**Utilizing Facebook in Language Classrooms: Social Constructivist and Affective Filter Approaches**

**Ahdab A. Saaty**

Department of English Language King Abdulaziz University
Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
&
Composition and TESOL Program
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA
USA

**Abstract**
Interaction is a fundamental process in any learning environment for knowledge construction. However, not every interaction leads to increased or meaningful learning. When interaction influences learners' meaning-making, we can say that interaction is meaningful. Facebook, as an emerging social network educational tool, has been increasingly implemented in second/foreign language classrooms. This article aims to answer the following question: How can social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis re-conceptualize meaningful, collaborative online interaction through Facebook in second/foreign language settings? To explore the current state of research and inform future studies, this article reviews previous research on the use of Facebook in second/foreign language classes. All articles were accessed using Google Scholar, ERIC, and ProQuest databases. The researcher examines empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals from 2007 to 2014. This article argues that social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis can help to illustrate the ways that Facebook as an educational tool, can enhance collaborative learning and meaningful interactions in second/foreign language settings. The researcher provides pedagogical implications of Facebook, as a useful and meaningful learning environment for language learners that could support, enhance, and strengthen their learning process. The researcher also addresses potential research directions for Facebook use in second/foreign language settings.
*Keywords:* collaborative learning, Facebook, language learning, meaningful literacy, online interaction

**Introduction**

Interaction is an essential ingredient in any learning process; however, not all interactions are meaningful or lead to increased learning. The meaning of "meaningful" interaction is strongly related to the development of a particular learning environment. Today, the growth and popularity of online social networks introduces a new world of interaction and collaboration in language learning education. Many individuals around the world are connected with each other in creating, collaborating, and increasing their knowledge through the Internet. Despite the importance of online social networks in providing a meaningful learning environment, this article mainly focuses on online interaction through Facebook as an educational tool. The conceptual background that is used to examine meaningful learning in this particular online ecology constitute the social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis.

Social networks are changing the way people interact, and that inherently changes interaction in classroom environments. Research suggests that online interaction influences learners' meaning-making and increases learning outcomes. Online interaction includes responding, negotiating internally and socially, arguing, adding ideas, and offering perspectives with collaborators while working on a task. As a perspective of social constructivist theory, learners construct knowledge when interacting in an educational environment that provides collaborative activities. Muirhead & Juwah (2004) described interaction as "a dialogue or discourse or event between two or more participants and objects which occurs synchronously and/or asynchronously mediated by response or feedback and interfaced by technology" (p. 13). Thus, learners' affective filters, which explain the emotional variables associated with the success or failure of acquiring a language, are needed to be reduced in a learning environment. Indeed, this partially characterizes what online interaction through Facebook typically looks like. In addition, working collaboratively in an online learning environment would assist learners to be motivated to become active participants in their own learning process. This will also enable learners to construct knowledge by expressing themselves through drawing on their experiences, emotions, and their feelings, all of which lead to meaningful learning. Moreover, Hirumi (2002) mentioned how emphasizing the quality of interaction on learning can lead to meaningful interaction then to meaningful learning. Hirumi (2002) stated that meaningful interaction is not just sharing personal opinions; rather the interaction must stimulate the learners' intellectual curiosity, engage learners in productive instructional activities and practices, and directly influence their learning.

There are various forms of interaction in learning environments. These varied forms are based upon the participants' level of involvement in a specific learning opportunity, such as in a university course or in a language learning course, and the objects of interaction, such as other participants or content materials. More specifically, meaningful interaction should include responding to peers, negotiating and arguing with peers, adding ideas, and offering alternative perspectives in real life tasks. Today, technology provides new potential channels for interaction, especially in education. Online interaction offers new ways for meaning making and emerges modes of communication that suggest a significant change, and demand fresh thinking about different educational settings. In addition, the nature of interaction also depends on the contexts in which interaction occurs, whether it is a face-to-face interaction, as in traditional physical classrooms, or at distance settings, as in social networks.

This article presents Facebook as a useful and meaningful learning environment that could support, enhance, and strengthen learners' language learning process. In second/foreign language learning classrooms, instructors should use meaningful online interaction where learners can work collaboratively in a non-threatening environment. Even though research has been surfing about utilizing social networks in general, and Facebook in particular, this article pushes the research further. It aims to answer the following question: How can social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis re-conceptualize meaningful, collaborative online interaction through Facebook in second/foreign language settings?

