and the class Blog. Firstly, a tutor blog is used for students reading exercises, searching for different English websites, providing a resource of rich links for autonomous learning and online exchanges. Secondly, a learner blog helps learners to post their ideas and thoughts related to reading. Therefore, it enhances and encourages learners’ self-expression and self-reliance. Thirdly, a class blog encourages students to post messages, links and photos related to classroom subject matter. Furthermore, a class blog can facilitate project-based language learning, and can be considered an essential space for an international classroom language exchange (Campbell, 2003).
In general, blogs share some features, such as i) individual ownership, (ii) a hyperlinked post structure, (iii) updates displayed in reverse chronological order and (iv) archival postings.

Individual ownership is one of the most significant features of Weblogs. In essence, users usually own the blog, and are responsible for it. They have the ability to publish content, justify the contents of the comments made by readers, decide readers’ rights and customise the appearance of the blog (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Downes, 2004).

Regarding the hyperlinked post structure feature, blog creators apply blog technology to create hypertext links to refer to contents outside their blog. Herring et al., (2005) claim that blogs have a very highly individualised nature, and the choice of the links is based on the blogger’s preference. Pacquet (2002) claims that the availability of links may be considered one of the distinctive traits of blogs, because it is contrary to online diaries.

The updating of the blog maintains the sequence of the posted content in reverse chronological order. Usually, a typical blog shows the most recent posting at the top of the page, while older posts appear further down. The reverse chronological orders help users to gain access immediately to the recently updated posts of the blog.

Lastly, the archival postings feature of blogs provides the ability to auto-archive older posts. Typically, the latest posts are at the top of the blog, while the older posts are archived, and can be accessed from different sites through a permanent hyperlink or permalink (Pacquet, 2002).

In the educational field, Weblogs are considered an improvement of traditional learning logs for both teachers and learners to cover gaps in traditional lectures or to be used as an effective learning tool. Due to the huge changes in educational styles and classroom dynamics, Weblogs have become an important educational tool. Additionally, different higher education institutions, such as the Open University and virtual environment courses, have used Weblogs extensively within the last decade.
Weblogs have been seen as having the potential for a great impact in the teaching of English, for many reasons. In fact, Weblogs offer significant opportunities for authentic communication and a real learning environment. Weblogs can be used by teachers to keep tracking students' learning progress; in addition, students can use blogs to reflect what they are learning, reading and working on with classmates. In blogs, authors publish ideas, beliefs, details and events that give the opportunity to readers to add a direct comment based on the author’s post (Oravec, 2002; Ward, 2004; Kavaliauskien, Anusien & Mažeikien, 2006; Du & Wagner, 2007; Benson & Reyman, 2009). Many studies assert the importance of blogs for enhancing reading comprehension and improving students’ writing skills; in addition, blogs provide a good learning environment in both reading and writing for students (Pinkman, 2005). Ward (2004) claims that blogs develop and promote autonomous learning.

In addition, blogs offer learners the ability to document their learning experience via different online learning logs (Du & Wagner, 2007). Mynard (2007) claims that the use of Weblogs by language teachers as a tool for learning encourages learners to reflect on their learning experience and comment on others’ blogs to enhance further reflection.

Weblogs improve learners’ analytical and critical thinking skills. When students post on their blog, they compose their blogs and examine their writing carefully, because they know that their writing will be available online. Once readers read blogs, they can give ideas and feedback, and can criticise the viewpoints of the publisher (Oravec, 2002; Zhang, 2009). This electronic idea exchange among blog users give opportunities to enhance critical thinking abilities and improve ideas (Yang et al., 2005).

The use of blogging allows the creation of a learning environment and social networking sites that help users to interact and communicate their ideas and beliefs easily. Blogs also facilitate cooperative approaches in writing and reading on the Internet (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Alexander, 2006; Kavaliauskien, Anusien & Mažeikien, 2006; Ševelj, 2006), and, finally, they can result in the gaining of knowledge. They usually offer an authentic learning environment for EFL learners who have limited opportunities to be exposed to the target language in a genuine environment. Various studies confirm that the use of Weblogs by EFL learners increases the motivation for EFL learners in reading and writing, and also encourages learner autonomy (Pinkman, 2005; Zhang, 2009).
Campbell (2003) shows that:

the authenticity and sense of ownership provided by running a weblog taps into a learner’s intrinsic motivation and encourages deep, reflective, autonomous learning strategies. Although initially engendering a sense of exposure and feelings of anxiety, cause insight into the way identity is constructed online, and gives learners direct experience with learning outside the confines of the formal institution (p. ii).

In addition, Miles (2002) claims that Weblogs plays a fundamental role in enhancing a learner’s research process:

they (weblogs) work wonderfully as personal post-it note systems, since most weblog tools have bookmark lets that let you grab a url and annotate it as you go. They are useful if you work in a distributed environment (in whatever form) and it is useful for students to be able to write about their work and to have that writing accessible in different places in different contexts (Miles, 2002, cited in Dickinson, 2003, p. 6).

However, Brescia et al., (2004) assert that there is no clear evidence that shows that blogs are useful and effective tools for the teaching and learning process. This does not mean that it can replace the teaching and learning processes that are used presently with blogs, although the use of blogs in the classroom facilitates teaching and learning. In addition, in a research study conducted on the implementation of ICT in schools (Mec, 2007), it was shown that there is variety in the use of technical activities among learners. Boys have the ability to operate and install programs easily, while girls are competent enough at participating in chats, discussions and blogs.

Giving students the opportunity to comment on each other's blogs may also result in some drawbacks. Sometimes, students may not be as open to sharing thoughts and beliefs once they know that anyone other than the teacher is going to read about them. Usually, these feelings of insecurity are temporary, and disappear once learners get used to their classmates (Hurlburt, 2008).
3.7 Students’ Experiences of Using Social Media

From what has been discussed above, we can see how social media tools have become the focus for a huge number of learners. Many different studies have been conducted to understand learners’ experiences with using social media tools, including their expectations and behavioural aspects in relation to incorporating different tools. Furthermore, these studies have uncovered the significance of implementing social media in education and how this influences students' progress.

A series of studies has been conducted to evaluate learners’ perceptions and use of various social media tools, including the value of incorporating them in education. Most of these studies’ outcomes were found to be either mixed or inconsistent. In a survey of 2000 university students in Australian universities conducted by Kennedy et al., (2007, 2008), the researchers claimed that there is no clear evidence that indicates social media tools have been incorporated well in recent learning processes. The researchers used interviews and surveys to understand students’ usage and preference for certain devices or social media tools. They state that learners are “nowhere near as frequent users of new technologies as some commentators have been suggesting” (p. 522). Despite this result, scholars acknowledge that learners are exposed to different types of tools and technology, and they are comfortable using them.

Many scholars have contested Kennedy et al.,’s findings, including Margaryan and Littlejohn (2008), and later, Margaryan, Littlejohn and Vojt (2011), who investigated a similar study to undergraduate students' implementation of ICT and social media tools at two distinct institutions. Researchers found that learners were quite familiar with using different tools, such as Wikipedia and YouTube, while they were not familiar with doing so in relation to social podcasts, blogging and virtual worlds. Similarly to the outcomes found by Kennedy et al., (2007, 2008), Ebner et al., (2008) also indicate that most of the technologies used by students are used only for the passive consumption of information, rather than being applied to make useful contributions. Researchers found that most of the students viewed e-learning as the ability to view and download lectures; however, others viewed it as the ability to communicate only. In a study conducted by Yoo and Kim (2013),
they claim that learners use different social media tools for both formal and informal learning.

Students generally prefer to use certain types of social media tools. Oliver and Goerke's (2007) study of learners' use of technology found a rapid increase in ICT tool usage among learners, mainly involving Weblogs, instant messaging and podcasts. However, the researchers state that there were no clear signs to show that learners implement Internet technology for their learning. This study was based on the findings conducted by Sandars et al., (2008) which indicate that more than 90% of the most commonly used devices by medical learners were instant messaging and social media sites. Due to the perceived benefits of informal collaborative learning, Sandars et al., (2008) advise all medical instructors to incorporate social media tools into their current teaching and learning approaches.

Another study was conducted to investigate learners' use of social media tools within and outside of schools, and it discovered that there is a sense of “digital dissonance” around students' experience and knowledge of social media activity, both within and outside of institutions, either formally or informally (Clark, et al., 2009). A large number of students were found to cross institutional boundaries easily; however, the implications of this activity are not clear enough for both educators and learners. Due to these findings, Clark and colleagues call for more research to be conducted to understand the implementation of different Web tools in education to support formal learning.

3.8 Gender and Age Differences

Numerous studies have extensively researched the significance of gender in relation to the use of technology for learning (Kahveci, 2010). More male than female students use computers and technology devices, and it has been claimed that women lose interest in engaging with technology for this purpose (Kadijevich, 2000; Li and Kirkup, 2007). In addition, studies show that female students found computers useful but less enjoyable than their male counterparts (Kaino, 2008). Gender use studies also concluded that females are less confident about using technology and more anxious about using as a learning tool
(Dhindsa & Shahrizal-Emran, 2011; Kirkpatrick and Cuban, 1998). While females are common users of online social sites such as Facebook, blogs and so on, male students dominate online gaming usage but require more help using social networking sites (Chan and McLoughlin, 2008 p. 160).

In a study of UAE students, Martin (2013) reported that female students make extensive use of a greater diversity of technology than males, although both genders reported similar levels of confidence and skill with these digital technologies. Martin also found that female UAE students engaged with social media more than males and also tend to spend more time on SNSs than males. Males were more strongly influenced by instrumentality, while females were influenced by social factors. However, it is notable that there are no significant gender differences in the determinants of ICT use (Morris, Venkatesh, and Ackerman, 2005).

Along with gender, age is a factor that influences learner experience and motivation in using ICT for learning and a number of researchers have investigated age differences and technology use. Dabaj (2009) claims that, due to time constraints and other limitations, distance-learning has been used by many people to enhance their learning, and in particular, older learners who are unable to attend traditional education classrooms. The use of technology in education offers solutions to distance problems and other situational limitations. However, Dabaj points out that some older learners have difficulty using non-verbal communication, and are less competent at using different technologies. Due to the rapid obsolescence rates of technology, older learners often encounter difficulties in adapting to technological changes and disincentivize the implementation of technology for learning. On the other hand, a recent study carried out by Maria and Hefer (2011) confirms that older students use technology to learn better than their younger colleagues. Nonetheless, Lenhart (2009) and Koca (2009) concur that the majority of social network users are young individuals at the university level. This claim has been supported by Lu, Yu and Liu (2006) who assert that, “Pioneer adopters of new ICT products are commonly believed to be young” (p. 4). Social networking sites are considered to play an essential role in the younger generation’s daily lives (Lenhart, 2009; Koca 2009). For example, the results of a study conducted in China revealed that the majority of digital technology users are less than 30 years of age. More than 56.3% of ICT users are aged between 18 and 30, while only
17.7% of users are aged between 31 and 40 years of age (CNNIC, 2003). Bao (2002) reports that:

People attributed such an imbalance across age levels to the difficulty felt especially by the aged people in learning computers and the Internet, since the majority of the computer technology and application software originates from overseas; the Chinese typing method is complex, especially for those whose education is lacking; poor health status; problems with vision, neck, hands and spinal cord; and the economic constraints (p. 4).

Grant (2008) also found that various social networking platforms, such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Weblogs and wikis, are mostly used by young people and teenagers to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, join online groups to share interests and stories, play games, and to tag and view photos and others’ statuses. Many studies indicate that age is significant here in multiple ways, such as having a direct effect on technology use and an indirect effect on technology use through perceptions and moderating the connections between perceptions and technology use (Yi, Wu, & Tung, 2005-2006).

3.9 Student Confidence in Using Online Technologies

A number of researchers have highlighted the relevance of confidence with regard to using technology for educational purposes, and Keller (2010) avers that students with inadequate assurance in their technological competencies are not motivated to learn in this way. Furthermore, implementing technology in education can result in adverse outcomes, such as students becoming anxious about the topic, situation or skill due insufficient familiarity with learning technologies. On the other hand, students might incorrectly assume that they already know the target tasks, and deprioritize details which are essential to the learning activities. Three strategies were suggested to avoid this situation as follows:

1. *learning requirements* is a technique used to produce a positive expectation of success and achievement
2. *success opportunity* is an approach used to enhance learner belief in their competence
3. *personal control* is a tactic to reinforce learner knowledge that their success is based on their own and abilities (Keller, 2010).
A study of Chinese students found that male students have more confidence than females in using digital technologies for educational purposes. The study further concluded that older Chinese students are more confident in using technology for educational purposes than their younger colleagues (Yau & Cheng, 2012).

The EU Commission has denominated students who are confident in using different digital skills as “digitally confident and supportive students”. Such learners are also positive about the effect of ICT on teaching and learning. Furthermore, the European Commission (2013a) report on ICT usage in education confirms that while learners boast a high level of confidence in using the Internet safely, they report a lower level of confidence regarding the use of social networking sites. The study reported that learners who use ICT regularly at school and at home develop more confidence in their ICT skills and their social networking site usage. In addition, these learners express satisfaction with the impact of ICT on their learning, compared to learners who report less access to ICT and use at school but high levels of access at home. The majority of learners were satisfied with the effect of implementing ICT in education.

3.10 Barriers in Using Social Networking Sites

The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) has been considered a key concern of most organizations and institutes in recent years (Zhang & Aikman, 2007). Contemporary global technology offers various means to enhance education (Lefebvre, Deaudelin & Loiselle, 2006). Such technologies have the potential to develop education and enable the teachers and students to communicate effectively (Dawes, 2001). However, this potential may not be realized, since “problems arise when teachers are expected to implement changes in what may well be adverse circumstances” (Dawes, 2001, p. 61). Since digital technologies are now considered critical to educational pedagogies, one important step is the identification and eradication of the main barriers hindering the integration of technology to classrooms. Balanskat, Blamire & Kefala (2006) argue that although teachers espouse a certain degree of interest in using ICT in schools, they continue to encounter a number of obstacles in this regard.
Several studies have been conducted exploring the barriers which impact on the incorporation of ICTs in education (Gomes, 2005; Osborne & Hennesy, 2003; Al-Alwanim 2005). These barriers are defined as any prevailing condition which unduly frustrates or problematizes the accomplishment of learner goals (Schoepp, 2005, p. 2). It is evident that the detection of such issues may help teachers and students to overcome them and become successful adopters of technology (Al-Awani, 2005).

Several such barriers to student implementation of ICT tools in education have been identified by scholars. These include a lack of motivation due to weak social skills, lack of class time, lack of availability and access to ICT, inadequate computer skills, and poor social awareness. The main barriers to the use of education technology by students revolve around a lack of confidence and/or competence in using the various technological resources (Bingimlas, 2009). While information sufficiency is a significant predictor of information seeking, aspects such as effective response also influence the behaviours of information-seeking learners (Kuttschreuter, 2006). The implementation of social media for sharing information and engaging also has a positive effect on users, but there is still a level of uncertainty in respect of the reliability of the information shared and the source of the information used. The credibility issue was the main factor that can be responsible for the useful utilization of the information shared on social networking sites (Santana and Wood, 2009).

Much evidence was found relating to barriers that limit learners’ use of Web 2.0 tools. This merely reinforces the necessity for teachers and students in higher education to utilize Web 2.0 tools more effectively (Sandars, Homer, Pell, and Crocker, 2008). The study aimed to explore factors that help learners’ uptake of these new different technologies for educational purposes. In applying the grounded theory analysis method, four basic themes in relation to the barriers to the implementation of new technologies in education were identified:

(i) have the interest to use, but need more training
(ii) barriers related to learning and technology preference
(iii) concern about resource quality
(iv) organizational issues, such as lack of time and complications with ICT access.
Scholars claim a "digital divide" exists between older and younger users of technology, which result in different technology type preferences. In fact, "digital divide" is a term that is used extensively in discussions of Internet use. It can refer to the lack of physical access to digital technologies, particularly computers and online technologies, wherein the solution is to invest more in online computer terminals in schools. Alternatively, "digital divide" may draw attention to the absence of institutional support and a lack of access to training in these skills (O'Dowd, 2007). It is clearly important to provide all members of society with adequate and necessary training in how to use technology in their lives. Foreign language learners also need proper training and support in order to make effective use of CMC activities, since the provision of computers and online communication tools alone cannot guarantee successful language learning outcomes (O’Dowd, 2007). Two crucial points noted regarding the uptake of technologies, are the ready availability of learning resources and students’ desire to learn more about new Web 2.0 technologies for education.

Studies have subdivided the obstacles into the two groups of intrinsic and extrinsic barriers. Intrinsic barriers refer to beliefs, attitudes, practices and resistance, whereas extrinsic barriers refer to time, support, training and the availability of resources (Ertmer, 1999). Hendren (2000, as cited in Al-Alwani, 2005) goes further in defining intrinsic barriers as pertaining to instructors, organisations, administrations and individuals, while extrinsic barriers pertain to organisations and institutions.

Pelgrum (2001) classified the barriers into the material and non-material groups. Material conditions refer to the lack of computers or software, while non-material barriers refer to poor instructor ICT knowledge and skills, difficulties in integrating ICT into teaching approaches, and insufficient time to integrate ICT in the classroom.

Lack of teacher confidence was found to be one of the major barriers which prevent instructors from integrating technology into education. This barrier is considered a contextual factor that can work as an obstacle (Dawes, 2001). Various studies have examined the main reasons behind teachers’ insecurities in relation to ICT use. For example, Beggs (2000) reported “fear of failure” as the rationale for teacher anxiety, whereas Balanskat et al. (2006) reported that poor technological knowledge makes teachers feel worried about integrating ICT for teaching purposes. Becta (2004) similarly observed that
the majority of teachers who do not have adequate ICT competencies are uneasy about integrating these technologies in front of their students in the classroom. Teachers admitted that they were reluctant to enter the classroom with poor knowledge and experience of using ICTs in this context.

Many scholars argue that poor skills and confidence in using technology affects teacher motivation to integrate technology in relation to instruction (Cox, Preston, and Cox, 1999b; Balanskat et al., 2006; Osborne & Hennessy, 2003). On the other hand, those teachers who have confidence and experience of using ICT in the classroom acknowledge the importance of integrating ICT for teaching purposes, and regard the process of extending the use of these technologies in the future as significant.

A lack of teacher competence is another barrier that has a direct connection to the teachers' confidence in terms of integrating ICT into pedagogical practice (Betca, 2004). However, the level of teacher competence varies from region to region. For example, in developing countries, many studies observed that poor teacher ICT competence is the main obstacle hindering the adoption of technology (Pelgrum, 2001; Al-Oteawi, 2002). In Saudi Arabia, for example, teachers’ lack of ICT skills is considered the greatest impediment to the incorporation of technology in teaching (Al-Awani, 2005; Almohaissin, 2006).

One study regarding the integration of ICT in schools which was carried out in 27 European countries cites “lack of skills” as the main reason teachers avoid integrating ICTs into educational instruction. Balanskat et al., (2006) stated that, “in Denmark […] many teachers still chose not to use ICT and media in teaching situations because of their lack of ICT skills rather than for pedagogical/didactics reasons”, whereas “in the Netherlands […] teachers‘ ICT knowledge and skills is [sic] not regarded any more as the main barrier of ICT use” (p. 50).

However, even if teachers have the requisite confidence and skills in relation to using ICT, they may still make only limited use of these technologies due to time constraints. A number of studies specified time limitations as a barrier which circumscribed teachers’ integration of ICT for pedagogical purposes (Al-Awani, 2005; Beggs, 2000; Sicilia, 2005). According to Becta (2004), lack of classroom time negatively impacts teacher capability to use ICT to accomplish tasks which require more time. Typical tasks include preparing lessons, dealing with technical issues, using technology, and locating Internet devices. In Saudi Arabia, this
lack of time is an obstacle influencing the use of ICT due to busy schedules (Alwani, 2005). Alwani found that both teachers and students reported insufficient time to utilize technology in the classroom. In the same way, Sicilia (2005) found that a group of Canadian teachers spend more time on designing projects that include the use of ICT than on working on traditional lessons. Teachers reported that “the constraints of different class schedule [sic] contributed to the lack of time they spent together to work on planning classroom activities” (Sicilia, 2005, p. 41). It is all too apparent then, that one of the main reasons why teachers avoid using technology in the classroom to achieve goals is lack of adequate time allocation.

In addition to the barriers discussed above, a lack of proper training is the most frequent cited barrier affecting technology use in the classroom (Albirini, 2006; Beggs, 2000; Toprakci, 2006). Pelgrum (2001) reported that teachers do not have the sufficient training to use ICTs in a teaching environment, and Beggs (2000) confirmed that a major stumbling-block to teacher integration of technology in education is a lack of training.