**Methodology**

As this theoretical article focuses on applying social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis to using Facebook as an emerging educational technology tool in second/foreign language classes, academic and empirical research articles were selected for review. The researcher searched Google Scholar, ERIC, and ProQuest databases with keywords, such as Facebook, meaningful interaction, social interaction, collaborative learning, language learning, and second/foreign language classes. The researcher found a lot of related articles addressing the use of Facebook in language learning educational settings, including empirical studies and non-empirical studies. The researcher examined empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals on using Facebook in second/foreign language classes, dated from 2007 to 2014. Previous research was positively reported on using Facebook as an educational tool to enhance learners' collaborative learning and meaningful interactions, and this is aligned with social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis.

Since the purpose of this article is to provide implications for future research on the use of Facebook in second/foreign language classes with a lens of social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis, the researcher is interested in empirical research about using Facebook in second/foreign language classes. The researcher closely examined empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals, such as *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, CALICO Journal*, *Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning,* and *The Internet and Higher Education*. However, this does not preclude the value of non-empirical studies, which provide theoretical insights and/or suggest pedagogical implications. This article evidences that social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis can help illustrate the ways that Facebook, as an educational tool, can enhance collaborative learning and meaningful interactions in second/foreign language settings.

**Application of Facebook in Language Learning Contexts**

As this article focuses on implementing Facebook as a language learning tool, this section sheds light on its general usage in language learning contexts and the common practice of the Group feature in Facebook, in particular. Before explaining the application of Facebook as a social network site in language learning contexts and environments, an overview about it is appreciated. In 2004, Zuckerberg established Facebook, which today is considered one of the most popular platforms for online social networking. Facebook is defined as, "a social utility that helps people share information and communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and coworkers" (Facebook.com). By 2007, Facebook was reported to have more than 21 million registered users, generating 1.6 million page views each day (Mazman & Usluel, 2010).

Facebook enables users to interact with people whom they already know offline or to meet new people online. Facebook is a place where people can meet, interact, swap photos, videos, and other information. Facebook also helps a user to connect with friends, family, and coworkers. Facebook features provide a variety of means for its members to communicate and interact with each other to stay connected. Most features and activities are purely social, such as confirming friends and communicating with friends through writing on friends' walls or sending messages. Other features and activities are considered more formal, like joining and participating on Groups without being friends of other group members.

The Groups function is the most popular Facebook feature, where application of Facebook in language learning contexts can happen. Facebook Groups "are dedicated spaces where [a member] can share updates, photos or documents and message other group members" (Facebook.com). Groups make it easy for specific sets of people to connect. Joining Groups on Facebook, in which members can share similar interests, is a popular feature that can be useful as an online educational community to support language learners. Facebook members can join Groups that already exist or create new Groups based on their interests. Any member can create a group that can be open for any Facebook user or can restrict it to a selected audience. Therefore, it is very simple for an instructor to create a group associated with a particular course for his or her students. A group can be limited to members that have been invited by the course instructor only. Having a closed-group for a course creates an intimacy for students to write and share knowledge in a non-threatening educational environment. Students will then feel motivated then to contribute on a Facebook Group if they subsequently receive support and help from their peers. In this regard, a good number of research studies (Ekoc, 2014; Guamán, 2012; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Mazman & Usluel, 2010) examined utilizing Facebook Groups as an educational tool in second/foreign language learning settings, as will be discussed throughout the paper.

A sense of community is necessary to sustain a dynamic and meaningful educational experience overtime. Facebook is a valuable asset to promote a higher level of thinking, and it helps in the construction of knowledge. Learners' interactions in Facebook, such as discussions in Groups, can facilitate a learner-centered approach to teaching, providing learners with opportunities to practice and learn knowledge and skills in a collaborative and encouraging environment. The traditional face-to-face classroom is a controlled communication environment where instructors and learners are required to be in the classroom at the same time for interaction to happen. However, in Facebook, instructors can communicate with learners outside of the controlled communication environment, classrooms (Ekoc, 2014). Facebook serves as a tool for learners as well as for instructors to connect, befriend and communicate with each other to extend the communicative activities of the traditional physical classroom to a virtual form (Wang et al., 2013). Godwin-Jones (2008) claimed that Facebook is a tool "that enhances communication and human interaction and can potentially be harnessed for language learning" (p. 7). In Facebook, learners can communicate and interact with each other at their own pace and whenever it is convenient to them. Learners can also take time to consider comments and responses to write, rather than having to act and react on the spot, as in the physical classroom. Some studies have concluded that a Facebook-supported educational community can offer a variety of opportunities for interpretive language use, cultural exploration and exposure, and rapport building (Mills, 2011). Also, Mitchell's (2012) study provided positive social impacts of using Facebook in language learning classes. Findings indicated that learners successfully