Özden (2007) and Toprakci (2006) concluded that insufficient teacher training in the use of new ICT is a significant barrier in Turkish educational institutes. It is clearly essential to provide pedagogical training for teachers, rather than training them to make effective use of ICT tools (Becta, 2004). Moreover, it is imperative to train teachers to develop their ICT skills in addition to undergoing pedagogical training and teachers must also be conversant with the use of new technologies in the classroom, (Schoep, 2005). Some initial training is required for teachers to improve their skills, knowledge and attitudes in respect of the appropriate use of ICTs to enhance education (Newhouse, 2002) as new teaching tools and methods require sufficient teacher training if teachers are to integrate them successfully (Osborne & Hennessy, 2003).

Conversely, insufficient teacher training inevitably leads to insufficient confidence and readiness to carry out the appropriate integration of ICT in the classroom (Balanskat et al., 2006). According to Newhouse (2002), teachers require proper training in technological and educational technology. In a study conducted by Sicilia (2005), it was reported that teachers are most willing to undergo training in the use of new technologies for teaching purposes, but lack opportunities to integrate technology or are obstructed from doing so, within the classroom.
Another issue related to professional development in ICT is that training courses are not sufficiently focused or specialised to meet the precise needs of instructors, and courses are not updated on a frequent basis (Balanskat et al., 2006). Inadequate teacher training adversely affects appropriate ICT integration in the classroom, and can result in situations wherein “universities risk being equipped with high-tech classrooms but lacking teachers who are sufficiently trained in the pedagogy of online foreign language learning” (O’Dowd, 2011, p. 9).

Nevertheless, lack of access to essential technological resources frequently hinders teacher integration of ICT into the classroom, and studies have drawn attention to various reasons for this issue. In a study conducted by Sicilia (2005), teachers reported that it is not easy to access computers, because most of the teachers share the same computers. Beta (2004) stated that many teachers were unable to access ICT resources, due to factors such as inappropriate software, a lack of hardware quality, and the poor organization of materials. Similarly, Korte and Hüsing (2007) observed a number of infrastructure barriers which prevent the use of ICT in teaching in European schools, such as the unavailability of broadband access. Surprisingly, a high volume of European schools do not yet have ready access to the Internet (Korte and Hüsing, 2007). Pelgrum (2001) also underscored poor integration of ICT as an insufficient number of computers, the unavailability of Internet access, and an insufficient number of software licenses. Cox et al., (1999a) reported that all teachers agreed that the unavailability of ICT resources and insufficient time prevents them from integrating ICT in the classroom, while limited access to technological resources affects teacher motivation to use technology in the classroom (Osborne & Hennessy, 2003).

In order to overcome the basic barriers to ICT use in education, proper technical support in the classroom is essential (Lewis, 2003). The lack of such support is recognized as a considerable impediment to the use of technology. Teachers contend that the inability to be connected to the Internet, waiting for a website to open, the unavailability of printers or up-to-date computers, have “impeded the smooth delivery of the lesson or the natural flow of the classroom activity” (Sicilia, 2005, p. 43) as itemized below:

...lack of computers, lack of quality software, lack of time, technical problems, teachers’ attitudes towards computers, poor funding, lack of
teacher confidence, resistance to change, poor administrative support, lack of computer skills, poor fit with the curriculum, lack of incentives, scheduling difficulties, poor training opportunities, and lack of skills in how to integrate ICT in education (Bingimlas, 2009, p. 241).

It is evident that in order to use technology effectively, it is important to develop a fulsome understanding of the technology itself, including its uses, barriers, functions, and effectiveness (Luke and Britten, 2007; Malkee, 2005), among both teachers and students alike.

### 3.11 Faculty Use of Technology in the Classroom

Teachers play an essential role in education, and it is necessary to provide them with knowledge about the use of technology for educational purposes (Danwa and Wenbin, 2010). Teaching staff facilitates students’ learning experiences by making effective use of technology and e-learning (Mapuva, 2009). Teachers are considered one of the most significant factors affecting the implementation of technology-based linguistic activity (Bancheri, 2006; Gruba and Hinkelman, 2012; Hirata, 2006).

Applying digital technology in education helps teachers in many areas. For example, teachers who have a good knowledge of digital and information technology can engage in real communication and collaborate with peers; they can also share instructional units through computer networks. Obviously, teachers with good technological knowledge can easily keep records, recall diagnostic information, organise students’ attendance, and keep a record of grades and other information on the computer (Boysen, 1994).

Implementing technology in teaching has become more important recently, and teachers have to be able to keep up with the new technological facilities (Richards, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, the role of the teacher should be changed into ‘facilitator’ rather than the ‘giver of knowledge’ and support group work and flexible learning environment (Dalton, 2009). The use of technology in educational activities helps to engage students in a good learning environment (Günüç and Kuzu, 2014). It also makes a general change on the way the teachers communicate and interface with their students. It was reported that the availability
of the ITs in the classroom rise students’ interaction as a result of their use of digital technology (Kalasi, 2014)

Recently, the role of language teachers has changed because of the rapid development of technology in the EFL classrooms (Zhu and Wang, 2006); they seek not only to teach students the rules of grammar, but rather to help them gain apprenticeship into new discourse communities” (Kalasi, 2014). Therefore, EFL teachers have to have a good knowledge of technology for teaching training programmes (Barzaq, 2007) and for teacher educator purposes (Moradkhani, Akbari, Ghafar Samar, and Kiany, 2013). Further, teachers have to create opportunity for authentic interaction either inside or outside the classroom by providing the communication tools that enable them access online environments of international communication (Kalasi, 2014). Lam (2000) supports EFL teachers’ use of technology in the classroom, because it offers an enthusiastic environment for students. Lyons (2012) mentions that, “Almost all the possibilities of face-to-face teaching can be replicated by technology” (p. 1).

In fact, the integration of digital technology, such as a white board, word processors and social networking sites, improves students’ communication skills and helps them be responsible for their learning. An example is the interactive white board use in EFL classrooms to facilitate the learning and teaching process (Çelik, 2014). Another example is the use of PowerPoint presentations as one of the most popular technological aids in the classroom, because they integrate colorful texts, photographs, illustrations, drawings, tables, graphs, movies, and transition from one to another through a slide show” (Alkash and Al-Dersi, 2013, p. 14).

Teachers’ successful integration of technology into the classroom is associated with critical factors such as teachers’ perceptions and attitudes. Teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards teaching and technology can be considered a facilitating or restricting factor, offering them more confidence or creating a barrier to using technology (Kim, 2002). Redmond, Albion and Maroulis (2005) also claim that there are certain factors that might support ICT integration in the classroom, such as teachers’ personal confidence, interests, and willingness in using ICT in the classroom.
However, a positive attitude towards implementing technology in the classroom does not guarantee that teachers will be able to use technology in their teaching (Egbert, Paulus and Nakamichi, 2002). Kim (2002) reported that teachers’ use of Web-based lessons was limited, avoided or withdrawn. Teachers encounter some difficulties while using technology, and these relate to a lack of experience and technological skills, a lack of knowledge and insufficient time, computer anxiety and a lack of confidence, despite of their positive attitude and strong motivation towards using technology in teaching.

Computer and Internet technology have developed extensively, and the emergence of these technologies has created a revolution in education, which has resulted in the wide use of these technologies by both teachers and students (Ess, 2009). Chong (2001) supports the use of the Internet in the EFL classroom, since it provides authentic materials for learners, helps students to meet native friends online and facilitates teacher-student communication. To integrate the Internet in the classroom, three factors should be considered, including the teacher's individual interest in the use of the Internet, the teacher's skill at integrating the Internet in the classroom, and computer amenities and technical support in educational institutes (Shin and Son, 2007). In a diverse information technology environment, teachers are required to guide students in the information technology environment, rather than only teaching them how to use these technologies (Danwa and Wenbin, 2010). Since teachers play an essential role in the success or failure of a language curriculum, it is important that teachers receive appropriate training in how to implement and use technology in the classroom (Bancheri, 2006; Chenoweth, and Tucker, 2006; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). This training should include proper technical and pedagogical support that make the curriculum effective (Gruba and Hinkelman, 2012, Hirata, 2006). In addition, O’Dowd (2011, p. 8) reported that “There is also a need for greater awareness raising among the foreign language teaching community and a greater focus on training teachers in the pedagogical applications of new technologies rather than on technical aspects”.

However, if teachers consider that technology has been thrust upon them without being a part of the development process, the implementation of the technology will fail (Davison, 2005; Warschauer, 2002). Therefore, it is important to train teachers in a positive way that gives them the time, support and resources they need to enable the proper implementation of technology in their regular teaching practices since young people use digital technologies
extensively (Davison, 2005; Hirata, 2006). They lack of teacher training will result in the use of traditional “chalk and talk” methods that do not contribute effectively to developing students’ critical thinking (The General People’s Committee of Education, 2008).

Despite the fact that teachers can acquire the basic technological skills required in training courses, Meskill, Anthony, Hilliker-Van Strander, Tseng and You (2006 as cited in O’Dowd, 2015, p. 64) report the challenges of training teachers in collaborative online international learning as follows:

it [a training course] does not prepare educators to integrate technology into everyday teaching and learning in ways that are supportive of learning […] What educators need to know when it comes to effective integration is in large part developed experientially in real institutional contexts (p. 283).

In the Libyan context, teachers do not have sufficient experience of recent educational methods that engage students in real educational environments by using technology (Bukhatowa, 2008), despite the increase in expenditure by the Libyan National Education Department. To fill this gap, appropriate training for teachers needs to be identified to meet the stated goals (Jamil and Som, 2007). Teachers should have sufficient knowledge about how educational knowledge contributes to developing pedagogy and can improve students’ performance (UNESCO, 2005a). In Libya, the majority of academic staff and students in higher education are not conscious enough of the support and help that can be obtained from e-learning or the Web environment (Rhema and Miliszewska, 2010). To raise awareness and change teachers’ and students attitudes, different techniques can be used, including formally organised awareness programmes, short training periods and visits to institutions where success has been achieved (Sife et al., 2007, p. 63).

The level of educational technology knowledge and computer skills among teaching staff in Libyan universities is considered low, and this leads to a delay in implementing ICT for teaching purposes (Rhema and Miliszewska, 2010). Moreover, teachers' lack of training in both technology and instructional methods leads to an unfamiliar teaching environment (Wright et al., 2009). “Teachers who succeed in using technology often make substantial changes in their teaching styles and in the curriculum they use. However, making such changes is difficult without appropriate support and commitment from school administration” (Roschelle et al., 2001, p. 22). For example, Libyan universities such as
Benghazi University, Tripoli University and the Academy of Postgraduate Studies and Economic Research have the basic information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure (e.g. Internet access and computers). However, traditional teaching and learning methods are still dominant, where teachers prefer to use face-to-face interaction with students inside and outside the classroom (Braun & Jones, 2013).

Therefore, Libyan teachers need to be trained on using modern technology, and how to make this technology effective in teaching. They also need to be provided, via lectures, with confidence and the improvement of skills through training courses to help them implement e-pedagogy in the classroom (Mapuva, 2009). Additionally, it is important to encourage teachers to build up their teaching experience and enhance their technological abilities (Danwa and Wenbin, 2010). To achieve this, it requires the involvement of academic expertise and support from educational developers experienced in e-learning and the curriculum (Rhema and Miliszewska, 2010).

In 2005, Libya signed a contract with UNESCO to improve and enhance education. The project was called “National IT Project for IT Building,” and included the establishment of local area networks for all educational institutions. The main focus of the project was to train teachers (using digital literacy, improving their basic IT skills and training them using ICTs in the classroom) and staff (administrating and managing information systems properly, having technological integration specialists, etc.). The project was expected to establish a national IT resource system for teachers, and to improve the universities’ management systems through ITs (managing such aspects as the university’s financial operations and student records) and staff (system administrators, media centre specialists, etc.). The project was expected to facilitate national IT resource centre for educators and the advancement of the university’s management system through ITs (e.g., student information systems, university financial services and other extra information processing).

Agostinho (2006) reports that even teachers in developed countries encounter some barriers and challenges in using technology for teaching purposes. Wright (2014), in his article “5 Key Barriers to Educational Technology Adoption in the Developing World”, stated that:

Educational technology will continue to be implemented incrementally in many parts of the developing world. More rapid uptake and success are unlikely to occur unless five items are addressed – power, Internet
connectivity and bandwidth, quality teacher training, respect and better pay for teachers, and the sustainability of implementations (Para, 1).

For example, in Libya, the technological infrastructure is poor compared to developed countries, and there were plans to develop an information technology infrastructure which aimed at improving and developing education. However, “despite the government’s efforts to supply computers to primary and secondary schools considerable challenges remain, including restricted Internet access and a shortage of teachers who know how to integrate computers into learning” (Bukhatowa, 2008, p.7). In addition, the educational system lacks sufficient tools and has limited educational resources, such as electronic libraries, the latest versions of books and computer hardware and software systems; this will reduce the enhancement of the quality of education via ICT use.

Different cultural influences are considered another challenge to the education system. Due to Libyan traditions, the majority of Libyan families are worried about the vast growth of technology and its effects on their children in education (Rhema and Miliszewska, 2010). Since home plays an essential part in implementing e-learning, families that are opposed to technology use restrict the use of e-learning (Mapuva, 2009). Parents’ concerns about technology use in the classroom are related to their belief that e-learning causes a distance to emerge between students and teachers. Therefore, replacing traditional classroom teaching with ICT and e-learning may cause problems for learners (Andersson and Grönlund, 2009). Surprisingly, Bukhatowa (2008) states that there are efforts to seek to improve the quality of education in Libya by opening distance learning facilities and adopting modern technology in education, providing computer laboratories and making them available and accessible for the majority of Libyan higher education students (Rhema and Miliszewska, 2010), in addition to designing new curricula, particularly for e-learning settings that link interesting learning and attractive designs to enhance learning (Andersson and Grönlund, 2009). Therefore, I propose that universities should provide adequate digital technologies and encourage teachers to apply these facilities for teaching and learning purposes. This will eventually create online environment that leads to an authentic interaction inside and outside the classroom. If this can be achieved, learners can achieve higher levels of autonomy.
3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed, in detail, a variety of topics related to social media, including their definitions, different types, social media and higher education, and teachers’ use of different SNSs. In addition, this chapter discussed the main barriers related to the poor integration of social media platforms and technology for educational purposes, for both teachers and students.

Social media platforms have significantly penetrated the world, influencing several aspects of our daily life. With the introduction of social media and Web 2.0 technology, different social networking forms have emerged and become popular. Students are increasingly using these networking sites to communicate and cultivate their social relationships and daily life, via such methods as Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and blogs. These websites offer good platforms for learners to communicate, express themselves and improve their language skills.

The focus of the next chapter will be on the methodology, and it will detail the process of data collection in order to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER 4- RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 introduced the key research areas dealt with this study, mainly autonomous learning and social networking sites in the field of foreign language learning. This fourth chapter will present and discuss the research design and the process of data collection. A research methodology is “the general approach the researcher takes in carrying out the research project; to some extent, this approach dictates the particular tools the researcher selects” (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005, p. 12). This chapter aims to articulate and describe in detail the research design process and methodology applied in the current study. This research investigates learners’ usage of social media as an autonomous learning instrument of English, and the opportunities and challenges related to this, as reported by Sabratha University students. The way in which any study is conducted and planned will be affected by the research philosophy followed, in addition to the research objectives and questions that are addressed.

Before embarking on the empirical aspect of this research study, a detailed investigation of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods designs was undertaken to shed light on several research questions that address the experiences and skills that Sabratha University students have in relation to different digital technologies. Furthermore, this chapter also discusses the research design and methodology, the population and sample size and the procedures that apply to this study.

4.2 The Research Methodology

This section of the research study focuses on the three main research methods used to conduct this study: (i) quantitative; (ii) qualitative; and (iii) mixed methods approaches. An introduction to the research methodology, in addition to the quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods used to gather data, will be explained in detail in this chapter.
4.2.1 The Quantitative Research Design

Educational research designs generally fall into two main patterns: quantitative and qualitative designs. As discussed by Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009), “educational research is the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the study of educational problems, [with] the goal […] to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena – in this case, educational phenomena” (p. 6).

According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000, p. 156), quantitative research is “research conducted using a range of methods, which makes use of measurement to record and investigate aspects of social reality”. Leedy and Ormrod (2005, p. 94) claim that the quantitative approach is basically applied to “answer questions about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting and controlling phenomena. This approach is sometimes called the traditional, experimental, or positivist approach”.

Survey research is used basically to produce statistics in the form of quantitative and numerical descriptions about different aspects of the study population, usually by asking people questions and obtaining their answers form the data to be analysed and investigated. This information is collected particularly from a fraction of the population, known as the sample of the study (Fowler, 2002).

This research study utilises a paper-based questionnaire survey to obtain data from the sample of Sabratha University students in Libya. The questionnaire was presented via a hard copy because “A paper survey in black ink offers a better resolution than you'll find on any computer monitor making it easier for the respondent to read” (Wyse, 2012). This sample was selected randomly, representing Libyan undergraduates, both males and females, between the ages of 18 and 25. All survey responses were collected on the basis of a consent form completed by participants after ethical approval was received in both Ireland and Libya. The data analysed by using Excel Microsft (for more details see section (5.1.1).

4.2.2 The Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative methodology is defined as “the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e. non-numerical) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest” (Gay et al., 2009, p. 7). According to Leedy and Ormrod
(2005), a qualitative methodology is generally used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants’ point of view. The qualitative approach is also referred to as the interpretative, constructivist, or anti-positivist approach” (p. 94).

This research design is significant, since it allows researchers to obtain inner experience of the participants, to look at the interpretation and meaning creation of different forms shaped through or in culture, and to describe and discover variables rather than testing them (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). Qualitative research is evolving and dynamic, which gives opportunities for discovery.

Creswell (2007) divides data collection procedures into four main forms: observations, documents, interviews and audiovisual materials. Among those different forms of this qualitative research design, diaries and semi-structured interviews were conducted in this research with a small percentage of the survey participants. In addition, a small number of teachers were interviewed, seeking richer answers and results. The purpose here was to enable the clarification of different variables and discover factors not addressed in the survey, in addition to enabling triangulation (Cohen et al., 2011) of the data collected to ensure credibility.

The students‘ semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3) consisted of different questions used with participants, and all responses were recorded on a digital audio tape. Before conducting the students' interviews, diary forms (see Appendix 2) were handed to individuals who showed their desire and interest to participate in the interview. These diaries were designed by the researcher, and had clear instructions for the participants (for more details, see 4.3.2). In addition, teachers were interviewed as well. The teacher's interview (see Appendix 4) involved a combination of different questions reflecting on teachers‘ use of digital technologies and social media platforms in the classrooms.

4.2.3 Mixed Methods Research

This research study utilised a mixed methods paradigm involving quantitative and qualitative paradigms:
Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 123).

Mixed methods involve a logical inquiry that includes the utilisation of induction, deduction, and the investigation and testing of hypotheses (Greene et al., 2008).

The combination of multiple research methods makes it possible to enable (i) triangulation, (ii) complementarity, (iii) development, (iv) initiation and (v) expansion to get richer and deeper results. Triangulation involves a combination of several qualitative methods or both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure the validity of the research, to capture various dimensions of the same phenomenon and to increase the reliability of the study (Flick, 2009). While complementarity means that both methods of research are connected together to measure overlapping phenomena. Development means that the result achieved through one method can be developed via another method. Initiation uses mixed methods to achieve and assist the framing of new thoughts. Lastly, expansion uses mixed methods to enlarge the range of a study (Greene et al., 1989, cited in Gray, 2014).

Many researchers call for a combination of research methods to improve research quality. This combination of methodologies is closely associated with the ‘realist’ philosophical position, where more scientific and quantitative examination of the subject is developed via a qualitative inquiry into essential educational and social factors to discover better research results. Newman, Ridenour, Newman and DeMarco (2003) discuss the idea that:

There is a link between understanding the purpose of one’s research and selecting the appropriate methods to investigate the questions that are derived from that purpose […] There is an iterative process between considering the research purpose and the research question. [From] this iterative process […] decisions about methods are made. [Furthermore,] we make the case that when the purpose is complex (as it often is), it is necessary to have multiple questions, and this necessitates the use of mixed methods (p. 169).

Mixed methods research is becoming increasingly acknowledged as a third major research methodology or paradigm (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 194). It is considered the most appropriate method for social research such as this study, because it enables more comprehensive understanding of phenomena to be obtained than [is possible in] single methods approaches, combining particularity with generality, patterned regularity with
contextual complexity, inside and outside perspectives, and the whole and its constituent parts” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 22, 48). Mixed methods research is defined as “the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of data one or more stages in the process of research” (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 212). This type of approach is successfully implemented mainly when driven by research questions (Cohen et al., 2011; Reams & Twale, 2008; Tashakkori, A., & Creswell, 2007) and when the research project and results are integrated and reviewed in “such a way that the quantitative and qualitative components are mutually illuminating” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 24).

Hanson et al., (2005) claim that adopting a mixed methods approach assists researchers in simultaneously generalising from a sample to a population and achieving a richer contextual understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Greene (2007) illustrates the importance and value of implementing mixed methods in different research:

[This] mixed method study seeks broader, deeper, and more comprehensive social understandings by using methods that tap into different facets or dimensions of the same complex phenomenon. In a complimentary mixed methods study, results from the different methods serve to elaborate, enhance, deepen and broaden the overall interpretations and inferences from the study. It is because most social phenomenon are complex and multifaceted that complimentarity mixed methods purpose fits many inquiry contexts (p. 101).