communicated with existing friends, learned English, and learned about the American culture through Facebook.

Moreover, interaction in Facebook Groups differs from traditional classroom writing settings in many ways. In traditional classrooms, the learner is the writing party and the instructor is the assisting party. In Facebook Groups, learners and their instructors can have informal interactions, besides learners' interactions with their peers. Learners can be more engaged in the learning process as active learners and collaborators. Authority will be distributed between the instructor and the learners, and learners will invest more in the learning process. (Ekoc, 2014). Also, Facebook could serve as an extended space for meaningful language learning activities when it is implemented in school practices. Lantaz-Andersson et al. (2013) studied how learners frame their interaction and accomplish tasks on Facebook Group when used in school contexts. In the Facebook Group, the study examined the nature of the interactions and investigations to know how the learners accomplished the communication upon the social constructivist perspective. The researchers followed and logged the learners' interactions in a closed Facebook Group, and they analyzed their activities as social practices. The results indicated that Facebook generated an extended space for collaborative language learning activities in educational contexts, where learners combine their school subject with their communicative use of language in their daily life. This showed that when learners are in command and take the space as theirs, they would use the target language for more meaningful and engaging interactions beyond regular school tasks. Thus, the learners' use of language will be more personal, they will process the target language, and make it their own, and learners will bend the language to their will.

One of the primary needs of language learners is to gain the opportunity to use the target language outside the classroom environment. Facebook Groups usage can help learners to socialize with other group members, to better express themselves, and to shape their social identity. Facebook Groups also lead to continuance developing and strengthening relationships with others. Undoubtedly, being a group member will enhance the sense of belonging, which is very important for language learners. In addition, such closed-groups will offer a constructive educational experience for learners while maintaining privacy and safety (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Thus, Facebook Group pages can be commonly used as an educational tool, inside and outside classrooms, for language learning (Ekoc, 2014; Guamán, 2012; Lantz-Andersson et at., 2013; Mazman & Usluel, 2010).

However, although social networks, such as Facbook, are not complete learning environments, they are widely used for supporting learning. Social networks can be used to promote motivation, socialization, discussion, and sharing resources for language learners, as well as making learning the target language meaningful for them. Therefore, more and more instructors are implementing Facebook usage in classrooms, especially using closed Facebook Groups to facilitate learning inside and outside classes (Ekoc, 2014; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Mazman & Usluel, 2010). Thus, this article argues that Facebook can act as an adequate educational tool for language learning in second/foreign language classroom settings.

**Meaningful Literacy Learning**

As this article focuses on utilizing Facebook as a meaningful online interaction tool, this section will highlight the meaningful literacy learning approach to define meaningful literacy and examine how Facebook can be used to encourage meaningful literacy in the second/foreign language classroom. As learning a language may be a life changing event, it is an event that involves the learner as a human being, rather than just focusing on intellectual abilities. As Hanauer (2012) stated, "… human beings are characterized by their ability to make sense of themselves and their surroundings" (p.107). Learning a language involves the learner and his or her relation to the world. Thus, to reposition and re-contextualize language learning, it has to entail a process where "the language learner's memory, experiences, feelings, beliefs, history and social environment are the context of the language use" (Hanauer, 2012, p. 109). Moreover, the moment when a language learner can express thoughts and experiences in a second language is very powerful. It can change the learner's perception of the new language as a tool to express personal expressions, and as a language that they own and use (Hanauer, 2012).

The word "meaning" is used widely in the learning process. Therefore, making the language learning process meaningful involves understanding world and making sense of it. Also, making the language learning process meaningful integrates one's personal history and future actions, more than just one's intellectual activities. Hanauer (2012) stated that to understand and to make sense of the world "… is a holistic activity that defines the self at the moment of understanding and a perspective and orientation towards the world" (p. 107). Kramsch (2009) explained that learning a language has many ramifications in how learners perceive their subjectivities as a result of knowing and learning about the world of bilingualism. Thus, learning a language involves the human being as a whole, including learners' experiences and emotions, beyond just intellectual abilities. However, the process of learning a language in classrooms is decontextualized. Widdowson (1998) has argued that language can only be pragmatically real, and thus, meaningful if it is reconnected and bonded with context of the same kind. Therefore, the real challenge in the language classroom is to provide an environment for learners where language is contrived to be engaged with and learned from, in which learners are at the center of the language learning process. Widdowson (1998) and Hanauer (2012) clarified that a major challenge in teaching a language is to find a way to make learning the language personally contextualized, and thus, meaningful for learners.

The language learning experience engages learners cognitively, emotionally, and morally (Kramsch, 2009). In other words, learning a language is an emotional experience, in addition to being a cognitive process. Learning a language is embodied individually in the physical, emotional and intellectual life of the language learner. Reid (2011) reported that as learners in the closed Facebook group expressed themselves, they drew on their diversity, identity, and culture. Also, learners' voices were heard, and their unique sense of self was illustrated. Reid explored language learning as a process of broadening ways an individual can understand, interpret, feel and express his or her personal and meaningful understanding to himself or herself in various social settings. Thus, integrating a meaningful literacy learning approach in language learning classrooms will form an instructional design that is rich with meaningful interaction for language learners.

Wan et al.'s (2014) research showed that interactive web 2.0, such as in Facebook, supports learners' meaningful English informal learning and provides life-long learning experiences. It helped them to express positive experiences and perceptions toward learning. It also enabled learners to adopt new learning behaviors, cooperative practices, and mutual engagement and responsibilities in such a virtual community. Furthermore, implementing Facebook in a language learning classroom can help learners socialize and maintain social relations, which all make the learning process meaningful for learners. In addition, Ellison et al.'s (2007) study findings showed a strong link between Facebook usage and helping learners to socialize and maintain social relations with people. The study suggested a strong association between the use of Facebook and the three types of social capital: bridging, bonding, and maintaining social capital. The Facebook usage was found to interact with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it might provide benefits for users, especially those users who have low self-esteem.

All these underpinning suppositions shape the learner's personal experiences, history, and social contextualization, where the individual learner is at the center of the learning experience. This approach will make the learning process in the class meaningful for each language learner, both personally and socially. It will also provide a sense of depth and ownership to the target language itself. The learner will be proficient in a language to the extent that he or she can process it, make it his or her own, and bend it to his or her will.

**Meaningful Interaction from the Social Constructivist Theory Perspective**
Social constructivist theory regards individuals and the social society as interconnected. It is asserted that learners grasp knowledge through participating in social practices of a learning environment, including collaborative and meaningful interactions. Thus, this section expands on meaningful interactions based on the social constructivist theory perspective. As social constructivist theory exerted an influence on education, in general, and on instructional technology field, in particular, the main focus is that learning is defined as meaning-making. Woo & Reeves (2007) stated, "according to social constructivists, learning requires the personal interpretation of phenomenon such as the construction of mental model representing complex phenomenon" (p. 17). Thus, when interaction in a learning environment is considered to enhance meaning-making, it will lead to having meaningful interactions, which are related to the social constructivist theory.

Knowledge relies on how the individual creates meaning from his or her life experiences. Woo & Reeves (2007) explained that social constructivist theory focuses on the assumption that learners construct knowledge when they attempt to make sense of their own experiences. This knowledge, which learners construct, consists of formative and constructed explanations by individuals who are engaged in the meaning-making process. Meaning-making, as Woo & Reeves (2007) defined, is the process of sharing various perspectives and experiences in communities of practice. Within the principles of social constructivist learning theory, it is stated that meaningful interaction is a learning approach that is designed to enhance meaning-making, where learners can share various perspectives and experiences in communities of practice, such as in social networks.