However, “few studies adopt mixed method designs which are, arguably, more appropriate to provide rich insight than any single method” (Margaryan, Littlejohn and Vojt, 2011, p. 431). A mixed methods approach can be applied in different forms (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), and for several purposes (Greene, 2007). In the case of this study, the sequential mixed design, where the qualitative approach follows the quantitative, has been applied. Mixed methods research is appropriate for examining the research questions of this study, and for enabling the data collection from Sabratha University students through the adapted survey instrument, diaries and semi-structured interviews (interviews conducted with both students and teachers). As discussed by Bergman (2010), a systematic inquiry into the variations of social constructions of meaning among interview and survey respondents may not only help in validating research instruments and scales, but may go further in that they could produce complementary subsets of results, which would enrich overall findings” (p. 172).
Regardless of the significance of the mixed methodology, Creswell (2007) claims that conducting mixed methods research is a difficult process, since it is time-consuming. He further states that the mixed methods approach “complicates the procedures of research and requires clear presentation if the reader is going to be able to sort out the different procedures”, and that researchers are “often trained in only one form of inquiry, and mixed methods research requires that they know both forms of data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 10).

Despite the numerous reservations voiced about the application of the mixed methods approach, on the basis of the inappropriateness and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative designs (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2009; Small, 2011), it is considered the best method for the current research, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure that the study is conclusive and comprehensive.

4.3 Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research

The main difference between a qualitative and a quantitative methodology depends on the nature of the data that are gathered for the purpose of the study. In fact, the aim of quantitative research is to produce statistics and numerical descriptions about some aspects of the study (Fowler, 2002), while qualitative research aims to collect, analyse and interpret data (i.e. non-numeric) to achieve insights into a certain phenomenon of interest (Gay et al., 2009, p. 7). However, this distinction is usually considered too simplistic (Rolfe, 2006, p. 305), and additional differences have been discussed to clarify other distinctions between the two traditions of inquiry. These important divergences are discussed below:
Table 4.1-Some differences between qualitative and quantitative methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quantitative methods</th>
<th>Qualitative methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemological positions</strong></td>
<td>Objectivist</td>
<td>Constructivist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship between researcher and subject</strong></td>
<td>Distant/ outsider</td>
<td>Close/ insider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research focus</strong></td>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>Meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship between theory/concepts and research</strong></td>
<td>Deduction/ confirmation</td>
<td>Induction/ emergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope of findings</strong></td>
<td>Nomothetic</td>
<td>Ideographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The nature of data</strong></td>
<td>Data based upon numbers</td>
<td>Data based upon text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Bryman (1999).

Based on the epistemological argument, which is the most important in this research, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are philosophically incompatible. In fact, individuals who hold to uniqueness view the two methodologies as constituting distinctive, ideal models. It has been argued that quantitative research takes an objectivist position that sees the truth and reality as existing separately from the researcher. On the other hand, qualitative research is closely linked to a constructivist model, which views facts and meaning as developed and improved by people.

Another difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is the way these two methods express different approaches to the relationship between the researcher and the subject. For example, in the quantitative method, researchers remain distant from those they are studying. Meanwhile, qualitative research usually attempts direct contact with the participants, which might take place over a long period.
Quantitative research views the social world as a reality, usually exploring the relationship between variables within a limited period of time. However, qualitative researchers spend more time with the participants in the research, and this will result in minimising the levels of “distance” or “objectives separateness” (Guba and Lincoln, 1988, p. 94) between the researchers and the participants being researched.

According to an objectivist philosophical position, quantitative research focuses on collecting ‘facts’ so that certainties can be established. Meanwhile, qualitative researchers argue that both truth and meaning are not available in the external world, but only established through individuals‘ interactions with the world (Gray, 2014).

Another commonly conceived difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is in their approach to the relationship between theory and research. Quantitative research usually starts deductively with a theory which can later be tested through the study process, whereas qualitative research inductively constructs theory. This means that qualitative research aims to establish a theory, while quantitative research aims to verify a theory. All types of research involve either deduction or induction (Brennan, 1992). Instead of constructing a theory, many studies are descriptive, and some quantitative researches begin with a theoretical framework. Therefore, the difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches is not as obvious as it should be (Bryman, 1999; Gray, 2014).

One of the important differences between the two methods is the scope or the area of the study. Quantitative research is considered nomothetic, while qualitative research is known as ideographic. Quantitative nomothetic research attempts to establish results regardless of time and place, and attempts to generalise to a wider population. On the other side of the coin, ideographic research attempts to gather and collect data in a specific time, and it focuses on the depth of data rather than breadth of it (Gray, 2014). However, Bryman (1999) claims that qualitative researchers show some discontent over this point, looking to delineate how their discoveries can be applied beyond the limitations of particular cases. In addition, quantitative studies struggle to construct nomothetic cases if they are not founded upon random samples or small groups of people. The consistency of findings over time is paid less consideration.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are different in the type of data collected for study. In the quantitative paradigm, usually, data gathered are in the form of numbers, which
is depicted as reliable and accurate. In contrast, qualitative modes of data collection seek to gather data that is claimed to be ‘rich’ or ‘deep’, and which can capture multiple realities. Since quantitative research is deductive, the results can be converted into numerical data; on the other hand, qualitative research is inductive, and creates theories expressed as narratives and models (Leedy, 1997, pp. 104-5). The focus in quantitative research is on chosen \textit{a priori} procedures to be followed and examining the theory and hypothesis, while qualitative researchers have more flexibility in their approach. A qualitative methodology focuses more on the questions to be answered, investigating some results, and discovering new theories to validate previous ones. In addition, in quantitative data analysis, the results can be statistically generalisable, whereas qualitative data analysis may result in the generalisation of theories (Becker, 1996, p. 66).

### 4.4 Data Collection Methods

This section explains the considerations that were undertaken to decide the research design that this study adopted. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 22) define a research design as “a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods of collecting empirical material”. Furthermore, it illustrates the process the researcher goes through to investigate the topic. Bell (2005) recommends that “decisions have to be made about which methods are best for particular purposes and then data collecting instruments must be designed to do the job” (p. 115). According to Bell, the study design is hence a sequential process for both qualitative and quantitative studies to bring validity and reliability to the research and enable triangulation (Creswell, 2007; Denzin, 1997; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

A combination of quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (diaries and semi-structured interviews) were used to investigate the connections between social networking sites (SNSs) and English language learning for Sabratha University students (English majors) in Libya. The university is located in Sabratha City, 67 kilometres west of Tripoli, the country’s capital. It is one of the largest public universities, and was established in 2015. Sabratha University has 18 campuses spread throughout cities west of Tripoli.

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used to measure various aspects related to this study. The data collection of this study was comprised of four stages.
The first stage involved the questionnaire that was designed to investigate different areas related to the use of social media and technology as a medium of learning English autonomously. These are the main parts on which the questionnaire design focused:

- a background information section;
- the availability of the Internet and technology;
- the usage of the Internet and technology for different purposes.

The second stage of this research involved the use of diaries to record and measure daily use of social media and the Internet over two days. Various aspects of diaries were considered, such as time spent on SNSs, the purposes of using SNSs and the languages used while on social media.

The third stage involved interviews, which were firstly conducted with students to help gain deeper and richer information, and to clarify different issues related to the first sections (questionnaires and diaries). Students’ interviews were planned to take 30-40 minutes, during which 11 questions were asked to five participants, covering various aspects related to the utilisation of the Internet, technology and social media.

The fourth stage was the teacher interviews, which were conducted with five English teachers in the English Department of Sabratha University. These semi-structured interviews were planned to take 30 minutes maximum, and consisted of 15 questions that covered all aspects related to the use of the Internet, technology and social media in the classroom to teach English (see Appendix D).

Consequently, the quantitative data was collected firstly, and then analysed; then, the qualitative data (diaries and interviews) underwent the same processes. Creswell (2007) claims that the reason behind adopting such methodologies is that “the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants’ views in more depth” (p. 87). These techniques were adopted with the aim of drawing out information about participants’ and teachers’ viewpoints and experiences with social media and online activities. The questions asked were used to gather data in order to obtain more comprehensive and deeper answers to the research questions. The purpose of selecting the best method of conducting this research study was to enable the researcher to
—explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 195). More details about the process of data collection are explained in the next sections.

4.4.1 Questionnaire

According to Gray (2014), “questionnaires are research tools through which people are asked to respond to the same set of questions in a pre-determined order”. According to Gass and Mackey (2007), questionnaires are “written instruments that present all participants with the same series of questions or statements, which the participants then react to either through providing written answers, marking Likert-style judgments or selecting options from a series of statements” (p. 148). Questionnaires are the most widely used data collection techniques that help to obtain information about different thoughts, attitudes, values, perceptions and behaviours of participants. The content and organisation of the questionnaire generally corresponded to the research study aims and objectives (Johnson and Christensen, 2008).

In general, questionnaires were the best data-gathering tool for this research, and they have several strengths; for example, their flexibility, efficiency in many aspects (time, money and effort), versatility and anonymity (Muijs, 2004; Dörnyei, 2007). Secondly, data collected through questionnaires flow easily, and from many participants. Thirdly, participants have flexibility in finishing the questionnaire at any time and place that suits them. Fourthly, they offer easy analysis of data and coding of questions. Fifthly, the respondents’ anonymity may increase the rate of responses (Gillham, 2007; Gray, 2014).

Even though questionnaires are considered the most common and efficient methods in a research study, they have their drawbacks (Gray, 2014; Dörnyei, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). These include the fact that respondents may often not be interested in completing the questionnaire, and this will result in a low response rate. If respondents tick answers in order to complete the survey quickly without indicating their true preferences, this will lead to inaccurate and misleading answers, and the researcher cannot detect such misleading answers (Gillham, 2007). To avoid these limitations of the questionnaires, a diary and a semi-structured interview were developed to attain information that was not gathered in the questionnaire. This would enable the researcher to triangulate the data collected and help to moderate such issues. However, issues such as of reliability (Cooper and Schindler, 2006),
validity (Yorke and Knight, 2003), bias (Engelhart, 1973), triangulation (Adams, 2006) were considered in the questionnaires’ design. The survey instrument was formally pilot tested in April 2016 with three males and one female, who were colleagues of the researcher at the University of Limerick, Ireland, and they responded to the questionnaire. Valuable feedback included the need to change some words to reflect those commonly used by Libyan university students and the need for a clearer explanation of some of the terminology used. These results provided the researcher with good feedback that helped to enhance the language and layout of some questions in the questionnaire to remove any ambiguities.

4.4.1.1 Construction of the Questionnaire

Organising and selecting questionnaire items are of critical importance to the questionnaire’s construction. Bryman (2008, p. 239) recommends designing questionnaire items in order to gain rich and deep answers. To ask questions, various approaches are used, which range from closed-ended to open-ended (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; Bryman, 2008).

The questionnaires were carried out in the University of Sabratha, Libya, in May 2016, near the end of the academic year, and before the final exams. The participants of the study were first-year and fourth-year students on the Bachelor of Arts programme studying in the English language.

In order to elicit information and explore opportunities and challenges about participants’ experience and use of digital technologies and social media in the context of learning English among Sabratha University students in Libya, a questionnaire was handed out to all participants at a strategic time of the study to enable data gathering. The design of a questionnaire will influence the rate of responses in addition to the reliability and validity of the data collected. This actually can be maximized by focusing on the questions design and ensuring the layout of the questionnaire is clear and understandable. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was comprised of open and closed questions, and was constructed to be administered among 150 Libyan students (English majors), who were randomly selected. Students’ participation was very satisfactory, and most of the students showed their enthusiasm and curiosity to participate in the research study.
In this research study, a mix of 23 closed questions and one open-ended questions focusing on various aspects related to education, technology and social media were used to assess participants’ use of social networking sites (SNSs) and Internet to learn English. The questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to be completed. Since all participants were English majors, the language used in this instrument was English, and it was simple and worded carefully.

The purpose of the questionnaire was explained clearly in the consent form attached to the questionnaire copies. Once participants completed the consent form, this meant that they had agreed to participate in the research study, and they had the option to answer the questionnaire anonymously or to identify themselves.

The questionnaire consisted of different sections (see Appendix A). Firstly, it started with four demographic questions gathering personal details (the name, age, sex and the academic year of study at the university). The core of the questionnaire was comprised of 24 questions related to the following: background information about education and social media (10 items); the availability of the Internet and technology (five items); the purposes of using the Internet and technology (nine items). Table 4.2 below gives some details about the survey questions.

Table 4.2 - Details about the questionnaire adopted in this current study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questions</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic questions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Name (optional), sex, age and academic year of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert scale</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>- not important/ slightly important/ moderately important/ very important - never/ few times per year/ daily/ weekly/ monthly - poor/ fair/ good/ excellent - strongly disagree/ disagree/ agree/ strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>e.g., Arabic/ English/ Mixture/ Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>e.g., If you have any further comments related to the use of social media as a means to learn the English language, please write them down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes/ No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>e.g., Do you access the Internet using wireless?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first section of the questionnaire was concerned with gathering information about education and social networking sites (SNSs). This section aimed to understand what social media platforms are the most commonly used and preferred by participants, and what language they prefer to use when on these SNSs. The second section shed light on the availability of the Internet and technology to the learners. The last part focused on the use of the Internet and technology, how they were used and why participants apply them in daily life. This section ended with an open question asking respondents to report and elaborate on any comments, complaints or concerns they have related to the research study. The tables 4.3 and 4.4 below are examples of the survey questions.

**Examples of two questions in the questionnaire used in this research study:**

*Table 4.3- Example of a survey question with mutually exclusive answers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What type of Internet access do you have at home?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(    ) No access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(    ) broadband Internet access (DSL or cable available at all times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(    ) ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(    ) Not sure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.4 - Example of part of the survey question enquiring about the frequency of use of various Internet activities over the past 12 months*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Few times per year</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send and receive emails</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For social networking (e.g. Twitter, Facebook chatting)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look up references for your study (e.g. online dictionary, library resources)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To download podcasts (e.g. using iTunes), or look at videos or photos files (e.g. using YouTube)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To read or comment on other people's SNSs (e.g. Facebook, blogs or twitter)

To create your own blog, Facebook or Twitter account

To buy or sell things (e.g. Amazon and eBay)

To download or upload podcasts (e.g. using iTunes), or SEARCH video or photo files (e.g. using YouTube, Picasa)

This current research study took place in Libya, at the Sabratha University, Faculty of Arts and Science, Department of English Language in May 2016, with a total of 136 surveys being returned, and 14 incomplete surveys being excluded. The sample size was 136 participants, with 51 male participants and 85 female participants with an average ages range from 18 to 24 from the English Department in Sabratha University.

4.4.2 Diaries

A second research instrument (see Appendix B) involved the use of diaries to help the researcher sustain contact with the participants and eventually to track the course of their experiences with social media for language learning over a short period of time. Individuals use diaries as an available and familiar tool to create and construct daily life records, such as actions, events, personal experiences, attitudes and feelings. Bytheway (2012) claims that diaries are an ideal instrument, providing a dated, contemporaneous record of interpretations, experiences and events. The data a diary offers the researcher can be interpreted in two ways: as the diarist's construction of personal experience and social realities, or as a source of information about unfolding sequences of events. In short, diaries offer researchers insights into occurrences and interpretations of the events of the life course, of everyday activities and of people’s experience of the social worlds around them (para. 2).

Using diaries in this research study helped to provide material for a triangulated approach; for example, by generating different questions that might be asked during subsequent interviews. Furthermore, diaries may include details and experiences that may not be obtained in the interviews; diarists are able to make entries at any time that suits them, and when they feel that they are ready to make comments on unfolding experiences. Despite the above-mentioned advantages, diaries have some drawbacks, such as the fact that some
participants may delay or neglect the writing of the diary, believing that it is a waste of time and does not merit the effort required (Bytheway, 2012). Again, as with questionnaires, the researcher is relying on self-recorded data.

The reflective diary instrument was formally pilot tested in April 2016 with one male and one female, who were colleagues of the researcher at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Valuable feedback included the need to change the template of the diaries to reflect the Libyan university students' use of digital technologies. These results helped enhance the layout of the diaries' template.

The researcher designed the diaries to produce data that served the specific objectives of this study. Clear instructions were given to the diarists, and they were free to choose what to include. The participants were from first and fourth year students from the English department. They were encouraged to fill out the diary forms about their purposes of using social networking sites (SNSs), the language used and the time they spent per day, for a period of two days. Time use diaries generally provide an hourly grid and clear classifications of activities in order to trace the ways in which participants use their time while on social media. Even though these diaries covered two days of participants' social media usage, they could lead to more accurate and deeper responses than the interview questions. Therefore, diaries could be seen as an interesting source of data in their own right. Once the diary forms had been completed by the participants, the interviews were conducted. To analyse diaries data, a thematic content analysis method was used (see 5.3 for more details).

4.4.3 Interviews

In order to gain richer results, this study conducted two interviews with both students and EFL teachers. Both teachers' and students' interviews were collected and analysed using a thematic content analysis (for more details see section 5.4)

4.4.3.1 Student Interviews

A third research instrument was the interview (Appendix C), which was used in addition to the questionnaire and diaries in order to examine in depth how students' use digital technologies and social media to learn the English language. This instrument was applied to this research study for exploring and describing educational issues and practices. An
interview is a data-collection method in which the interviewer attempts to ask questions and obtain information to gain an understanding of the interviewee. Interviewees may be asked to talk about their own experience, attitudes, beliefs or behaviours (Rowley, 2012). Berg (2009) defines interviewing as a "conversation with a purpose" (p. 101). According to Byrne (2004),

> Interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values – things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire. Open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees' views, interpretation of events, understandings, experiences and opinions (p. 182).

Interviews may come in different forms. According to Gray (2014), interviews have various categories, and these include structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, non-directive interviews, focused interviews, informal conversational interviews and problem-centred interviews.

For the purpose of this study, a semi-structured interview protocol, including a range of open-ended questions, was selected to attain in-depth information. Open-ended questions allow the researcher to shed light on a particular topic and facilitate flexibility for communication, and also allow participants to answer in any manner they see fit, letting them express their thoughts and ideas in their own manner (Gass & Mackey, 2007, p. 151). According to Axinn and Pearce (2006), an unstructured or semi-structured interview can be much more flexible, allowing the respondent to change the course of the conversation and bring up new issues that the researcher had not preconceived (p. 6). The semi-structured interview gives the opportunity for the researcher to ask more questions and engage in in-depth discussion with the interviewees. As Crouch and McKenzie (2006) point out, there are advantages in spontaneous interviewer-interviewee interaction [...] where an open-ended mode of inquiry can produce great richness of material if the researcher is responsive to cues as they occur in the course of the interview (pp. 486-487). The use of open questions in the semi-structured interview should leave adequate space for the interviewees to express themselves freely and without boundaries. Flick (2006) suggests that interviewees should be given as much scope as possible to reveal their views. At the same time, they should be given a structure for what to talk about (p. 173). Another advantage of semi-structured interviews is the ability of the interviewer to control the interview. Furthermore, the
interviewee has some freedom to develop the interview, and he/she can "probe far beyond the answers to [his/her] prepared standardized questions" (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003; Bryman, 2008; Berg, 2009).

However, interviewing participants has its drawbacks, including time difficulties, and respondents may not give honest answers that the researcher is seeking. They may feel anxious about the interview and give extra responses more than what they believe. Another disadvantage of the semi-structured interview is the difficulty in analysing its results. Usually, interviews can produce a variety of details in a short period of time, and this will require an "analysis plan". Furthermore, the interviewer has to prepare for the interview process before conducting it (Cohen, 2007). The researcher should prepare the questions to be asked and order them in sequence before conducting the interview. Interviews, however, are helpful in obtaining in-depth data, and this will ensure more comprehensive data-collection. This interview was pilot tested in April 2016 with one colleague at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Some questions were changed and carefully worded to ensure that interviewees understand everything.

Before conducting the semi-structured interviews, participants who showed their interest in being interviewed were handed a diary form to be filled out. In this diary, interviewees were asked to provide details about their use of the Internet and social media over two days. They were asked to bring the completed forms (diaries) with them to the interview, for discussion. This was then used as a guide before conducting the main interview. Before holding interviews, the interviewees were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C), and interviewees were informed that their responses would be audio-recorded using a Voice Recorder application for the purpose of data analysis. Additionally, interviewees had the choice to respond either in Arabic or in English to ease the flow of the interview. The interview questions were asked online to five students via the Messenger and Viber applications in December 2016 and January 2017. The interviewees' answers were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed, coded and analysed to enrich the quantitative data collected via the survey and the diaries.

The researcher was not able to conduct face-to-face interviews, due to some difficulties encountered through her journey to Libya for the purpose of data collection. The data elicitation process was originally planned to occur from May 2016 to June 2016, but, since
this was the end of the semester, the researcher was able to collect questionnaires and diaries only. Because the researcher stayed in Libya for only two months, the interviews were postponed, to be conducted after the analysis of the questionnaire and diaries. The interviews were delayed until December 2016, and were facilitated through the Viber and Messenger applications.