Social constructivist theory stresses the role of the learner and the learners' peers as they converse and negotiate meaning. When learners work in a group activity or any collaborative practice, they can grasp concepts and ideas that they cannot understand on their own. Also, weak learners, who struggle more than their peers in learning, can benefit from peers who are advanced in the meaning-making process than them (Suthiwartnartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012). Vygotsky (1978) underscored the effects of social interaction, language and culture in learning. He emphasized dialogue on the educational environment and argued that all cognitive functions originate in social interactions. Vygotsky (1978) also explained that learning is not the assimilation of new knowledge by learners only; instead, it is the process by which learners are integrated into a knowledge community, and focusing on learners' peers as they question, explain and negotiate meaning. Therefore, the abovementioned evidences that learning is occurring from rich conversations with peers or people who have similar or even different perspectives and opinions, all based on their own life experiences.

Furthermore, as a perspective of social constructivist theory, learners construct knowledge through participating in social practices of an educational environment, including collaborative activities and group work assignments, besides social practices outsides the classroom with their friends and family. Woo & Reeves (2007) stated that meaningful interactions in learning environments are designed to enhance meaning, sharing various perspectives and experiences in communities of practice. In addition, Shish (2011) explained that Vygotsky (1978) focused on the effects of social interaction, language and culture on learning. In his study, Shish's (2011) results were consistent with the principle of the social constructivist theory that meaningful interactions in a learning environment strengthened sharing perspectives, ideas, and experiences in online communities of practice. In an online learning environment designed on the social constructivist learning theory, meaningful interaction should include responding to peers, negotiating and arguing with peers, adding ideas, and offering alternative perspectives regarding real life tasks.

Humans are social beings by nature, thus learning a language is tied to social interactions. Woo & Reeves (2007) stated, "Learning is viewed primarily as a social product yielded by the processes of conversation, discussion and negotiation" (p. 18). Nowadays, many educators have come to see the value of implementing social constructivism in their classes as a more effective educational environment, especially for language learners (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013). Learning is seen as an interactive process of participating in various social and cultural practices where collaboration occurs. Consequently, learning is seen as an interaction between learners and their peers situated in their practice. However, not all interactions, discussions, and negotiations occurring anywhere or anytime are meaningful for learners. Facebook Groups portray a community of practice, where learners can interact with their peers and work collaboratively, which is an important component of language learning in social constructivist theory. In addition, collaborative interaction promotes a non-threatening learning environment, where a learner's affective filter is reduced, as it will be discussed next. Such a Facebook property will strongly benefit language learners in their learning process.

**Social Networks Reduces the Affective Filter**

This section argues that utilizing Facebook in second/foreign language classroom settings reduces the learners' affective filter by offering a collaborative language learning environment,

where learners can interact meaningfully with their peers. This will enhance and strengthen learners' learning process and will also promote learners' language production. In terms of learning purposes, utilizing Facebook in a language learning environment promotes and endorses the affective filter hypothesis. A learner's affective filter, which attempts to explain the emotional variables associated with the success or failure of acquiring a language, is needed to be reduced in a learning environment, and this is what online interaction through social network usage can facilitate. Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012) explained that the affective filter, which Krashen (1981, 1988) referred to, is an invisible psychological filter that can either facilitate or hinder language production in a second language. When the affective filter is high, learners may experience anxiety, stress, and lack of self-confidence that may hinder success in language production. On the other hand, a low affective filter facilitates risk-taking behavior in practicing and learning a second language, especially in a social vacuum. Also, the affective filter can be raised or reduced according to the environment that learners are in, and to interactions with peers and/or instructors.

One of the aspects that social networks provide is that users, such as in Facebook, do not have to use their real names, which can help in reducing the affective filter and eventually enhance motivation and risk-taking in learning a language. Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012) mentioned that Krashen (1981) explained motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety as essential factors that affect language learning. Therefore, having high motivation, good self-image, and low levels of anxiety will lower the affective filter. This will lead to increasing the amount of language competence and comprehension. Thus, blending aspects of social network usage with Hananuer's (2012) meaningful literacy approach increases learners' self-efficacy, motivation, and this means reducing learners' affective filters.

In traditional face-to-face classrooms, many learners experience such problems of being considered as a fool, shy, or of having high anxiety levels. Learners may be overwhelmed with negative feelings in classroom, such as feeling anxious or panicked when speaking in front of a class. All off these elements will make the language learning class a threatening environment, and this will hinder the learning process. Therefore, an online environment, such as Facebook, will make the learner less anxious, and possibility more likely to write posts. In Facebook, learners can ask questions more freely without the fear of making mistakes or being judged, and by that, the affective filter will be lowered and learners will be able to understand and produce more knowledge. Ellison et al.'s (2007) study is an example in which its findings suggested that Facebook usage in classrooms benefits learners who are shy and/or have low self-esteem. Facebook usage helped learners to socialize and to produce language in a safe and non-threatening environment. Another recent study (Kabilan et al., 2010) argued the benefits of implementing Facebook for language learning, in that it increases learners' self-efficacy, boosts confidence, and enhances learning motivation. It also offers an ideal environment where it addresses diverse ways for cultural interactions to improve language learning. Thus, when the affective filter is lowered, learners will be motivated, less anxious and dare to communicate. Also, the amount of comprehensible input will be enhanced in the language learning process.

Studies, such as Shish (2011), investigated the effect of using Facebook as a medium for language learning and reported positive results. Shish (2011) indicated that Facebook not only effectively enhanced learners' learning competence, but it also built positive attitudes of learners.

Also, findings revealed that learners improved in paragraph organization, content, and grammar after Facebook was integrated in their learning. Moreover, Al-Shehri's (2011) study showed advantages of integrating Facebook in language learning classrooms. In this study, the participants were required to upload photos or videos, add descriptions, and post on Facebook. Results indicated that the learners preferred to collaborate in English on Facebook when they uploaded materials, and they found it interesting. Also, Facebook allowed them to stay connected with their peers and with other people. Using Facebook provided an opportunity where learners can upload materials and synthesize ideas from various sources of information. This study showed collaboration as a way of reducing a learner's affective filter. Al-Shehri (2011) reported that Facebook created a positive language learning environment, where learners were not afraid or shy to participate, and they developed the abilities to synthesize knowledge. Additionally, Suthiwartnartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi's (2012) study used Facebook as a learning tool and reported positive attitudes of learners. The findings indicated that using Facebook provided the learners with a convenient and attractive means to be engaged in discussions with their instructor and other users who had better grammatical knowledge than them. Learners wrote meaningful contents in well-organized paragraphs. They had overcome their shyness and dared to ask people questions and negotiate on Facebook. This indicated that learners' affective filters were lowered; they were able to produce more knowledge and interact more effectively with each other and with their instructor. They wrote messages for their instructor and other users. Also, learners reported that they could practice their English writing before tests in a non-threatening environment.

In all, in terms of learning purposes, Facebook can promote and endorse the affective filter hypothesis, as well as the social constructivist theory. Offering a collaborative language learning environment, where learners can interact meaningfully with their peers and instructors, promotes learners' language production and learning. All previously mentioned findings, presented in this article, showed Facebook as an effective medium for language teaching and learning (Shish, 2011; Al-Shehri, 2011; Suthiwartnartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012).

**Facebook as a Social Collaborative Networking Community**
This section mainly focuses on collaboration as a valuable language learning process as informed by social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis, and it argues that Facebook can be used as a successful tool to foster collaborative work and interaction among second/foreign language learners. Definitions of social networks in research literature usually focus on communication and collaboration. For instance, Bartlett-Bargg (2006) defined social networks as a "range of applications that augments group interactions and shared spaces for collaboration, social connections, and aggregates information exchanges in a web-based environment" (p. 3). Social networking communities offer users a great opportunity to participate easily in various communities of knowledge building and knowledge sharing. Social networks also offer easy ways to stay connected with other people. Most importantly, today, social networks are widely used as supplementary tools, giving learners independence in learning. Social networking communities encourage a wide range of expressive capabilities allowing learners to express their interests, emotions, and work collaboratively with their peers, as well as with their instructors (Mazman & Usluel, 2010). If learners were encouraged to express their feelings, experiences, interests, and emotions, this will gradually reduce their affective filter.

Learners will feel motivated and that such a learning environment is safe, which will promote their language production.

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites, which allows users to post information, photos, links, chat with others, and collaborate with other users in various ways. With all its features, Facebook provides communication and data management resources that actively encourage different forms of collaboration and coordination of users. For language learning, Facebook could offer learners greater opportunities to collaborate with a large number of people from all over the world, where they can communicate and use the target language.