4.4.3.2 Teacher Interviews

A semi-structured teacher interview was used as a fourth research instrument in this thesis. The main reason for using teacher interviews was, as stated previously, to obtain richer details and information on the EFL teachers’ utilisation of digital technologies and social media in the classroom, and for educational purposes. In the teacher interviews, 15 questions were designed to interview five EFL teachers from the English Department of Sabratha University. All of the interviews were held online through Messenger and Viber, and were recorded using the Voice Recorder application. As mentioned above, the interviews were not conducted face-to-face, because they were delayed until the beginning of the new year, after the analysis of the questionnaires and diaries. In fact, the small teacher sample and the online interviews can be considered a limitation of this study. For more details related to the teacher interviews, see Appendix D.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

The production of valid and reliable data in respect of the correlation between the research question and the data collection processes and instruments (Opie 2004, p. 71) is the shared goal of all research (Merriam 2009, p. 209). This aim can be realized by ensuring that data is collected, analysed, and interpreted, with the utmost diligence and integrity (Merriam 2009, p. 210).

The aim of this research was to provide in-depth understanding of the issues related to the use of social networking sites as an autonomous tool for learning English among EFL students in the Libyan university context. To this end, I devised a range of recognized research paradigms to establish validity and maintain reliability throughout the study.
In the first instance, the triangulation of multiple methodologies was used to elicit comprehensive and authoritative support for the data set which encompassed the participation of both EFL teachers and learners (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, p. 254; Creswell 2004, p. 197).

Secondly, in order to further improve the transparency, dependability, and generalizability of the research, and enable to future researchers to replicate and apply the current study template, all data collection procedures were fully elucidated and illustrated (Burns 2000, p. 475).

Among many notable commentators, Blaiki (1991) and Adams (2006) contend that triangulation is the preferred means of collating reliable and meaningful data. While a qualitative approach is conventionally yoked to a phenomenologist paradigm, and quantitative research is usually linked to a positivist hypothesis (Saunders, et al., 2003), when used in tandem each complements and supports the other in terms of overall academic rigour and assured research empiricism (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000). Therefore, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was deemed feasible and appropriate to the aims of this study.

Research reliability is the evaluation of both internal and external coherency and consistency. Thus if follows that research questions should elicit information which would be replicated if the same questionnaire was reused within an analogous context and community (Cooper and Schindler; 2006). As ambiguous questions are inherently antithetical to the reliability of any questionnaire, all individual items should be devised using direct and unambiguous language in order to simplify instructions and minimize participant misunderstandings or misinterpretations (Oppenheim, 1992). Accurate planning and a logical sequential question structure also help to avoid unnecessary confusion (Saunders et al., 2003).

Validity refers to the clarity and precision of all questions or statements contained in a questionnaire (Saunders el al., 2003). Such validity is best established by a systematic review of all items to safeguard against any content, sentence construction, or mode of expression which could inadvertently influence the questionnaire variables and skew the
results to render any findings invalid or unreliable. In other words, in order to fulfil the purpose of the questionnaire, the researcher must be ever-mindful to compose all questions in the most objective and unbiased manner possible (Kumar, 2010).

4.6 Selecting the Population and the Sample of the Study

4.6.1 Population

A population is a complete set of people, objects or events of concern to a research study, from which a sample is designed (Cohen, 2007; Dorneyci, 2003). The concept of a population to be surveyed is significant to a research study, and indicates the entire group of people about which some information is to be ascertained by the researcher (Lynn, 2002). Two types of population, known as the wider population and the target population, are relevant in any research study. The wider population refers to the large group of people who share the phenomenon to be studied and investigated, while the target population (a subset of the wider population) refers to the group of people that the researchers use to generalise their results (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Bell, 2005; Larson-Hall, 2010).

In this research study, the wider population refers to all EFL students whose major was the English language in Sabratha University, Libya, between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Students usually enrolled in the Faculty of Languages at the age of 18 as First Year freshman, and they continue as seniors up to the age of 25. Meanwhile, the target population refers to a sub-set of the population; in this case, 150 EFL students, English majors, at Sabratha University were selected randomly. All study participants had studied EFL for more than six years in primary and secondary schools. Students had four classes per week, which lasted for 45 minutes per class, during the academic year and before moving to university level. The participants of the study were training to become English language teachers after graduation. A sample is a part of the target population which was selected carefully to represent the target population.

Sampling in any educational research refers to the process of selecting a sample as a small group of people or a subset from a defined population for the purpose of representing a particular population. There are two main sampling approaches: probability (a random sample) and non-probability (a non-random or purposive sample) sampling.
In probability sampling, every individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected in the sample from a given population as the subject of the research. However, in non-probability sampling, members of the population do not have an equal chance of being selected in the study. Instead, the researcher deliberately chooses either to include or exclude a particular subset of a population (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007, Bryman, 2008, Gray, 2014).

The selection of the sample in this research study was intentionally selected and arranged in advance and before the beginning of the fieldwork. In this respect, Cohen et al. (2011) state that:

> The selection of a sampling strategy must be governed by the criterion of suitability. The choice of which strategy to adopt must be mindful of the purposes of the research, the timescales and constraints on the research, the research design, the methods of data collection and the methodology of the research (p.163).

Five different factors were considered when choosing the sample strategy: the research paradigm (mixed methods research), the research methods (qualitative and quantitative design), sample availability, the relevance to the population and the sample size (Cohen et al., 2011). In this research study, and among different sampling strategies, the target participants were selected from university-level students. Participants in the study had the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which is one of the key factors of having a good sample. As mentioned by Dornyei (2010), the main factor in having a good sample is for students to be similar in relation to education, age, ethnic beliefs, social backgrounds and socio-economic backgrounds.

### 4.6.2 Sample Size

As this research study aimed to study a specific group of language learners, it adopted a "non-probability sampling” approach (Leedy, 1997, p. 204; Cohen et al., 2011, p. 153). Larson-Hall (2010) defines the sample size as "the number of participants in a study” (p. 401). It is generally recommended that large samples would be more representative and would give more reliability in relation to research results. Therefore, this enables the possibility of generalising research results that may not be achieved through smaller samples (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; Aldridge & Levine, 2001; Bryman, 2008).
However, larger samples should not automatically be seen as better than smaller ones, and attention should be paid more to the method of selecting samples (Crowl, 1996). In order to obtain high response rates, it is better to involve smaller samples than larger ones (Crowl, 1996; Bryman, 2008). The sample size can be also influenced by various factors, such as: the type and the purpose of the research, the size and nature of the population, and the methods of data analysis chosen (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Cohen et al., 2000).

However, it is widely agreed that the size of samples suggested by Cohen et al., (2007) and Gay and Airasian (2003) is the most appropriate standard for deciding a sample size. Cohen et al., (2007) proposed that qualitative non-probability sampling should contain a minimum of 30 participants for a research study, especially when the researcher intends to apply "some form of statistical analysis on their data" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 144).

In this research study, vital factors (time, accessibility and cost) affecting the decision regarding the sample size have been considered. In addition, the potential for a number of participants to refuse to participate in the study or decide to withdraw from the study at any time has been considered as well. The researcher also considered that some respondents may fail to fill out the study survey, and that this may lead to "spoiled questionnaires (e.g., missing out items, putting two ticks in a row of choices instead of only one)" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 148). For all of the aforementioned reasons, it was decided to sample a large number of respondents, representing approximately 150 students, for the questionnaires, which exceeds the number suggested by Cohen et al., (2007); 20 students were involved in the diaries, while five students and five teachers took part in the interviews.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methods used to elicit data in this study, and the researcher's rationale for choosing them (see Figure 4.1). It presented details and explanations of different research methodologies (i.e. quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies). In addition, various research instruments were used to help gain richer and deeper information; the questionnaires, diaries and interviews were explained in detail in this chapter. As with any research study, "high-quality data collection is fundamental to the advancement of knowledge in the social sciences" (Axinn & Pearce, 2006, p. 1), and so it was important to
determine what data and analysis was required to meet the goals of the research and answer the questions at hand” (Bazeley, 2009, p. 203).

The next chapter presents the analysis of the data elicited during the field study regarding the students’ use of digital technologies and social media to learn English.
Research Objectives

1- To investigate the connections between learners’ use of social networking sites (SNSs) and English language learning.
2- To examine the extent to which social media can be adopted as an autonomous English language learning tool from the perspective of students in Sabratha University.
3- To identify the opportunities and challenges of using social media tools in learning English among Libyan EFL learners.

Research Questions

Primary question
Question 1: What is the role of social media as an autonomous tool for English language learning in Libya?

Sub-questions
In order to answer the primary question, a study of Sabratha University will be carried out, and will focus on the following issues:
- To what extent do Sabratha University students access and use of social networking sites (SNSs)?
- To what extent do Sabratha University students regard themselves as skilful and confident in their use of SSNs as an autonomous learning tool?
- Which social media are preferred by Sabratha University students to improve their English language progress?
- How do students think of SNSs as a means of English language learning?
- Are there particular factors that are perceived to impact on the desire and ability of Sabratha University students to utilise social media, such as:
  a) the availability of, and unrestricted access to, social media within society in general, and specifically within the university;
  b) the use of information technology and social media by faculty members at Sabratha University in the classroom.

Paradigm
Mixed (qualitative and quantitative) methods

Data Collection Instruments
1- Questionnaire: N= 150
2- Diaries: N=20
3- Semi-structured interviews: (students / N= 5 and teachers N= 5)

Data Collection and Analysis

Discussion

Recommendation and conclusions

Figure 4.5-Summary of the current research design
CHAPTER 5- DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the major findings from the data collected using different research instruments in the study. It focuses on analysing data that have been obtained from the participants in the questionnaires, diaries and semi-structured interviews, all of which were selected and designed to obtain collective answers to the research questions (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 448). Cohen et al., (2007) define data analysis as the “reduction of copious amounts of written data to manageable and comprehensible proportions” (p. 475).

The fundamental aim of the current study is to determine the extent to which university students and teachers utilise digital technology and social media for EFL learning at university level in Libya. In order to obtain data about students’ perceptions and usage of SNSs as a means to learn English autonomously, questionnaires were completed by a sample of 136 EFL students; 10 participants completed diaries recording their SNSs and Internet usage, and five students who participated in the diaries also took part in semi-structured interviews. In addition, five teachers were interviewed as well to obtain richer data. The questionnaires, diaries and interviews (with teachers and students) were carried out at Sabratha University, Libya, in May 2016 and December 2016.

In this study, in order to maintain anonymity, neither the survey participants’ nor the interviewees’ personal details have been identified, and instead, descriptors were used to refer to them. For example, volunteers involved in the interviews have been referred to in the following format: S1, S2, T1, T5, and so on. There were five students and five teachers interviewed, so the coding for each interviewee starts with S for students, and T for teachers, followed by a number allocated to every interviewee.

Various topics have been explored using different research instruments (questionnaires, diaries (with students only) and semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers), addressing topics such as the following: the availability of the Internet and technology, using the Internet and technology, the perceived value and purposes of using the Internet and technology, students’ confidence levels and skills, and teachers use of the Internet and digital technology in the classroom.
5.1.1 Questionnaire Context

The research project was carried out in the University of Sabratha, Libya, in May 2016 see section (4.4.1.1) for more details. In order to analyse the quantitative data, EXCEL Microsoft was used. Students’ participation in the survey was very satisfactory. Of the respondents, 136 students (90.6%) finished the questionnaire survey, 71 students (52.2%) were in their first year, and 65 students (47.8%) were in their fourth year.

The data analysis of the questionnaires starts with a profile of the student participants (see Appendix A), including demographic data such as their age, gender, academic year of study, language proficiency and Internet, and social media literacy. The second section gives an insight into the availability of the Internet and technology, with a focus on participants’ level of Internet access, types of Internet access and whether they access the Internet through mobile devices or not. The third section explores in depth students’ views on Internet usage and technology, as well as perceptions in relation to the value and purpose of using the Internet and social media to achieve academic goals.

5.1.1.1 Students’ Profile

The data shows that the participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 24, with a median age of 21. According to the data collected, the vast majority were 18 and above: 19.8% of students were 18 years of age; 16.1% were 19; 13.2% were 20; 12.5% were 21; 19.2% were 22; 9.5% were 23; 5.1% were 24; and only 3% were 25, as can be seen in the chart below.
The majority of participants were females (over 62.5%), compared to only 37.5% of males, and this is possibly because women are more likely to participate in surveys than men (Curtin et al., 2000; Moore & Tarnai, 2002; Singer et al., 2000), as well as due to the fact that the number of females enrolled in the university is higher than that of males. The participants were all Libyans (100%), and they all reported that they had been studying English as a foreign language for more than six years. The following chart shows the percentages of males and females that participated in the study.
The students’ Internet and social media access were self-assessed in the questionnaire. The majority of participants (91.9%) stated that they were familiar with the Internet, and had been using it for at least 2-3 years. The results showed that a large number of the students were Internet users, and only 21 students (15.4%) indicated that they had not used any social networking sites. The social media users generally had an active Facebook account (83.09%). Not surprisingly, given that it is the dominant SNS globally with 136 of users, Facebook came in first position, followed by Youtube (71.32%), Twitter (22.06%) and others (e.g. Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype and Viber) (17.65%). Interestingly, none of the students had used Weblogs. The majority of learners (89.7%) were using two or more SNSs, and were using social media for more than three hours per day (52.2%). Along with social media literacy, Internet access has been reported to have an effect on learners’ participation in different online activities. In total, 94.2% of students reported that they access SNSs through their mobile phones. In this survey, learners were asked to choose the most preferred social network from the following: Facebook, Twitter, Weblogs or others. Overall, 114 students (83.8%) put Facebook in first place, while only four students (2.9%) prefer to use Twitter, one student (0.7%) used Weblogs, and 17 students (12.5%) mentioned that they prefer to use other media, such as Viber, Messenger and WhatsApp. Participants reported
that Facebook took first place more clearly, which made it the most popular platform among learners in Libya, followed by other SNSs (e.g. Viber, WhatsApp, Skype and Messenger), then Twitter, and Weblogs were strongly indicated as the least liked tool (see Chart 5.3).

The majority of participants (46.3%) used the Arabic language for social communication between each other when online; on the other hand, a significant number (53.5%) of participants preferred to use a mixture of both Arabic and English when on social media, while less than 15% used English. The chart (5.4) below shows the languages used by the majority of Libyan University students when using different SNSs.

**Figure 5.3 - Social media platforms listed in order of preference**
5.1.1.2 The Availability of the Internet and Technology

The results indicate that almost 92% of the students surveyed had Internet access at home, of which 52.9% had broadband Internet access for use on their device, while only 8.09% had no Internet access, and over 77.9% connected wirelessly. Nearly 62% of participants reported having unlimited access to the Internet at home, or access limited only by the sharing of the Internet connection with others. Access time for Internet use at home was limited to 30.15% of survey participants, and this was due to a weak telecommunications infrastructure that cannot provide reliable and consistent high-speed Internet, and also due to the expensive prices of Internet modems, as not every family can afford the price. The flow figure 5.5 reveals the availability of the Internet for the students.
In this survey, only 16 students (11.8%) reported either not having a phone or having only a basic mobile phone for calls and messaging (i.e. they did not have a smart phone), whereas 77 students (56.6%) reported having two or more mobiles, of which over 80.8% were smart mobile phones with Internet access. Mobile phone ownership has spread extensively among university students and became very popular; they help learners to be connected and increase their social inclusion, as well as providing a sense of security, as they can contact others should they need help or experience an emergency (Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012). The International Telecommunication Union [ITU] (2012) reported that mobile phones in Libya have spread dramatically over the last decade, from 1% in 2001 to 171% in 2010 (see figure 5.6 below), including multiple subscriptions per person. In order to compensate for the lack of infrastructure, the Libyan government has leveraged mobile-broadband technology. ITU (2012) reported that there were nearly 10.9 million mobile-cellular subscriptions and 2.7 million active mobile-broadband subscriptions in the country, and these are large numbers compared to the population of Libya (6.3 million).
Using smart mobile phones with Internet access has been perceived as a valuable approach to help students get more study opportunities anytime and anywhere. Walsh et al., (2008, 2010) reported that university students show signs of cognitive salience, whereby students keep thinking about their phones when they are not using them, as well as behavioural salience, whereby students frequently check their mobile phones for any messages or missed calls. Here, in this survey, it can be concluded that most young students in Sabratha University, Libya, have access to the Internet and social media resources at almost any time and in any place. The majority of students have appropriate devices for Internet and social media usage.

5.1.2 Using the Internet and Technology

This data analysis section is divided into subsections, and it discusses various topics in relation to the purpose of using the Internet and technology, the use of digital technologies, students’ level of confidence and students’ main purposes of digital technology use.
5.1.2.1 The Purpose of Using Internet and Technology

Now that we have established that the majority of students report having access to different SNSs, what can we say about their perceptions of the role of such technology in their academic life? Specifically, do they consider the use of such technologies for learning and academic life? Are there sufficient facilities in the university for them to use? Do teachers make use of such technologies? The results of the survey indicate that 105 of the surveyed participants (77.2%) agreed/strongly agreed with the statement "students use Internet and social media to achieve academic purposes". Overall, 81 students (59.6%) stated that they agreed/strongly agreed with the statement "There are special computer rooms for Internet access at the university", while 106 students (78%) agreed/strongly agreed with the statement "Students often use computers and Internet to do presentations and lessons at the university". Meanwhile, 77 students (56.6%) stated that they agreed/strongly agreed that there are wireless and Internet connections in the library and at the university. However, only 64 students (54.4%) agreed/strongly agreed that teachers use computers and the Internet in the classroom. Thus, we can see that students feel strongly that there is a role for these technologies in their learning, that there are sufficient facilities in terms of dedicated computer rooms, although the provision of Wi-Fi is not rated very positively, and, interestingly, they do not think that their teachers make extensive use of these technologies in the classroom.

5.1.2.2 Using Digital Technology

In this survey, students were asked to rate their frequency of using computers and the Internet to accomplish different activities during the last 12 months. The scale of frequency was from 1 (never) to 5 (monthly). The data are summarised in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.
Table 5.1 - Percentages and frequencies of participants’ usage of different types of computer technology over the past 12 months (N=136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Computer Technology</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Few times / year</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To create presentations (e.g. PowerPoint) or write homework (e.g. Word)</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To play music (e.g. CD/downloaded) without accessing the Internet</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To play games</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create or watch movies (e.g. iMovie or Movie maker)</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 shows that only 29 students (21.3%) used the Internet and technology for academic purposes; however, the majority of the surveyed students used the Internet and technology for different social activities, such as playing music and games, and to create or watch movies, as can be seen in the table above.

Table 5.2 - Percentages and frequencies of participants’ usage of different types of computer technology over the past 12 months (N=136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Computer Technology</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Few times / year</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send and receive emails</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>13.97</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>13.24</td>
<td>8.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For social networking (e.g. Twitter, Facebook chatting)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>77.21</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look up references for your study</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>36.03</td>
<td>20.59</td>
<td>13.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To download podcasts (e.g. using iTunes), or look at videos or photos files (e.g. using YouTube)</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>20.74</td>
<td>24.44</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>17.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To read or comment on other people’s SNSs (e.g. Facebook, blogs or Twitter)</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>67.65</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create your own blog, Facebook or Twitter account</td>
<td>33.09</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>11.03</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To buy or sell things (e.g. Amazon and eBay)</td>
<td>69.12</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>8.09</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2, above, shows that 114 participants in the survey (83.8%) were rarely involved in either buying or selling things online, or in using online financial services. This finding could be related to the absence of an appropriate environment for practicing electronic commerce such as telecommunications and Internet users that ensures the security and confidentiality” (Shuaieb, 2013). In addition, only private commercial banks in Libya have launched electronic banking services, while other banks are under pressure to improve their services but provide poor electronic banking services (Bouthahab & Geador, 2012). In total, 58 students (42.9%) were rarely (only a few times a year, or never) involved in downloading podcasts (e.g. using iTunes) or looking at videos or photos files (e.g. using YouTube), because of a slow Internet connection speed, at 0.5 Mpbs, which requires a long time to download and upload a video (McIntyre, 2014). Around 79 participants (58%) were rarely (only a few times a year, or never) involved in creating their own blog, Facebook or Twitter accounts. Meanwhile, the majority of participants, 125 students (90.4%), used the Internet and computer technology for social networking (e.g. Twitter, Facebook chatting) on a regular basis (daily or weekly), and 89 students (66%) used the Internet and computer technology to send and receive emails. This is interesting to compare with the students’ perceptions reported above, indicating that Internet-associated technologies have an important role to play in their learning-reported practices, as it would suggest otherwise.

5.1.2.3 Students’ Confidence and Skill Levels in Using Digital Technologies
Students reported an overall high level of self-perceived confidence and skill when using most of the digital technologies. Table 5.3, below, provides a summary of the results and analysis of the self-perceived skill and confidence levels of students while using digital technologies. In the survey, students reported their confidence and skills levels with different technological activities using computers, the Internet and mobile phones. The vast
majority (between 61% and 86.8%) of the participants considered themselves good or excellent at using different digital technologies for different purposes. Only a small percentage of students (ranging from 13.2% to 3.7%) considered themselves to have poor skills and confidence with regard to some digital technologies. A summary of the results is provided below in Table 5.3:

Table 5.3- Students’ confidence and skill levels in using digital technologies (N=136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using computers to play games, upload and download information, and watch movies</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet to watch movies, read news, use social networking, play games and E-mails</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet to find information related to your academic purposes</td>
<td>13.24</td>
<td>15.44</td>
<td>32.35</td>
<td>38.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet to participate in online activities and communicate with others (e.g. sharing photos, texts, and videos)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using mobile phones to watch movies, listen to music, read news, use social networking (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Weblogs) and play games</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a cell phone to search websites related to your academic purposes</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, the majority of Libyan students surveyed perceived themselves to be highly skilful and confident when using a range of digital technologies and only a small percentage of students regard their skills and confidence as poor.
5.1.2.4 The Purposes of Using the Internet

In this survey, learners were asked about the perceived value and purpose of the Internet to determine how important learners consider it as a source of information for their academic and general information needs, in addition to what they considered to be the most important purposes for using the Internet and how important using technology is for them to achieve academic outcomes.

Data from the survey show that a large majority of students (89.7%) considered using the Internet to access information and news to be the most important purpose to achieve academic goals. One student commented that the ―Internet is very helpful in learning English‖. Around 84% of participants agreed that asking friends and classmates is the next most important purpose that helps them to attain good information related to the academic field by sharing some information. Students considered social networking sites (70%) and books (71%) as important factors that help them to achieve academic purposes. The use of electronic journals for students (53.7%) seemed to be the least important purpose used to achieve academic goals by Libyan students. The results are summarised in Table 5.4, below:

Table 5.4 –The importance of different academic information sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information sources</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using books</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>33.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using electronic journals (e.g. science direct/ERIC)</td>
<td>15.44</td>
<td>30.88</td>
<td>38.97</td>
<td>14.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>24.26</td>
<td>65.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using social media (e.g. Facebook or Twitter)</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>19.85</td>
<td>29.41</td>
<td>40.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking friends and classmates</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>38.24</td>
<td>45.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to the most important purposes of using the Internet, 94% of students reported that they used the Internet to find information related to their field of study. The second
most important purpose of using the Internet was to communicate with others, with 85.3% of students stating that the Internet is important to them, since it helps them to communicate with people easily. A large number of students (79.4%) considered the Internet important to them, because it helps them access worldwide news and websites. Around 77% of learners claimed that the Internet helps them use social networking sites easily, which is again about making connections with others, while only 45.2% of the students used the Internet to create content.

In relation to rating the importance of social media and the Internet for learners‘ academic achievement, 86.8% of students reported that the most important purpose of using social media and the Internet was to help them improve their technological skills. It seems obvious that 83% of students admitted that SNSs assisted them in finding information related to their study, as one student stated that “Internet and SNSs help us find information easily.” In addition, 80.2% of participants considered that SNSs facilitate communication between them and their teachers in order to get feedback. In total, 78.7% considered SNSs a significant factor that helps them to find future job opportunities and establish good friendships. Besides, 68.4% reported that social media make learning more joyful and interesting. However, only 50% of the students agreed that using social networking sites helps them get higher grades in their university studies. These data are presented in Table 5.5, below, and this illustrates how social media and the Internet play an important role in almost of the learners’ academic lives.
Table 5.5- Importance of SNSs and the Internet for students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They help me get higher grades in my subjects</td>
<td>19.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They make learning more joyful and interesting</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They facilitate communication with teachers and students and make it much easier to get feedback</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They make it easier to find information related to study</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They give me an opportunity for future employment and to make new friendships</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They help improve my technology skills</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this survey, students were asked if social media could help improve learners' English language skills. 79.4% of the students feel that different SNSs helped them improve their English language skills. Students commented that SNSs are helpful in that they “help improves one’s English language” (anonymous male student), and that “people should use social media in learning English and try to improve their language instead of using them for chatting purposes and fun only” (anonymous female student). Another male student added that “social media are excellent tools particularly when someone apply them to learn English”, and another stated that they “helped me improving my language skills” (anonymous female student). Only 20.5% of the learners did not agree that social media sites improved their English language skills. One female student reported that “social media is useless in learning English, and they are time consuming”, and another female student claimed that social media are “not helpful in learning English”. The majority of students (91.9%) did not add any further comments related to the importance and use of social media as a means to learn English.
In this research, a paired t-test was conducted to compare the differences between Libyan males and females at the university level, including their level of access to, use of, preferences, level of confidence and the importance of established and emerging technologies and technology-based tools. The survey results summarised in Table 5.6, below, revealed that there is no difference between both genders in the use of digital technologies and the Internet. They all have equal use and access to digital technologies and the Internet, and they use them for the same purposes, and have the same level of confidence.
Table 5.6- Differences between males’ and females’ confidence and use of digital technologies (N=136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.589</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.564</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td>5.480</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-1.229</td>
<td>.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>1.010</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>1.031</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.611</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To make a comparison between first- and fourth-year students in Internet use, their skills and confidence, the importance of the Internet and digital technologies for them, Levene's Test was used to assess the equality of variances. The F value was calculated using the Levene’s Test to assess the equality of variances to determine the homogeneity of variance (0.494) and the level of significance of 0.484. The results indicate that there is no difference between first- and fourth-year students; for more details, see Table 5.7, below.

Table 5.7- Differences between first- and fourth-year students’ use of digital technologies (N=136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>academic year</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_18</td>
<td>.494</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>-.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.23</td>
<td>.528</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_19</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>.515</td>
<td>-.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.31</td>
<td>.682</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_21</td>
<td>2.827</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>-.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.31</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean_Q_22</td>
<td>2.936</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>-.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.30</td>
<td>.713</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Summary of Quantitative Results

In this research, the results of the quantitative survey confirm that the use of the Internet and social networking sites (SNSs) is widespread among the majority of Sabratha University students in Libya. Internet access is available to nearly 91.9% of students in both the home and the university, and over 94% of students access the Internet via their mobile phones. Most of the students (80.8%) showed that they had a smart mobile phone with an Internet connection, and over 94.2% of students access SNSs through their mobile phones. 89.7% of students use two or more social media sites.

At least once a week, 65.5% of students use emails, around 89% of students use different SNSs, 56.6% of students look up references on regular basis and about 82.4% of students use the Internet and SNSs to read and comment on other people’s social media accounts. Although access to, and the use of, digital technologies is ubiquitous for these Libyan students, there are a significantly lower number of students involved in activities using the Internet and digital technology, especially in the use of the Internet to buy and sell things online.

Students participating in this survey recorded a high level of self-perceived confidence and skill when using different digital technologies. Around 74.3% to 86.8% of students considered themselves good or excellent when using mobile phones for various activities (e.g. SNSs, games, and searching websites related to academic purposes). In addition, many students considered themselves to be good or excellent when using the Internet for various purposes.

There is nevertheless a small group of students (37.5%) who do not appear to have Internet access or limited access time. Around 3.8% to 11.7% of students reported having poor skills when using computers, the Internet and mobile phones. Students considered the Internet to be the most important source of academic information. Digital technologies appear to play a vital role in students’ current lives and academic careers; students considered the Internet their main reference when looking up information.
Nearly 40.4% of students who participated in the survey reported not having special computer rooms or Internet facilities available at the university, while around 45.5% of teachers do not often use digital technology in the classrooms, and 43% of students reported that there are no computers or a good Internet connection in the library and the university. The reasons behind the low integration of digital technologies in the university seem to be related to the weak infrastructure, which was affected by the economic, political and social difficulties existing in Libya. However, 50% of learners believe digital technology can assist them in achieving better results.

The results of the survey revealed that there is no difference between males and females in digital technology use. In addition, both first- and fourth-year students have equal access levels to, and purposes for, using digital technologies.

The importance of implementing digital technologies and SNSs in the lives of the Libyan University students within the context of English language learning is confirmed by that fact that around 79.4% of students (see figure 5.7) considered social media platforms as good tools to improve their English language skills.
5.3 Diary Data

This section will focus on the analysis of 20 student diaries which documents their use of social networking sites over the course of two days. The aim of using these diaries was to get some insight into recorded practices to complement the data on the reported perceptions and attitudes gathered in the survey. Specifically, the aim was to determine when they use these social platforms and how much time they spend on social media, what the purpose of using these social media is and what language they use. Diaries provide rich information on students‘ use of SNSs that can assist in illuminating survey responses, especially as they related to the purposes of using of using social platforms (see Appendix 2). The researcher obtained 10 students‘ diaries (50%) as data for the research, as some of the students forgot to return or finish them. A thematic analysis method was used in order to identify and analyse the themes within data collected. The data produced by participants throughout this study was composed of their use of social networking sites as a tool to learn English for two days. The feedback the participants provided in the reflective diaries were transcribed and coded into themes to give richer details.

5.3.1 Use of, and Access to, Social Media and the Internet

Students were asked to record their use of the Internet and SNSs over two days. In day 1, the diary responses show that students spent 30 minutes to three hours on the Internet and social media for many purposes. All of the participants indicated that they used the Internet and SNSs — to check emails, contact friends, news, check Facebook and Twitter, upload and download music, chatting with friends and for fun”. Only one student mentioned that she used the Internet and social media to ‘search some websites related to my study and looking for academic articles on Google”. However, the majority of responses indicated that learners used the Internet and social media for chatting and fun purposes, but not for academic purposes. All of the participants preferred to use both Arabic and English when they surf the Internet and check their social media accounts.

In day 2, students reflected on their use of, and access to, SNSs and the Internet. Students‘ Internet access time varied form 15 minutes to three hours, and they used it for different purposes. As mentioned by the participants, they used the Internet and social media to check their emails, chat with friends, comment on others’ profiles, read the news and watch
movies on Youtube. Only one student stated she used Google and other websites to help her do her homework. Both Arabic and English were used while on social media and the Internet.

Diary data indicated that all participants are confident when using the Internet and social media, and they use them for many purposes. In addition, the data show that the Internet is available, since students recorded a different amount of access (measured in time) to the Internet and social media during day 1 and 2, and they spend more time (1-3 hours) on it in the evening time compared to the rest of the day.

5.4 Interview Data

This section presents an analysis of the qualitative data that was gathered from students and teachers in Libya, revealing insights into their usage patterns, engagement with and confidence in using the Internet, technology and social media for educational purposes. The analysis of these recorded interviews will reflect and provide a richer and deeper understanding of the current research study. These qualitative data provide a richness of information on the opinions of the Libyan students and teachers surveyed. In the following section, different topics are discussed to explore students‘ and teachers‘ opinions and views towards digital technologies and social networking sites. The interview questions for both teachers and students have been included in Appendices C and D. Both students‘ and teachers‘ interviews were transcribed as a textual data and coded in order to facilitate the process of analysis. The data analysis consisted of ―thematic content analysis‖ which is also known as ―coding‖ (Anderson, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Thematic content analysis entails a detailed description of qualitative data being reported (Anderson, 2007). The description of data may contain labels, codes or short phrases that capture the essence of the portions of texts selected (Saldana, 2009). When labels used, every piece of data is having a meaning (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). In this research instrument, the researcher coded the chunk of information that mainly contributes positively to the data collected.
5.4.1 Student Interviews

In the student interviews, the researcher focused on certain subjects to get better results and fill in the gap of the missing data that could not be obtained from the questionnaires (e.g., regarding students’ confidence and skill levels as regards using digital technologies, the purpose of using digital technologies, the use of SNSs for academic purposes and the importance of digital technologies, with a focus on social media). A detailed data analysis is included below.

5.4.1.1 Students’ Confidence and Skill Levels in Using Digital Technologies

Interviewees were asked several questions related to the availability of the Internet and digital technology. Students were asked if they had a smart phone, and, if so, what they used it for. All students interviewed appear to have one or two smart phones with Internet access, and they use them for a variety of purposes:

Yes, I do have two smart phones with the Internet. I use them for communication purposes. I use them also to check up my emails, Google, and social media (F1/ 12-12-2016).

Of course I do. I use it for chatting and texting with my friends. I use it also to search some information on Google, references, and social media (F4/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, I do. I use it to connect to the Internet daily. Of course, to contact with friends, people from different cities and for research (F2/ 12- 12- 2016).

Yes, I do have two smart phones. I use them for communication purposes, to send and receive messages (M1/ 12- 12- 2016).

The interviewees’ comments showed extensive use of all types of digital technologies, particularly mobile devices. The activities undertaken on these devices by interviewees were mostly basic activities such as contacting people, social media or using the Internet to search for some information. Students’ interview comments reported an overall high level of self-perceived confidence and skill when using most of the digital technologies and social media, and this confirms the survey results.
5.4.1.2 The Purpose of Using the Internet and Technology

The interviewees were asked whether they considered the Internet to be important in their daily life and for their future. They certainly confirmed a very strong belief in the importance and value of the Internet in their future and daily lives:

*I cannot live without it (F2/ 12-12-2016).*

*It is very important, and I cannot even imagine a life without Internet (F5/ 12-12-2016).*

*Yes, it is very important for us. It helps me get information I need and keeps me updated with what was happening in the world (M1/ 12-12-2016).*

Most students interviewed considered that information and searching for references were the most important purposes of the Internet, followed by communication:

*Yes, Internet is very important. Internet helps me search for references and easily get any answer I am looking for. I also can do my homework very quickly, and can communicate with people easily (F1/ 12-12-2016).*

*Yes, it is very important to search references and information. Internet is a huge library for information resources (F4/ 12-12-2016).*

*Yes, it is very important for us. It helps me get information I need and contact with the world easily (M1/ 12-12-2016).*

Students were also asked about whether they used the Internet to achieve academic goals, and they reported the following:

*Of course, I use Internet for academic purposes. It helps me look up some information and resources. Any question I have, I easily get an answer for it once I search for through Internet (F1/ 12-12-2016).*
Yes, of course. I always use Google to research answers, particular topics and to answer any question arousing me (F2/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, I use Internet for academic purposes. I use it to search some articles, news, information related to my study. I use it to contact with my teachers and friends (M1/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, I use Internet to prepare for presentations in the classroom and to look up references (F4/ 12-12-2016).

The interview comments strongly agreed with the survey results, indicating that the majority of learners use the Internet to access information and news, and to achieve academic goals.

5.4.1.3 The Use of Social Media for Academic Purposes

Students were asked what social networking sites SNSs they like to use for academic purposes. Most interviewees showed confidence and interest in using different social media sites, particularly Facebook:

Yes, I do. I use Facebook sometimes for academic purposes. There are some pages that have information related to my academic work, and this helps me communicate with my colleagues regarding my study (F2/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, I do use social media. I use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Viber and Messenger. Actually, I use mainly Facebook for academic purposes, to get some information and to go to some pages related to my study, and I use it for sharing and following news (M1/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, I use social media. I use Facebook, YouTube and Google to look up references, details related to my study (F4/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, I use Facebook, Snapchat, Messenger, WhatsApp and others (F5/ 12-12-2016).

Interestingly, the comments above show that none of the students use blogs, and only one student reported that he used Twitter, while Facebook seems to be the most popular social
media site among learners. It can be observed from the interviewee comments that they have a high level of confidence when using social networking sites.

While students did appear to have a high level of confidence in using social media, and they want to utilise it for academic purposes, they were aware of several access problems when using them:

The most problem I face is the Internet speed is poor, and the technical facilities are weak in the university (F2/ 12-12-2016).

Actually, sometimes it is difficult to find information related to my study, and the Internet connection is weak sometimes, which makes it difficult to find information (M1/ 12-12-2016).

Weak Internet connection is the biggest problem, and sometimes is disconnected. I cannot download some articles and files sometimes (F4/ 12-12-2016).

Only one student remarked that she did not have many problems while utilising social media:

I do not have many problems (F1/ 12-12-2016).

These above comments support survey results, which ranked Facebook in first place, as the most dominant SNS among Libyan University students.

5.4.1.4 The Significance of Digital Technology and Social Media

Besides reporting on their use of social media in daily life, interviewees were asked if they use SNSs with friends and outside the classroom to improve their English language. Students’ feedback reveals how important social media are for language learning:

Sure, I like to use it everywhere. For example, when I am chatting and texting with my friends, it helps me improve my English skills (F4/ 12-12-2016).
Yes, social media improves my speaking and writing skills. Also, it improves my vocabulary. It is a very fun source to learn English (F1/12-12-2016).

Yes, particularly communication skills. It improves speaking skills and improves my vocabulary when texting with friends and teachers (M1/12-12-2016).

Yes, it is a good tool of learning English and connecting people with the world (F4/12-12-2016).

Sure, but in case the person uses it [social media] in proper way to learn English (F5/12-12-2016).

When asked whether social media have any advantages / disadvantages in learning English, students acknowledged that social media have many advantages in learning English. The advantages that were mentioned are as follows:

Social media helps me communicate easily and at any time. Any thing I want, I can find it on YouTube. Through group discussions and different social platforms, I can learn English quickly. They are convenient tools (F1/12-12-2016).

In minutes, I can get answers and help from people. I can learn new ideas, topics, and new information. I learnt many vocabularies and new English idioms through social media (F2/12-12-2016).

Social media are convenient, and I can access them at any time and in any place. It helps us communicate easily and get news and information very quickly. They are easy to use and interesting (M1/12-12-2016).

I consider social media the best invention of the century. Social media opens wide avenues in life and makes life much easier. Once I have any question, I just Google it and get the proper answer. Also, some English language pages on social media provide excellent language lessons and discussions (F4/12-12-2016).
The varieties of social media applications help improve my English language if I use it in the proper way. I believe they are effective tools to learn English independently (F5/12-12-2016).

Interviewees listed fewer shortcomings than benefits to using social networking sites in the context of language learning. The most commonly recurring disadvantage mentioned by participants was the fact that it was time-consuming. Only one student claimed that “Social media damaged my spelling, because I depend on the phone to correct my spelling mistakes. Also, it is time-wasting” (F5/12-12-2016).

In general, the use of social media in the language learning context seems to have a positive effect on the students despite some identified disadvantages.

5.4.1.4.1 Students’ Perceptions of Their Teachers’ Use of Digital Technology in the Classroom

In the interview, students were asked about their teachers’ experience with technology and social media in the university, particularly the use of computers and the Internet in the classrooms and as part of the curriculum. The students’ comments demonstrate a good use of computers and technology in the classrooms by their teachers:

Yes, they use it. They use PowerPoint, sometimes Google or YouTube (F1/12-12-2016).

Yes, some teachers use technology, but not all of them. They use PowerPoint and computers in listening classes, “Language Labs”. Sometimes, I send my homework to my teacher via email (F2/12-12-2016).

Yes, they use technology in the classroom. They use PowerPoint and computers (M1/12-12-2016).

Most of my teachers depend on social media and technology. They use PowerPoint, and they use emails to send a feedback on the homework and test results (F4/12-12-2016).
Most interviewees agreed that teachers showed a good example of technology use in the classroom, and some of the interviewees agreed that their teachers are good Internet and technology users:

Yes, they are good (F1/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, they use it in [the] proper way (F4/ 12-12-2016).

Interviewees mentioned a variety of abilities possessed by their teaching faculty members when using the Internet and digital technologies in the classroom. However, two students considered their teachers not to be proficient enough in using the Internet and digital technologies:

Not all of them. Only some teachers who apply technology in the classroom (F5/ 12-12-2016).

Yes, but they are not proficient in using them. It seems they do not like to use them in the classroom (M1/ 12-12-2016).

5.4.2 Teacher Interviews

The semi-structured teacher interview was another research instrument used in the current study to help gather deeper and richer information about the research questions. The main purpose of conducting teacher interviews was to establish how often EFL teachers use SNSs in the classroom, for what purposes, and what the main difficulties they encounter are when using social media inside the Libyan classroom. The teachers showed a good interest in using the Internet and digital technology in their EFL classes. In this research study, five faculty members were interviewed to provide us with richer information and details related to the usage of digital technology and social media in the classroom. Three of them were PhD degree-holders; one was working on his PhD degree; and the other was an MA-holder. They have been teaching English in Sabratha University for three to 14 years.

5.4.2.1 Faculty Members’ Use of Digital Technology and Social Media

The majority of teachers interviewed showed limited use of technology and social media in the classroom, and they gave the following reasons for such limitations:
No, we do not use them, because [of the] unavailability of [the] Internet in the university. Only recently, the university administrations [sic] started to buy smart boards and train teachers on how to use them. Computer labs were available in the university, but [it was] only phonetics and speaking teachers who used them, but personally, I never used social media and technology in the classroom (T1/12-12-2016).

No. Although, I like to use technology in the classroom, but it seems that most of the students did not prefer to use technology in the classroom; for example, CD-Rom and PowerPoint. They prefer to listen [to] me than listening from the CDs (T2/12-12-2016).

No, I do not use them. This is because of the lack of facilities in the university, and weak infrastructure and lack of knowledge from my side (T4/25-12-2106).

No, because of [the] large numbers of students and lack of technology facilities in the university, and, as a teacher, I was not encouraged by the university administration to use technology in the classroom (T5/5-1-2017).

Only one teacher talked about the actual use of technology in the classroom, and he clarified this in his response below:

Yes. In the last year, I used the smart board in the classroom. Technology has been implemented in the classrooms recently in the university (T3/25-12-2016).

The teachers reported that they had used social media for a period of between six years and 10 years. It was reported that three teachers had been using social media for six years and another two teachers for 10 years. Teachers were asked if they were proficient enough in using the Internet and technology in the classroom, and their answers varied:

Yes, but, due to the mentioned reasons [from previous responses] I was not able to use them in the classroom (T1/-12-12-2016).
Using technology in the classroom is not that difficult [a] task for me. I really like to use them in the classroom (T2/ 12-12-2016).

Actually, I am not as good as [I] should be in using technology such as the smart board in the classroom, although I used them before (T3/ 25-12-2016).

Yes, but, because of the weak technological infrastructure and facilities in the university, it makes it difficult to implement technology in the classroom (T4/ 25-12-2016).

Yes, but I lack the experience to use them in the classroom (T5/ 5-1-2017).

Although teachers mentioned that they have taught English for between three and 14 years, and that they are proficient enough to use social media in daily life and to communicate with students, they did not use them inside the classroom, as indicated in the following comments:

No, I do not use it inside the classroom, but, outside the classroom, I use social media tools for advertising and to share information and news with students in English (T1/ 12-12-2016).

No, I do not use social media. I only record some lectures and present them in the classrooms, but I use it to collaborate with other teachers and in searching [for] information or discussions (T3/ 25-12-2016).

Although I do not use social media in the classroom, […] I use it with my students outside the classroom. For example, I have a Facebook page, and I use it to post news, information, sharing reflections and suggestions (T5/ 5-1-2017).
5.4.2.2 The Availability of the Internet and Digital Technology in the University

Participants were also asked whether the Internet and technology were supported enough by the university. Most of them claimed that, although they are available in the university, technology and the Internet were not supported enough:

Technology is provided by the university, but, because of the weak university administration, technology use was not supported or encouraged (T5/ 5-1-2017).

They are available in the university, but we [...] were not encouraged to use them, and because we do not have enough experience in using them (T2/ 12-12-2016).

Meanwhile, three faculty members claimed that the university did not support the availability of the Internet and technology in the classroom:

No, the university does not support the use of technology and social media, and there is no strong technological infrastructure, and [a] weak Internet connection. Moreover, if [we] want to use them, it is individual and personal efforts (T3/ 25-12-2016).

No, they are not supported at all in the university. Although technology in [the] classroom help[s to] facilitate [the] teaching process and communication between the teachers and students [...] they are not developed and supported enough in the university (T4/ 25-12-2016).

5.4.2.3 The Significance of Digital Technology and Social Media

Despite their reported lack of use of social media in the classroom, all interviewed teachers acknowledged that social media are significant, and have many positive effects on English language learning:

It is something new, unique and popular that makes a unique teaching and learning environment different from the traditional ones. It connects students with a foreign environment and
encourages learners to learn more. It entertains students (T3/ 25-12-2016).

Sure. For example, some social media sites and Internet websites ease the process of learning and teaching. Also, for students, it eases the educational life for them, and learners can apply to study online and facilitate many complications and difficulties. It helps learners share ideas and submit work online (T4/ 25-12-2106).

They are convenient, easy to use, save time and effort. They introduce the students to a new culture and language in an interesting way. They help learners to be independent learners and [not to] rely on teachers always (T5/ 5-1-2017).

It improves communication and language skills for learners (T2/12-12-2016).

Teachers did not state many disadvantages of technology and social media use in the classroom:

Since it is used in [a] proper way, its advantages are much more than its disadvantages (T3/ 25-12-2016).

Sure, it has some disadvantages, and this is related to the person himself who use[s] them. If the person uses them in [a] proper way, its advantages will be more; but, in general, technology and social media [have] more advantages than disadvantages (T4/ 25-12-2106).

Two-edged sword: if it were used in a wrong way, it would be dangerous (T5/ 7-1-2017).
5.4.3 Summary of Qualitative Results

The interview comments from both students and teachers reflected a high level of access to, and availability of, digital technologies and social media in Libyan society. All interviewed students and teachers showed their interest in using digital technology and different social media platforms in daily life and for academic purposes.

The interviewed students appear to use digital technology extensively, particularly smartphones. Their use of technology was reported to be mostly at a basic level, for communication purposes, searching for references and social media. All five interviewed students showed a high confidence level when using digital technology and social media.

All interviewed students reported a strong belief in the importance of the Internet, and considered that information and searching for references were the most important purposes of the Internet for them, followed by communication.

The interviewees reported accessing different social media platforms, and they considered SNSs an important part of life. All students have a Facebook account, while only one student used Twitter; whereas Weblogs were the least liked social platform among Libyan university students. Students' responses ranked Facebook in first place, as the most dominant SNSs among Libyan university students. In fact, these responses support the survey results.

Many students mentioned that social media is a significant element of their academic life; they strongly believed that it helps them to improve their English language skills. They also mentioned a variety of abilities among their faculty members when using the Internet and digital technologies inside the classrooms.

On the other hand, faculty members' interviews were conducted to give wider information. It helped to complete the full picture of the qualitative data. The teachers reported a good interest in using the Internet and digital technology in their EFL classes. The majority of interviewed teachers, however, showed limited use of technology and social media inside the classroom, because of many reasons, such as the unavailability of the Internet in the university, the university administration’s lack of support for the use of digital technology, a weak infrastructure and a lack of knowledge regarding how to use digital technology in the classroom among a large number of students.
Teachers reported a high level of confidence in using the Internet and digital technology in daily life, but not in the classroom. Some of them mentioned that they lack the experience and training to use digital technologies in the classroom. However, they reported that social media platforms are important, and have many positive effects in relation to learning English. They considered SNSs something unique, convenient and popular that makes the teaching experience interesting and saves time, but, because of the reasons given, they were not able to implement them in a formal way in the classroom.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter described participants' perspectives on their use of social media and digital technologies in learning the English language autonomously. A mix of both quantitative and qualitative research instruments were used to explore in depth the extent to which Libyan university students access and use digital technology and social media. The study results indicate that both first- and fourth-year students in Sabratha University access digital technologies and social media almost at the same level, and no differences were noticed. In addition, most of the students are generally engaged with digital technologies and social media on a basic level but show good confidence and skills in applying them. This study revealed that there are no major gender differences in actual engagement, abilities and confidence while using digital technologies.

The next chapter will reveal the major themes emerging from the data, and will contextualise these results with regard to other comparative studies carried out recently. The results of this research study, with relevance to the literature, will also be discussed in detail.
CHAPTER 6- DISCUSSION: LINKING BACK TO THE THEORY

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the main themes reported in the previous chapter about university students’ use of the Internet, technology and social media, bringing the results back to the original goal of the thesis, which was to contextualise the opportunities and challenges of utilising social media as an autonomous learning tool of English among university students in Libya.

This chapter discusses the main key themes which emerged in Chapter 5 in relation to the engagement of Libyan university students with digital technologies. It also explores the major findings in Chapter 5, connecting them with the current literature, and divides them into two main sections.

Section 6.2 discusses learners’ engagement with digital technologies. Sub-section 6.2.1 focuses on the availability of digital technologies, and how learners access them. In Sub-section 6.2.2, different issues related to the main purposes behind using the Internet and technology among Libyan university students are discussed. Students’ confidence and skills in relation to a range of activities using the Internet, technologies and SNSs are discussed in Subsection 6.2.3.

In Section 6.3, the focus is on the local environment. Various sub-headings are discussed under this main heading. Firstly, the utilisation of the Internet, technology in general, and SNSs in particular, in the universities, and for educational purposes, was discussed in Subsection 6.3.1. Subsection 6.3.2 investigates in depth the significance of digital technology and social media in education, and particularly in learning English. Subsection 6.3.3 addresses faculty use of the Internet and SNSs in the university. Finally, Subsection 6.3.4 discusses teachers’ confidence and skill in using digital technologies in the context of education.
6.2 Learners’ Engagement with the Internet, Technology and Social Media

6.2.1 The Availability of, and Access to, the Internet and SNSs

The data of this study indicate that the majority of the Libyan university students involved in this study have fairly comprehensive access to broadband Internet and social media, using different technologies such as mobile phones. Certainly, over 94.2% of Libyan students reported accessing SNSs daily, and for various purposes.

Reflective diary comments also confirm students’ use of the Internet and social media for various purposes. Furthermore, interviews conducted with students confirmed that Libyan students access and use social media sites; for example: “Yes, I do. I use it to connect to the Internet daily. Of course, to contact with friends, people from different cities, and for research” (F2/ 12-12-2016).

Interviewees’ responses strongly acknowledged the high value of the Internet in their lives: “It is very important, and I cannot even imagine a life without Internet” (F5/ 12-12-2016); they also highly value the contribution of the Internet in their academic lives: “Yes, [the] Internet is very important. [The] Internet helps me search for references, and easily get any answer I am looking for. I also can do my homework very quickly, and can communicate with people easily” (F1/ 12-12-2016). These findings seem to confirm the claim that university students cannot live without the Internet, and they are clearly part of the international “Internet class”, as coined by the 2011 Beloit College Mind-Set List (Troop, 2011). This generation is popularly known as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), the Net Generation (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Tapscott, 1999), Generation Y (McCrindle, 2003) or Millenials (Howe & Strauss, 2000), and these labels also seem to apply to the learners in the study, but with some caveats and special local conditions, which we will discuss below.

Although the technological infrastructure in Libya is poor compared to more developed countries, only a small percentage of students report not using the Internet regularly, and do not use social media and digital technologies in their lives. Although the social class is a variable and the researcher did not measure it in this study but it can be concluded from the results of the study that there is no disparity between the rich and other social classes in the ownership, engagement with, and use of digital technologies in Libya.
This research investigates in depth the difference and similarities between first- and fourth-year students in Sabratah University, in relation to their use of, and access to, social media and digital technologies. Interestingly, this study revealed that there are no major differences between first- and fourth-year students in their access to, utilisation of, and skills and confidence in relation to an array of digital technologies and emerging technology-based tools. Both first- and fourth-year students were shown to be highly tech-savvy.

In a comparison between males and females, this research study reports similar levels of self-perceived skill, confidence and use of digital technologies. Obviously, social media is popular among Libyan university students, enabling communication between students and family in society. This result was supported by Thanuskodi (2013):

> Internet users are not predominantly used by any sex. Both genders have equal access to [the] Internet; however, the differences are noticed in terms of usage pattern. The access is similar for both genders probably because both genders have high exposure to the technology through their educational experience (p.12).

However, these findings are in contrast to the central arguments in the gender debates, which assume that there are differences between males and females in the access to, utilisation of, and skills and confidence while using digital technologies (Kadijevich, 2000; Li &Kirkup, 2007; Kaino, 2008; Dhindsa & Shahrizal-Emran, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Cuban, 1998; and McLoughlin & Lee, 2008; Martin et al., 2013).

All of the findings mentioned in relation to the availability of, and access to, the Internet and social networking confirm similar research conclusions reached by, for example, Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley (2009), Subrahmanyam, Reich, Weachter and Espinoza (2008), Rainie (2012), Giordano (2011), Balakrishnan and Raj (2012), and ITU (2012).

### 6.2.2 The Purpose of Using the Internet and Digital Technology

While the results of the study would appear to show a high level of connectivity with the Internet and SNSs among the majority of Libyan University students, however, this does not necessarily mean complex, advanced use of technology and SNSs in all cases.
The results drawn from this research study (see Table 5.2) demonstrate the frequent use of and access to the Internet and digital technologies by Libyan undergraduate students. However, their engagement with the digital technologies and SNSs is at a basic, rather than an advanced, level.

The majority of Libyan students (66%) use the Internet and computer technology to send and receive emails, and more than (90%) of students use them for social activities such as playing music and games, and to create or watch movies daily, rather than using them for academic purposes. Even though a large number of students (89.7%) believe that the Internet and digital technologies help them to achieve academic goals, however, only a small number of students (21.3%) report actual engagement with digital technology and the Internet to achieve academic goals.

The reflective diary data and students’ interviews also support the survey data, which indicates that the majority of Libyan university students use the Internet and SNSs basically for chatting and fun purposes, rather than for academic purposes. For example, here is a typical comment from one of the learners interviewed: “Yes, I do. I use it to connect to the Internet daily. Of course, to contact with friends, people from different cities, and for research” (F2/ 12- 12- 2016).

This research documents reluctance on the part of the majority of Libyan university students to engage with technology and social networking sites for academic purposes. The unsophisticated use of, and engagement with, the Internet and SNSs for academic purposes in this research study support the results of the study conducted by Kennedy et al., (2007, 2008) and Enber et al., (2008), which conclude that most of the technologies used by students are used only for passive consumption of information rather than being applied to make useful contributions, although, of course, the definition of “useful” is subjective. As we know, quite an amount of learning can take place when people are carrying out all kinds of activities. Another study, conducted by Sandars et al., (2008), found that more than 90% of the most commonly used devices by medical learners involved instant messaging and SNSs. Combes (2008) also identified that technology users “use technology to be connected more than anything else, and they use it for entertainment. They use it for finding information when the need arises and they have acquired a culture of use when seeking information via electronic means” (p. 9).
Zakaria (2013) conducted a research study on Malaysian students, and found that

[the use of ICT and other Web 2.0 tools by the students have not reached to any significant level that can merit an increase to any person’s knowledge. The use of existing tools such as e-mail or messaging are still dominating most options although some students are beginning to consider social tools for information sharing. High scores in the use of instant messaging, chats and social networking activities do not reflect the collaborative construction of knowledge; the key aspect of Web 2.0 collaboration. The study has also found several activities that may lead towards the use of [the] web for informal learning activities. Students turned to [the] web to obtain information not related to academic or formal education (p. 60).

The main uses of basic technology and SNSs among students in this research confirm similar results identified in different research within the Libyan context (Rhema and Miliszewska, 2010; Nusir, 2014; Elmabruk, 2008), and other major international research in Malaysia (Zakaria, 2013), in the UK (Margaryan et al., 2011; Livingstone et al., 2005); Selwyn (2009) and in Australia (Sztendur & Milne, 2009; Kennedy, Judd, et al., 2008; Combes, 2008).

6.2.3 Students’ Confidence and Skill Levels at Using Digital Technologies

Despite the unsophisticated use of the Internet, technology and SNSs, Libyan university students in this study, overall, reported a high level of self-perceived confidence and skill when using most of the digital technologies. The majority of students (see Table 5.3) rated themselves as having good or excellent skills and confidence in using digital technologies (e.g. SNSs, games, mobile phones and searching websites related to academic purposes). Only a small number (11.7%) of students reported having poor skills when using computers, the Internet and SNSs.

Diary data shows that the learners who were involved in this study considered themselves skilful and confident in using the Internet and SNSs for a variety of purposes. In the diaries, students reported that they used the Internet, technology and SNSs for a variety of purposes: to check emails, contact friends, news, check Facebook and Twitter, upload and download music, chatting with friends, and for fun purposes’. This means that learners are having high levels of skills and confidence in using digital technologies and social media platforms. The
diary data indicates that the Internet is available for the majority of learners, since they recorded different levels of time spent on the Internet and SNSs, spending 7-21 hours per week online. They also reported using a mix of English and the Arabic language when on SNSs.

Several interview comments showed extensive use of all types of digital technologies by Libyan university students. The activities undertaken on these by interviewees were mostly basic activities such as contacting people, social networking or using the Internet to search for some information. Students' interview comments reported an overall high level of self-perceived confidence and skill among these Libyan students when using most of the digital technologies for a range of information needs. For example, "Of course I do. I use it for chatting and texting with my friends. I use it also to search some information on Google, references, and social media" (F4/ 12-12-2016);"Yes, of course. I always use Google to research answers, particular topics, and to answer any question arousing me" (F2/ 12-12-2016). One of the interviewees showed a deeper level of engagement with digital technologies, although it appears that the majority of Libyan university students are not engaging in sophisticated use of the Internet. For example, "Yes, I use [the] Internet for academic purposes. I use it to search some articles, news, information related to my study. I use it to contact with my teachers and friends" (M1/ 12-12-2016).

These findings are reflected in a research study conducted with students in China, which concluded that,

> Although accessing the Internet is not a problem for the majority of them, students might lack important skills, such as inquiry skills and critical thinking skills, to correctly analyze and efficiently use those online resources and digital tools" (Li & Ranieri, 2010, pp. 1039-1040).

As Branch (2003) reports, students need particular instructional intervention in order to improve their information skills. Students were sometimes frustrated and confused to find the information on the Internet intimidating. A UKCGO study explains this issue as follows:
It seems that ‘access’ to the Internet is not as simple as turning on the computer and clicking on ‘Google’. A range of skills, some more complex than others, is required to access the range of online facilities [...] These skills are variably, and unequally, distributed across the population, with age, gender and socio-economic status all associated with differences in literacy (Livingstone, Bober & Helsper, 2005, p. 3).

Similarly, the Pew Research Center studied Americans’ use of the Internet and technology, and how young people use technology in their lives. The study confirms that only a few technology users have a good knowledge about the sophisticated use of different search engines. Although users did not use technology for sophisticated purposes, they are confident in their ability to find information through different search engines. The JUSTEIS project (JISC Usage Survey Trends: Trends in Electronic Information Service) also reported that students depend on search engines to access data directly. Combes (2008) reports that students tend to navigate different websites by clicking on links rather than applying complicated search strategies. The majority of students lack the cognitive skills to navigate hypertext, and often struggle with these basic skills (Scott & O’Sullivan, 2005).

Combes (2008), following extensive research into the information-seeking skills of Australian students, concludes that

The assumption that students have the skills to locate information in the virtual environment simply because they are familiar with technology and confident about using it, has meant that information-seeking behaviour amongst members of the Net Generation is unsophisticated, demonstrates a culture of use that is hard to change and the result of a lack of formal information literacy education. They have poor Internet literacy skills, rely on keyword searching, trust search engine results and as a consequence, exhibit a high level of satisficing and snaffling behaviour (p. 15).

In a later paper, Combes (2009) discussed the potential disenfranchisement of young people, and stated that ‘education and the general public have accepted the idea that constant exposure to technology combined with the natural inquisitiveness of youth equals competence” (p. 8).

These findings of the current study are supported by research conducted in the Malaysian context. Zakaria (2013) studied a group of Malaysian students, and found that the majority of learners are ready to be exposed to different Web 2.0 applications, and reported a high level of confidence and ease with the use of Web 2.0 applications in learning. Furthermore,
Rhema and Miliszewska (2014) report that Libyan undergraduate students are “confident in using computers, enjoyed using ICTs in their studies, believed in the benefits of e-learning, and would be interested in studying courses that used e-learning”. Similarly, Othman et al., (2013) conclude that

> the majority of students in this research were comfortable and confident concerning usage of computers as well as the online environment in general, most students spent over ten hours per week on the Internet in their home or other places, also most of them had experience using computer over ten years, and the majority of students recommend blending this environment with traditional learning (p.7).

As described above, the discussion indicates that the majority of Libyan undergraduate students are confident at utilising various ICT and SNSs for different purposes; however, they do not use them for advanced levels. This is perhaps because

> some students may not have had enough experience with a technology to envisage how it could be usefully applied. Also it is difficult to expect students to have the expertise to judge how to best use emerging technologies for educational purposes (Kennedy, Judd, et al., 2008, p. 119).
6.3 The Local Environment

6.3.1 The Availability of the Internet and Digital Technology Facilities in Libyan Universities

Internet and digital technology access and use appear well-established in the universities in Libya, with around 59.6% of students in the research study reporting having special computer rooms for Internet access at the university, and nearly 56.6% of students indicated that a wireless Internet connection is available in the library. The majority of students (78%) reported using the Internet and computers in their lessons or in the classroom in the university.

Although it appears that Internet and digital technologies were highly available in the Libyan universities, students’ interview responses reported several access problems while using the Internet and digital technologies in the university. The chief problem of using the Internet and computers in Libyan universities is a weak Internet connection, which makes it difficult to find information and download articles related to the students’ studies; as one student put it, “the biggest problem I face is the poor Internet speed, and the technical facilities are weak in the university” (F2/12-12-2016). The poor Internet connection in the Libyan universities negatively affects learners’ ability to find information related to their field of study, and, sometimes learners find it difficult to download academic articles and files. It was reported that “the average Internet connection speed in Libya is the slowest in the world at 0.5 Mbps” (McIntyre, 2014). In fact, the poor ICT facilities in Libya are due to the political environment in Libya, where the civil war in 2011 has crippled the country's economy and disrupted its telecommunications sector. It is estimated that more than US $1 billion worth of ICT has been destroyed, including about 20% of the country's cell sites” (Elzawi, Kenan, Wade, and Pislaru, 2013).

Interestingly, students involved in this study reported that their faculty members use digital technologies in the classroom. In the words of one student, “yes, they use technology in the classroom. They use PowerPoint and computers” (M1/12-12-2016). However, like the students, this usage could hardly be described as sophisticated or advanced in relation to educational technology in the contemporary era. Furthermore, several interviewees believed that their faculty members were not proficient enough to integrate technology in the
classroom, based on their belief that their teachers “do not like to use them in the classroom” (M1/12-12-2016).

The results of this study show that the Internet and computers are ubiquitous in Libyan universities but that faculty members do not make extensive or sophisticated use of these technologies in the classrooms. Since implementing technology in teaching is important these days, “teachers also have to be able to keep up with the technological knowledge of their students” (Richards, 2014, p. 2). However, not enough research has been done to identify the underlying reasons why digital technology adoption in Libyan universities has been slow, and the basic factors that may contribute to this (Elshaikhi, 2015).

6.3.2 The Significance of Digital Technology and Social Media in Libyan Education

One of the significant findings of this research study is that Libyan university students consider the use of the Internet and SNSs beneficial for achieving academic goals. They also strongly regard the Internet as a valuable source to learn the English language. The majority of students (83%) admitted that SNSs assist them in finding information related to their study, and they believe that SNSs ease communication between their colleagues and teachers to get feedback. Social media are valued highly by learners, because they make learning more interesting and help them get better grades in university.

Interestingly, interviewees’ comments supported the effectiveness of implementing SNSs to achieve academic goals; as one student commented, “Yes, I do. I use Facebook sometimes for academic purposes. There are some pages that have information related to my academic work, and this helps me communicate with my colleagues regarding my study” (F2/12-12-2016). Another student mentioned, “I use social media. I use Facebook, YouTube and Google to look up references, details related to my study” (F4/12-12-2016).

Libyan students in this research reported a high preference for Facebook as a leading online social site (comScore, 2011; IAB and Elogia, 2012; Lenhart et al., 2010; Hargittai, 2007; Jones and Fox, 2009; Lenhart and Madden, 2007; Salaway and Caruso, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Harvard, 2011; Liu, 2010). Facebook, at the most basic level, is
conceived as “an online directory that connects people through social networks at colleges and universities” (Zuckerberg, 2005, p. 1).

Different international studies have confirmed a positive connection between Facebook use and higher-education students. A survey carried out in the USA about Facebook use and adoption among learners found that more than 90% of university students use it. In the UK, for example, Facebook is one of the most popular online sites among British people (Madge, Meek, Wellens, and Hooley, 2009).

Facebook would seem to influence undergraduate students positively (Munzon and Tower, 2009), and it has a great impact on students’ academic performance, although it is considered a social tool rather than a learning tool (Madge et al., 2009; Mazman and Usluel, 2009; Selwyn, 2009). Liu (2010) argues that “Facebook could be a wonderful tool for building a sustainable and life-long learning social network and building an extended community learning environment” (p. 110).

The majority of participants (79.4% in this study) stated that SNSs help to improve their English language skills. They believe that SNSs can contribute positively in improving English language skills among users: “social media are excellent tools, particularly when someone applies them to learn English” (F5/ 12- 12- 2016). Thurairaj et al., (2015) reported that:

> [t]he usage of SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter and mobile phones enhances English proficiency as these SNSs can be accessed worldwide and thus allow people all over the world to post and share their thoughts, feelings, news and articles (p. 313).

Social networking sites (SNSs) can play an essential role in promoting language learning autonomy. As mentioned in Sub-section 6.3.1, students reported some constraints that affect learner autonomy, such as Internet access problems, poor ICT facilities in the university and low educational technology knowledge among faculty members, which counteracts learner autonomy. However, ICT technology contributes notably to the learner autonomy concept through enabling an immense amount of materials that facilitate autonomous learning (Godwin-Jones, 2011).
The main constraints facing Libyan learners in relation to fostering learner autonomy are basically external constraints related to a lack of teaching and learning aids and inflexibility of exam dates, rather than to internal constraints that spring from participants themselves, which would have erected barriers in the face of implementing autonomous learning if they had been present” (Elmahjoub, 2014, p. 269).

As discussed above, Internet and computer technologies are ubiquitous in Libyan universities, but faculty members do not make extensive or sophisticated use of these technologies in the classrooms. Elmahjoub (2014) stated that “most teachers pointed out that insufficient time with classes determines their modes of working on lessons and limits opportunities for students to work autonomously” (p. 269).

Since the majority of Libyan undergraduate students use digital technology and social media platforms for collaboration and communication purposes, learner autonomy can take place. It was found that, although there are different constraints that learners encounter while utilising digital technologies, learners revealed a high level of readiness to work autonomously and control their learning. Obviously, “autonomy is not an alien concept within the Libyan context” (Elmahjoub, 2014, p. 269).

A significant number of students in this study (53.5%) preferred to use a mixture of both Arabic and English when on the Internet and SNSs, while the majority of surveyed participants (around 46.3%) used and preferred the Arabic language to write and read material on the Internet and social networking sites. Interviewee comments indicated that Libyan university students use SNSs to improve their English language skills, including comments such as “social media improves my speaking and writing skills. Also, it improves my vocabulary. It is [a] very fun source to learn English” (F/ 12-12-2016), in addition to “It improves my speaking skills and improves my vocabulary when texting with friends and teachers” (M1 12-12-2016).

Liu (2010) suggests that “Social media tools provide learners with new opportunities to become independent in their study and research” (p. 109). Furthermore, social media develop and enhance various expressive capacities (Crook et al., 2008). Godwin-Jones (2008) reports that Facebook can “enhance communication and human interaction can potentially be harnessed for language learning” (p. 7). Facebook increases learners’ motivation and this leads to authentic language skills, and improves learners’ use of English
language, and also «offers constructive educational experiences while maintaining privacy and safety» (Blattner and Fiori, 2009).

To integrate social media tools to achieve academic goals, Liu (2010) suggests two techniques to use social media in education:

There are mainly two ways to use social media tools for educational purposes. One way is to integrate social media tools into the current educational system as a teaching and learning resource to assist the process of curriculum delivery […] Another way is to use social media as a parallel learning channel to complement current curriculum delivery, and to extend the learning environment to the real world and to enrich students learning experiences with real life practice (p. 110).

Facebook is considered one of the top social media tools used among learners, and the majority of participants reported not using Twitter or blogs. Even though implementing social media tools such as Facebook for academic purposes has abundant benefits, such as its collaborative facilities, Facebook cannot be considered a proficient course delivery system or as a stand-alone educational instrument (Guess, 2008). It has been claimed that time spent on Facebook can have a negative influence on the students’ GPA because of the short time spent for class preparation (Junco, 2012; Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010; Malaney, 2005). Yet, there is no clear evidence that indicates that social media tools have been incorporated well in recent learning processes (Kennedy et al., 2007, 2008).

Students involved in this study showed that they access the Internet through their smart phone/s, and over 94.2% of students access SNSs using their mobile phones. In the last decade, the use of mobile technologies has expanded extensively among Libyan university students, and, in 2010, there were nearly 10.9 million mobile-cellular subscriptions and 2.7 million active mobile-broadband subscriptions in the country (ITU, 2012). These findings support the central argument that «the increasing use of mobile technology for learning is creating a paradigm shift for electronic learning” (Adegbija and Bola, 2015). Mobile learning gives an interesting learning opportunity to learners who regularly use mobile devices (Gedik, Hanci-Karademirci, Kursun & Caglitay, 2012). Adegbija and Bola (2015) suggest that:
the undergraduates have personal access to cell phones, Android, Smart phones, Mp3 players and laptops in the study area and they are favorably disposed to the adoption of mobile technologies for learning. The undergraduates also showed their willingness to procure their own mobile technology devices if they are introduced for learning (p. 356).

The potential for increasing the use of mobile technologies for educational purposes has gained considerable interest recently (Adegbija, and Bola, 2015; Azizinezhad, Najafi, & Nesari, 2011; Vinu, Sherimon, & Reshmy, 2011).

6.3.3 Faculty Use of the Internet and SNSs in the University

There were also some reservations expressed by students interviewed in this research study about the extent to which their teachers use and apply digital technology in the university; for example, “Not all of them; only some teachers use technology in the classroom” (F5/ 12-12-2016). However, some interviewees were obviously confident about the faculty members’ experience in using digital technology in the classroom.

In the teachers’ interviews, the majority of the interviewees reported a low integration level of digital technologies in the classroom. The reasons behind the limited use of digital technology inside the classroom are mainly to do with the environment rather than the individual teacher. For example: –No, I do not use them. This is because of the lack of facilities in the university and weak infrastructure, and lack of knowledge from my side” (T4/ 25-12-2106). Another teacher commented, “No. Because of the large numbers of students and lack of technology facilities in the university, and, as a teacher, I was not encouraged by the university administration to use technology in the classroom” (T5/ 5-12-2017).

Recent research about the Libyan context of higher education institutes reported that the primary barrier to integrating technology effectively in the universities is that –teachers have little experience of modern educational methods which implement strategies to build skills and engage students in thinking and analysis or even in using technology” (Bukhatowa et al., 2010, p.4). Rhema and Miliszewaska (2010) also demonstrated that the level of educational technological knowledge and basic computer skills among faculty members are low, which leads to a delay in implementing technology in the classroom. In addition, in a study by Elshaikhi (2015), it was reported that the overall level of faculty members’
knowledge of ICTs in Benghazi University in Libya was not high, and that the integration of ICTs in teaching was poor. This is because Libyan faculty members did not receive — either enough or high quality pre-service and in-service technology professional development about how to use information technology” (Elshaikhi, 2015, p. 107).

Teachers lack training in both technology and instructional methods, and this leads to an unfamiliar teaching environment (Wright et al., 2009).

This research indicates that Libyan faculty members had a high level of confidence in using the Internet, technology and SNSs in their daily life, but weak use inside the classroom. For example, one faculty member stated, “Yes, but I lack the experience to use them in the classroom” (T5/ 5-1-2017), and, when they asked about their use of SNSs in the classroom, one teacher mentioned, “No, I do not use it inside the classroom, but outside the classroom, I use social media tools for advertising lectures or course information and to share information and news with students in English” (T1/ 12-12-2016). However, in respect of the use of the Internet and SNSs inside the classrooms and for English language learning purposes, the majority of teachers interviewed acknowledged the significant positive effects of SNSs in learning English, e.g. “It improves communication and language skills for learners” (T2/ 12-2-2016). One interviewee also reported that SNSs have the least misconceptions, “since it is used in proper way, its advantages are much more than its disadvantages” (T3/ 25-12-2016).

Various studies acknowledge the importance of the teacher's role in implementing technology and social media positively in the classroom.

Social media tools are an open resource, which also means they are open to uncensored public. It is educators’ responsibility to make sure this learning environment is protected for the best interest of student learning. It is also the responsibility of educators to train students and equip them with analytical and deep thinking skills during the process of using social media resources. Intelligent adoption of social media tools can engage students in interactive learning, which is the key to a successful education (Lui, 2010, p. 113).

Faculty members are considered the most significant factor affecting the implementation of a technology-based linguistic activity (Bancheri, 2006; Gruba & Hinkelman, 2012; Hirata, 2006).
Since it is very challenging for some instructors to use social media in the classrooms, therefore, certain factors that might support ICT integration in the classroom should be considered, such as teachers’ personal confidence, interests and willingness in using ICT in the classroom (Redmond, Albion and Maroulis, 2005).

International research has confirmed similar results about the challenges of implementing ICT in the university. In Korea, for example, it was found that most English teachers face difficulties using CALL in the classroom. The reasons behind not implementing ICT were limited class hours, technical issues related to poor Internet access and computer facilities (Shin and Son, 2007). Meanwhile, in the UK, Livingstone (2012) reports that, while "technologies can make learning more convenient, it requires considerable input of teacher training, preparation and production of appropriate materials for such learning also to become more effective” (p. 14).

Furthermore, in Turkey, Erişti, Kurt and Dindar (2012) found the following obstacles related to technological integration in the classroom. Such obstacles include

- the limited number of the staff to provide teachers with technological support at schools;
- inability to provide teachers with instant support at the exact time when necessary;
- lack of sub-structure;
- physical conditions;
- the quality of teachers' efficacy in technology use; and
- lack of sufficient amount of time in the process of becoming efficient in technology use increase the problems that teachers experience regarding technology use. Therefore, teachers cannot efficiently use technology in their courses (pp. 39-40).

As demonstrated by the findings gained in the current research, teachers state that they are willing to implement technology in their courses, but they encounter many challenges in using technology, such as the unavailability of the Internet in the university, a weak technological infrastructure, a lack of training, large numbers of students, a lack of time, a lack of university administrative support to use technology in the classroom, and these are all consistent with the research findings reported in the literature (Kim, 2002; Egbert, Paulus and Nakamichi, 2002; The General People’s Committee of Education, 2008; Bukhatowa, 2008; Rhema and Miliszewska, 2010; Wright et al., 2009; Roschelle et al., 2001). The teachers interviewed in this study reported that the chief barrier to utilising technology in the classroom was the lack of university administrative support to integrate technology in the curriculum. Even though teachers reported being highly confident in using technology
inside and outside the classroom, however, instructors were not completely comfortable with the technological implementation in the classroom, because of their belief that traditional pedagogical approaches are more efficient in covering the curriculum (Wood, Mueller, Willoughby, Specht, and Deyoung, 2005). Therefore, to use technology successfully, “administrators must allow teachers the opportunity to elaborate on and identify barriers in experiences and expectations as teachers integrate technology into classrooms” (Wood et al., 2005). In addition, to achieve higher educational quality, it would be better to focus on learners’ ICT needs and interests:

Students can be a very good consulting source because they are the experts and they have a better understanding of the tools. The future technology integration in education should focus on what students use instead of what the school wants them to use to guarantee maximum efficiency. When students become the stakeholders of their own learning, education will be truly revolutionized through the effective collaboration between educators and students (Liu, 2010, p. 113).

Interestingly, the findings of earlier studies show that teachers are willing to utilise technology in their teaching, particularly when making and supporting technological integration within the curriculum and making constant use of it (Georgina & Hosford, 2009; Chen & Chang, 2006; Dexter & Riedel, 2003); these are consistent with the findings gained in the current study.

6.3.4 Faculty Confidence in Applying Digital Technologies

Teachers interviewed in this study reported a high confidence level in using digital technology (see 5.3.2); however, they did not use digital technology in the classroom. This is because of some barriers they encounter while teaching. A recent study in the UAE reported that the main barrier to integrating digital technology effectively in the university was the lack of certainty concerning the effective use of the integration of digital technology among the faculty members (Schoepp, 2005, p. 10). This study also identified faculty members’ lack of experience in using basic technology for educational purposes, poor skills, and a lack of training and ICT facilities in the university (Schoepp, 2005; O'Dowd, 2011).
Ertmer (1999) suggests that there are two types of factors that may hinder attempts towards incorporating digital technologies in the classroom. The first factor refers to external barriers, which include training issues, support and access facilities. The teachers’ philosophy and beliefs about the teaching and learning methods are considered the second factor. Here, in this study, the major obstacles behind not implementing digital technologies in the classroom by the majority of Libyan teachers are external barriers such as the lack of facilities in the university, a weak infrastructure, a lack of time, and having large numbers of students in the classrooms. Only some teachers believed that they lacked the knowledge to incorporate technology in the classroom, and they thought that it was a difficult task. Other teachers believed that students are not interested in using technology for educational purposes. All of the reasons mentioned cause poor digital technological integration in the classroom.

Despite the barriers mentioned, the teachers interviewed reported a high level of confidence in using the Internet and digital technology in daily life, but not in the classroom. Teachers highly value the significance of digital technology for educational purposes. The extensive ECAR National Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2011, from the US, reported that “there is a strong correlation between the technologies that students value most and the technologies their instructors use – and use effectively – to teach, mentor, and communicate” (Dahlstrom et al., 2011, p. 4). Although Libyan teachers seem to highly value digital technology, they do not make extensive use of them in the classroom, and their actual usage of technology is low. However, to enable learning through technology and make learning more convenient, it requires extensive effort in terms of teacher training, preparation and the production of suitable materials for such learning to be very effective (Livingstone, 2012, p. 14).

Although teachers involved in this study were mostly confident in using a range of digital technologies, their actual use of these technologies in the classroom was low; for example, one teacher responded, “No [to digital technologies], because of [the] large numbers of students in the classroom and lack of technology facilities in the university, and, as a teacher, I was not encouraged by the university administration to use technology in the classroom” (T5/ 5-1-2017). Yeung et al., (2012) mention that “Although [...] teachers generally have a high level of confidence in using technology, their use is stronger for
personal purposes than for teaching purposes” (p. 1328). Various kinds of technology have been used worldwide for many careers; however, the actual application of digital technology in education is still less than optimal (Warschauer & Grimes, 2008). In Singapore, for example, school administrations have a very positive attitude towards the integration of technology in education, with a high score of 90 out of 100 (Koh & Lee, 2008); not all schools have a good ICT infrastructure and plans (Divaharan & Lim, 2010).

Because of the wide spread of digital technologies in the world, teachers today are expected to be able to integrate various ranges of digital technologies in their teaching (Graham, 2008; Roland, 2010; Todorova & Osburg, 2009). Therefore, it is important to encourage them, build up their teaching experience and enhance their technological abilities (Danwa & Wenbin, 2010). Mapuva (2009) has suggested that teachers need to be provided with confidence and improvement in skills through training courses to help them implement e-pedagogy in the classroom. Luck and Britten (2007), and Markee (2005), added that it is necessary to understand technology, its uses, functions and effectiveness in order to use it effectively. To achieve this, the involvement of academic expertise and support from educational developers experienced in e-learning and the curriculum is required (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010).

It can be surmised in this study that the reluctance to integrate digital technologies into education by faculty members is likely to be influenced by their poor skills in integrating them in education. These findings are reflected in similar research conducted by Egan and FitzGibbon (2010), which reported that some teachers do not seem to have a good mastery of technological applications for educational purposes despite having undergone intensive courses on how to implement technology in teaching. Yeung et al., (2012) claim that it may not be easy for faculty members to adopt comfortable risk-taking behaviours such as innovative use of technologies. In addition, Lim and Khin (2006) state that teachers show high reluctance levels regarding their ICT integrated pedagogies which were evaluated. Therefore, administrators should encourage faculty members to use ICTs in their teaching by improving and providing the necessary technological infrastructure in the universities, providing Internet access, computers and technical support (Elshaikhi, 2015).
6.4 Chapter Summary

In summary, we can see that learners documented a high level of access to, and use of, digital technologies that are widely spread and available in Libya, and which are used frequently, but not at an advanced level by the majority of Libyan university students in this research. Although it appears that the Internet and digital technologies were highly available and widespread in Libya, the findings reported that students encounter several access problems when using the Internet and digital technologies in the university. The main problem of using digital technologies in Libyan universities is a weak Internet connection, which makes it difficult to find information and download articles related to the students’ studies. Furthermore, although faculty members in Sabratha University illustrated a high confidence level in using digital technologies, they do not use them in the classrooms or for actual teaching purposes.

A major finding in this study was the high level of confidence and skill level reported by Sabratha University students with regard to digital technologies. The majority of students rated themselves as having good or excellent skills and confidence in using digital technologies (e.g. SNSs, games, mobile phones and searching websites related to academic purposes). A large number of Libyan students in this study appeared to be enthusiastic users of digital technologies for various purposes. It can be concluded that Libyan university students highly value the Internet and the use of digital technologies in their lives. The findings from this research revealed considerably higher use of different social media platforms; significantly, Facebook is ranked as number one among Libyan university students. Both genders reported similar levels of confidence, skill and use of digital technologies. They acknowledged that SNSs assist them in finding information related to their study and ease communication between their colleagues and teachers to get feedback. Learners think that SNSs play an essential role in promoting autonomous language learning.

The results and the main findings will be discussed in relation to the research questions in chapter 7.
CHAPTER 7- CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Twenty years ago it was said that computers were the key to the future; the future is now and in active motion. If the Libyan educational system does not remain active and in motion, Libya’s future as a people will become stagnant (Elshaikhi, 2015, p. 3).

This concluding chapter will discuss the major findings of this research project. It will also identify the perceived limitations of the study, implications for future studies and recommendations for further research about the future integration of digital technologies within undergraduate education in Libya.

To begin the chapter, the main findings are summarised and discussed according to the results achieved from the participants. Following this, the limitations of the current study will be discussed as well, and the directions for future research in the same field of study will be addressed.

7.1 Summary of the Thesis

This research study addressed the role of social media as an autonomous English language learning tool among Libyan university students. The main objective of this study was to answer the research questions, which we will now revisit briefly:

- What is the role of social media as an autonomous tool for English language learning in Libyan universities? (Primary question 1)
- To what extent do Sabratha University students access and use social networking sites (SNSs)? (Sub-question 1)
- To what extent do Sabratha University students regard themselves as skilful and confident in their use of SNSs as an autonomous learning tool? (Sub-question 2)
- Which social media are preferred by Sabratha University students to improve their English language progress? (Sub-question 3)
- How do students think of SNSs as a means of English language learning? (Sub-question 4)
Are there particular factors that are perceived to impact on the desire and ability of Sabratha University students to utilise social media (Sub-question 5), such as:

a) the availability of, and unrestricted access to, social media within society in general, and specifically within the university (Sub-question 5a)

b) the use of information technology and social media by faculty members at Sabratha University in the classroom (Sub-question 5b)

This doctoral dissertation discussed major themes related to learners’ use of, and access to, digital technologies (Sub-question 1). The data analysis indicated that Libyan learners had a high level of access to, and use of, digital technologies that are available in Libya. Despite the availability of digital technologies in Libya, learners encounter several problems when accessing digital technologies, particularly in the university (Sub-question 5a). As reported by the majority of the students, a poor Internet connection is the main obstacle that made it difficult accessing or using digital technologies. The poor Internet speed made it difficult for students to find information or download articles related to their studies. Faculty members reported a high level of confidence in using digital technologies for daily personal use, but not for educational purposes or inside the classroom (Sub-question 5b).

Despite the obstacles reported in the previous chapter about the utilisation of digital technologies by EFL learners, students also reported a high level of confidence and skill in using digital technologies (Sub-question 2). Data analysis showed that the majority of Libyan students rated themselves as having good or excellent skills and confidence in using digital technologies (e.g. SNSs, games, mobile phones and searching websites related to academic purposes), and for a variety of purposes. Libyan university students appear to highly value the Internet and social media in their lives. Learners reported significantly high use of a range of social media platforms; unsurprisingly, Facebook was ranked the top social media platform used among Libyan university students (Sub-question 3). Despite the poor Internet speed in Libya, students reported that SNSs facilitated them in finding information related to their study and enabling them to communicate with their colleagues and teachers; for example, in order to get feedback. The findings indicate that SNSs play an essential role in promoting autonomous and informal language learning (Sub-question 4). The results of the study show that students are highly motivated, and also pointed to clear correlations between the SNSs students used and English language learning. Lastly, faculty members’
guidance and support were also considered one of the significant factors affecting positive implementation of a technology-based linguistic activity and online tasks. English language teachers in Libyan universities also appear to play a vital role in providing students with a variety of means to work autonomously and in supporting the integration of digital technologies in the classroom for reliable online interaction.

7.2 Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of the survey data, diaries and interview responses indicates that Libyan EFL students in the current study experienced excellent access to broadband Internet and social media using different technologies, such as mobile phones, in all aspects of their daily lives. Although the technological infrastructure in Libya is poor compared to more developed countries, the majority of Libyan students reported frequent use of, and access to, SNSs, for various purposes (Sub-question 1).

Digital device ownership has spread widely among university-level students as a result of the need to access the Internet and social media. Internet access is available to the majority of students, either at home or at the university, and they access the Internet using a mobile phone. This high level of connectivity and ownership of digital technologies by most Libyan students, however, cannot be seen as a sophisticated or explicitly pedagogical use of these technologies. This study concludes that Libyan university students’ engagement with, and use of, the Internet and social media was at basic rather than advanced level, despite their extensive ownership and use of a range of digital technology gadgets.

The results indicate that students do not rely on search engines to find information related to their academic needs, and most activities undertaken were basic activities, such as contacting people, using social networking sites or using the Internet to search for some information. Nonetheless, in spite of the unsophisticated use of digital technologies by the majority of Libyan University students, students in this study reported a high level of self-perceived confidence and skill when using most of the digital technologies (Sub-question 2).

In this research, it was noted that a variety of SNSs were used extensively by the university students. According to the data, Facebook is the most popular online platform among Libyan university students. Although it is considered a social tool rather than a learning tool, Libyan university students do use it to find information related to their study, and they
believe that SNSs ease communication between their peers and teachers as a means to get feedback. Since SNSs (e.g. Facebook) can be accessed worldwide, and users can post and share their ideas, thoughts and news, language learners believe that its use can improve their English proficiency and get better grades in the university (Sub-question 3). The data analysis confirmed that Libyan university students highly value the importance of SNSs as a means to improve their English language skills (Sub-question 4).

According to the participants, Internet and digital technologies were highly available in the university and in their homes. However, they reported several access problems while using the Internet and digital technologies in the university. The chief problem is infrastructural, namely a poor Internet connection, which makes it difficult to find information and download articles related to their academic studies (Sub-question 5a).

Additional infrastructural, institutional and cultural factors – including teachers’ poor ICT experience of modern educational methods, the low level of technological knowledge and basic computer skills in integrating digital technologies in the classroom, a lack of teacher training in educational technology gadgets, limited class hours and poor Internet access – are likely to delay the implementation of digital technologies inside the classroom (Sub-question 5b). According to the English teachers, integrating the Internet and SNSs in the classroom have significant positive effects on learning English; however, from their and their students’ reported practices, it would appear that they do not implement the use of such tools in their teaching.

The final issue addressed in this dissertation was the role that social media can play as a tool for autonomous English language learning in Libya (Primary Question 1). As stated above, Libyan university students value social media and technology highly. SNSs contribute notably in promoting an immense amount of materials that facilitate language learning autonomy (see Figure 7.1). The data in the results indicate a much stronger trend towards undirected autonomous learning on the part of students, as a by-product of using social media, than directed autonomous learning, which is lacking in the current context. The goal of any future development could be to direct the very positive attitudes and undirected learning towards more structured autonomous learning using social media platforms.
7.3 Limitations of the Study

Some limitations relate to the context of the study – i.e. having to conduct it in the current context of Libya, and with particular time and resource restraints – while others relate to the nature of the study, its design and implementation. One major limitation was the lack of opportunities for the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews with both teachers and students, because the study was conducted at the end of the academic semester. Therefore, the researcher was able only to collect the questionnaires and diaries, and planned to arrange for interviews in the following semester, and after analysing the questionnaires and diary results.

In addition, in terms of design and implementation, the study used a survey method, and the data are exclusively self-reported. Such data inevitably need to be treated cautiously. This study also demonstrates some restrictions in terms of the generalisation of results, because the study sample was limited to first- and fourth-year students only, rather than those from all university levels or different disciplines. Furthermore, the study sample was restricted to the English Department students and teachers.
7.4 Directions for Further Research

This section suggests some recommendations to any researcher aiming to conduct future research within the Libyan, or another comparable, EFL context. Despite the insights and results gained from both EFL students and teachers in relation to using social media and technologies in the Libyan university context, much remains to be investigated in the field of integrating social media platforms and technology for autonomous language learning in the Libyan context. Despite the stated limitations, the present study suggests the following recommendations for future research:

- In this study, the participants were from the first and fourth academic year at the same university, Sabratah University. I would recommend expanding the same study with a larger number of students from second and third academic years, and from different institutions.
- The teacher interview participants involved five EFL teachers in the English Department at Sabratha University. I think if the interview involved a larger sample, it could help to gain better and deeper results in any future research.
- In order to achieve better results, I suggest conducting a new study with different groups from different universities. The study should not be limited to one group.
- The present study focused on using questionnaires, diaries and interviews as methods of data collection. I suggest that it would be an interesting experience to replicate this research study using ethnographic research, in order to explore the practices in greater depth.
- Another possible limitation in this study is the languages that users dealing with on SNSs are mainly written (not spoken) and this would be something to look at in future studies.
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Appendix- A

Dear Participant,
My name is Sana Hussein, currently a PhD student at the School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics/ Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Limerick/ Ireland. I am working on a thesis about social media as an autonomous English Language learning tool, and I would like to investigate the ways social media and Internet can assist to learn English language.

Therefore, you are invited to participate in a PhD questionnaire of a research study at the University of Limerick. This research project entitled –Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool among Foreign Language Learners in Libya: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges‖. The purpose of this research study is to examine the students’ use of social media as an autonomous learning tool of English, its advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and challenges.

This questionnaire is divided to three main parts. It constructs of 24 different questions. Participants have to tick (✓) the suitable answer for them. Any further details or comments can be added in question 24.

1. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes.
2. The participation in this project is voluntary.
3. Confidentiality in this questionnaire is guaranteed.
4. You have the right to withdraw your contribution from the project at any time.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference: 2016-02-14-AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, AHSS Faculty Office, University of Limerick, Tel: 00353- 61 202286, Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

Yours faithfully,

Sana Hussein, School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics, University of Limerick, Limerick.
Office: F145. Email: (Sana.hussein@ul.ie)

Supervised by: Prof. Helen Kelly Holmes, Email: Helen.Kelly.Holmes@ul.ie
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics
Consent Form

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in this research project entitled
―Social Media as an English Language Learning among Foreign Language Learners in
Libya: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges‖.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it,
  and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge
  of how the information collected will be used.
- I fully understand that my participation in the research is voluntary.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw from completing this questionnaire any
  time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality and anonymity in terms of my participation
  and personal details.

_______________________                                __________________________
Signature of participant                                                                Date
Questionnaire

Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool among Foreign Language Learners in Libya: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges

Name (optional): __________________
Sex: __________________
Age: ___________________
Academic year of study: ___________

Part 1. Background information

Please tick (✓) the answer of your choice.

Question 1: How long have you been studying English as a foreign language?

( ) 1-3 years
( ) 4-6 years
( ) More than 6 years

Question 2: How long have you been using Internet?

( ) 0-1 years
( ) 2-3 years
( ) 3-4 years
( ) More than 5 years
Question 3: How long have you been using Social Networking Sites?

( ) 0-1 years
( ) 2-3 years
( ) 4-5 years
( ) More than 5 years.

Question 4: What social media sites do you use?

( ) Facebook
( ) Twitter
( ) YouTube
( ) Weblogs
( ) Others: ......................................

Question 5: How many social media sites do you use?

( ) 1
( ) 2
( ) 3
( ) More than 3

Question 6: How much time do you spend on social media sites per day?

( ) Less than one hour
( ) 1 hour
( ) 2 hours
( ) 3 hours
( ) Others: .....................

**Question 7:** Do you access social media sites through your mobile phone?

( ) Yes

( ) No

**Question 8:** which social networking sites do you prefer to use?

( ) Facebook

( ) Twitter

( ) Weblogs

( ) Others: ..................

**Question 9:** What language do you use when on social media?

( ) Arabic

( ) English

( ) Mixture

( ) Others: ..................

**Question 10:** What language would you prefer to use when on social media?

( ) Arabic

( ) English

( ) Mixture

( ) Others: ..................

---

**Part 2. Availability of Internet and technology**
Question 11: What is your own level of access to the Internet?
( ) No access

( ) limited access time

( ) Access is available by sharing the Internet connection with others

( ) Unlimited access using my own computer and mobile phone

Question 12: Do you access the Internet using wireless?
( ) Yes

( ) No

( ) Not sure

Question 13: What type of Internet access do you have at home?
( ) No access

( ) broadband Internet access (DSL or cable available at all times)

( ) ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network)

( ) Not sure

Question 14: How many cell phones do you use?
( ) 0

( ) 1

( ) 2

( ) 3 or more

Question 15: Please describe the cell phone you use:
( ) I do not have a cell phone

( ) A basic cell phone for calls and messaging only

( ) A "smart" cell phone with Internet connection

( ) Not sure
Part 3. Using Internet and technology

Tick (✓) one box for each item

Question 16: How much do you agree with the following statements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students use Internet and social media to achieve academic purposes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are special computer rooms with Internet access at my university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students often use computers and Internet to do presentations and lessons at the university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers often use computers/Internet in classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are computers and fast/wireless Internet connection in the library and the university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 17: How often have you used computer technology over the past 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Few times per year</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To create presentations (e.g. PowerPoint) or write homework (e.g. Word)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To play music (e.g. CD/downloaded) without accessing the Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To play games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create or watch movies (e.g. iMovie or Movie maker)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 18: How often have you used Internet technology over the past 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Few times per year</th>
<th>daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>monthly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send and receive E-mails</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For social networking (e.g. Twitter, Facebook chatting)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look up references for your study (e.g. online dictionary, library resources)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To download podcasts (e.g. using iTunes), or look at videos or photos files (e.g. using YouTube)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To read or comment on other people's SNSs (e.g. Facebook, blogs or twitter)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create your own blog, Facebook or twitter account</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To buy or sell things (e.g. Amazon and eBay)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To download or upload podcasts (e.g. using iTunes), or SEARCH video or photo files (e.g. using YouTube, Picasa)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 19: How skilful and confident are you when using these technologies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using computers to play games, upload and download information, and watch movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet to watch movies, read news, use social networking, play games, and Emails</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet to find information related to your academic purposes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet to participate in online activities and communicate with others (e.g. sharing photos, texts, and videos)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using cell phones to watch movies, listen to music, read news, use social networking (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Weblogs) and play games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a cell phone to search websites related to your academic purposes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 20: How important is each of the following for finding information related to your academic study?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using electronic journals (e.g. science direct / ERIC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 21: What are the most important purposes of using Internet for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Blogs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding some information related to your study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>create content (e.g. creating web sites, blogs, and wikis)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World-wide access to news and related websites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 22: Rate each of the following for the importance of using social media and Internet in your studies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal use</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They help me get higher grades in my subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They make learning more joyful and interesting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They facilitate communication with teachers and students and make it much easier to get feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They make it easier to find information related to study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They give me an opportunity for future employment and to make new friendship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They help improve my technology skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 23: How helpful do you feel that using social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and weblogs) is to you in improving your English skills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely not helpful</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>A little helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Extremely helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Question 24: If you have any further comments related to the use of social media as a mean to learn English language, please write them down.

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
If you wish to participate in an interview, please add your name, phone number or email address to contact you.

Name: ..................

Phone: ..................

Email: ..................

Note: These personal details will be separated from the questionnaire and will be saved in secure place.
Appendix- B

My name is Sana Hussein, currently a PhD student at the School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics/ Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Limerick/ Ireland. I am working on a thesis about social media as an English language learning tool among foreign language learners in Libya, and I would like to investigate the ways social media and Internet can assist to learn English language.

You are invited to participate in a PhD Interview of a research study at the University of Limerick. The purpose of this research study is to examine the students’ use of social media as an autonomous learning tool of English among foreign language learners in Libya, its advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and challenges.

You are asked to fill out a diary form about your use of social media and Web-based activities for two days. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Any information that you give will be treated anonymously and confidentially.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference: 2016-02-14-AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

AHSS Faculty Office, University of Limerick, Tel: +353 61 202286, Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Sana Hussein, School of Modern Languages, and Applied Linguistics, University of Limerick, Ireland, Email: Sana.Hussein@ul.ie

Supervised by: Prof. Helen Kelly Holmes, Email: Helen.Kelly.Holmes@ul.ie
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics

Consent Form:

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in this research project entitled
―Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool among Foreign Language Learners in Libya: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges‖.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I fully understand that my participation in the research is voluntary.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw from completing the diary at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of participant                                                                Date
INTERVIEW DIARY

1) Please provide the following information:

Age:  Sex: M [ ] F [ ]  Academic level:  First year [ ] Forth year [ ]

2) What languages do you know well/ prefer to use on the social media?

..........................................................................................................................

3) Please fill out the table below with information about your use and access of social media for two days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY/DATE</th>
<th>TIME OF DAY</th>
<th>HOW LONG IN MINUTES</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>LANGUAGE(S)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics

Information Sheet

Appendix- C

My name is Sana Hussein, currently a PhD student at the School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics/ Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Limerick/ Ireland. I am working on a thesis about social media as an English language learning tool among foreign language learners in Libya, and I would like to investigate the ways social media and Internet can assist to learn English language.

You are invited to participate in a PhD Interview of a research study at the University of Limerick. The purpose of this research study is to examine the students’ use of social media as an autonomous English language learning tool among foreign language learners in Libya, its advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and challenges.

This interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and will take approximately (30 min). The outcome of the study will provide rich information about the students’ experience and use of SNSs. This research can contribute to a future development in integrating Social Media in the education system.

Before meeting for the interview, you are going to fill out a diary form about your use of social media and Web-based activities for two days. Afterwards, you are going to meet the researcher for the interview. This interview consists of 11 questions. As you may be asked to answer questions on the interview, the interview will be recorded (digital recorder). All information provided by you will be kept confidential and anonymised at all times.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference: 2016-02-14-AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
AHSS Faculty Office, University of Limerick
Tel: +353 61 202286, Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

Yours sincerely,
Sana Hussein, Postgraduate Researcher, School of Modern Languages, and Applied Linguistics, University of Limerick, Ireland, Email: Sana.Hussein@ul.ie
Supervised by: Prof. Helen Kelly Holmes, Email: Helen.Kelly.Holmes@ul.ie
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics

Consent Form:

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in this research project entitled “Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool among Foreign Language Learners in Libya: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges”.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I am also aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (audio digital recorder) and I agree to this. However, the recording can be stopped once I feel uncomfortable. I am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is completed.
- I fully understand that my participation in the research is voluntary.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.

__________________________________  __________________________
Signature of participant                      Date
Interview Questions for Students

Internet, Technology, and Social Media

1) Do you have a ‘smart’ phone? If yes, what do you use it for?

2) Do you think that Internet is important in your life and future? Why?

3) Do you use the Internet for academic purposes?

4) Do you use social media? What types of social media have you used mainly for academic purposes? Explain.

5) Do your teachers use technology in the classroom? If yes, what type? And how?

6) Do you think that your teachers are as good at using the Internet/technology in the classroom?

7) What kind of problems do you have when using social media for academic purposes? If yes, can these problems be overcome and how?

8) Do you like using social media and Internet in/ outside the classroom to learn English language?

9) In your opinion, what are the main advantages of using social media to learn English?

10) In your opinion, what are the main disadvantages of using social media to learn English?

11) Do you think that using social media with friends/ outside the classroom helps improve your English language learning?
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics
Information Sheet

Appendix- D

My name is Sana Hussein, currently a PhD student at the School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics/ Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Limerick/ Ireland. I am working on a thesis about social media as an English language learning tool, and I would like to investigate the ways social media and Internet can assist to learn English language.

You are invited to participate in a PhD Interview of a research study at the University of Limerick. The purpose of this research instrument is to examine the teachers’ use of social media as an English Language learning tool among foreign language learners in Libya, its advantages, disadvantages, opportunities and challenges.

This interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and will take approximately (30 min). The outcome of the study will provide rich information about the students' experience and use of SNSs. This research can contribute to a future development in integrating Social Media in the education system.

The researcher is going to call you through Viber or Messenger to conduct the interview. This interview consists of 15 questions. As you may be asked to answer questions on the interview, the interview will be recorded (using digital recorder). All information provided by you will be kept confidential and anonymised at all times.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (reference: 2016-02-14-AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, AHSS Faculty Office, University of Limerick, Tel: +353 61 202286, Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

Yours sincerely,

Sana Hussein, Postgraduate Researcher, University of Limerick, Ireland, Email: Sana.Hussein@ul.ie

Supervised by: Prof. Helen Kelly Holmes, Email: Helen.Kelly.Holmes@ul.ie
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics

Consent Form:
I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in this research project entitled
―Social Media as an English Language Learning Tool among Foreign Language Learners in
Libya: A Study of Opportunities and Challenges‖.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it
  and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge
  of how the information collected will be used.
- I am also aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (audio digital
  recorder) and I agree to this. However, the recording can be stopped once I feel
  uncomfortable. I am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once
  the study is completed.
- I fully understand that my participation in the research is voluntary.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without
  having to explain or give a reason.
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal
details.

___________________________                                        __________________________
Signature of participant                                                        Date
Interview Questions for Teachers

Internet, Technology, and Social Media

1) What is your educational level?

2) Do you have any certificates in teaching English?

3) How long have you been teaching English?

4) Do you use technology and social media in the classroom? If so, how?

5) How often do you use SSNs and technology?

6) How long have you been using social media?

7) What are your purposes of using SNSs?

8) Do you use social media to interact with your students?

9) Do you use SNSs for educational and academic purposes?

10) Do you think that you are as good at using the Internet/technology in the classroom?

11) Do you use social media in the classroom? What types of social media do you use? Explain.

12) Do you think that Internet and technology are integrated/ supported enough in the university?

13) What roles do you think SNSs can play in developing English language education?

14) In your opinion, what are the main advantages of using social media to learn English in the classroom?

15) In your opinion, what are the main disadvantages of using social media to learn English in the classroom?
Appendix - E

To whom it may concern,

Ref: Sana Bashir Hussein

This is to confirm that Ms. Sana Bashir Hussein has been approved to conduct her fieldwork at the English department at Subratha College of Arts as a part of her study as requested.

This letter has been given to her upon her request.

Yours faithfully,

Ahmed A Ashibani
Head of the English Department – Sabrata

Email: ahmedsabrata@yahoo.com
Tel: 00218- 922491458
Appendix- F

To whom it may concern,

Ref: Sana Bashir Hussein

With reference to the request of Ms. Sana Hussein to conduct fieldwork as a part of her PhD studies at the English Language department, Subratha College of Arts, Subratha, Libya. SCAS hereby certify that the request is completely approved and the researcher has the permission to contact students and conduct her study. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Ali Kreir

Dean of Subratha College of Arts

Tel: 00218- 928354824