Collaboration could be defined as something a learner achieves through a joint and mutual negotiation in interaction with others, where sharing of group meanings is essential (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013). More specifically, collaborative writing, such as in a Facebook group, is a collaborative learning process. As informed by social constructivism, which posits that learning is a socially constructed process through interaction, collaborative writing allows multiple writers to co-author and jointly produce a written text. In other words, it is known as plural authors producing a singular text. Therefore, Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012) and Woo & Reeves (2007) stated that Vygotsky (1978) explained collaborative writing, either among learners or between learners and an instructor, is essential for assisting each learner in advancing though his or her own Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is the gap between what the learner could accomplish alone, or what he or she could accomplish in cooperation with others who are more skilled or experienced in learning. In other words, ZPD is the range of abilities that a learner can perform with assistance, but cannot perform independently. Facebook can promote a social collaborative online interaction between instructors and learners through discussions, negotiations, comments, and questions. Instructors can post comments, photos, videos, and then sign learners to respond. Learners will then stay connected and will be more likely to benefit from collaborative learning on Facebook. Therefore, language and social interaction facilitate learning in the learners' ZPD, and will reduce learners' affective filter as well.

Wang et al.'s (2013) research revealed that the use of Facebook contributes to the level of learning engagement in the real world. Specifically, it assists learners in their social and academic lives. The study showed Facebook as a successful tool for fostering collaborative work and interaction among learners in a learning environment. As a tool for studying, learners can browse profiles, meet and communicate with new people, and participate in Groups. Thus, learners can construct new knowledge after interacting with other people on Facebook who they can share knowledge with. As Suthiwartnartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012) stated, "When students receive comments and suggestions, they can use the information given to improve their language skills" (p. 195). Also, using Facebook features and activities, such as participating in Groups, could indirectly create a community of practice as an important component of learner education in social constructivist theory.

In Lantz-Andersson et al.'s (2013) study, a Facebook group was created, and teachers introduced the Facebook collaborative language activity to learners. Learners' interactions were logged, enabling analysis of their posts, interactions, and types of information shared. Findings indicated that there are possibilities for boundary crossing, which as it was reported, could generate extended spaces for collaborative language-learning activities in educational contexts

where learners combine their school subject of learning language and their communicative use of language in their everyday life. This means that collaborative language activities, such as the one in this study, offered by using Facebook, will help learners to learn the language through combining their school subject with their communicative use of language in their everyday life, which is more meaningful for them.

Learners learn better through a collaborative engagement with each other through interactions, especially when they are less anxious. Learners also take roles in contributing and participating with each other, while instructors simply support, facilitate, and guide their overall learning process (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013). Working with one another provides useful insights for learners, in terms of the process, which is involved in negotiations. Facebook creates a non-threatening interactional collaborative space where knowledge is shared and negotiated. As many studies, such as Ekoc (2014) and Lantz-Andersson et al. (2013) reported, learners value connecting themselves with their peers inside and outside of the classroom, and as a result of their collaborative work and interactions with their peers and instructors, their connection to language learning practice strengthens.

## Conclusion and Implication

In this article, the researcher examined previous empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals on using Facebook in second/foreign language classes from 2007 to 2014. The findings indicate that Facebook, as an emerging educational social network, has been increasingly implemented for second/foreign language instruction at different educational level, throughout the world. Nevertheless, this article uses a lens of social constructivist theory and affective filter hypothesis to emphasize the importance of utilizing Facebook, specifically the Groups feature, in second/foreign language settings.

Social interaction is the main objective of all online social networking sites. These social networking sites, such as Facebook, offer a place where people can share their personal stories in words, pictures, and videos with their friends. Social networks also connect users with their peers, especially through the Groups feature. Since language learning is a dynamic and a flexible process, and each learner learns differently, there is no one way of teaching it. Nevertheless, utilizing Facebook allows a flexible method of learning and offers a more individualized learning process. Instructors should be more aware of new implementations of language teaching, and they should use virtual learning communities as an important part in the development of their classes. In addition, instructors should keep in mind learners' interests and learners' different learning styles. Such a medium in a language learning environment could promote social presence, which is an important factor that determines learners' usage of Facebook. Using Facebook as a medium for language learning encourages a collaborative environment, builds positive attitudes, increases motivation and learners' participation in the classroom. It can also encourage learners to collaborate and work together in a non-threatening environment. If planned appropriately as part of a learning process, the technologies and features of Facebook would be able to facilitate and produce effectual and meaningful learning of English within an online community of second/foreign language learners.

Learners of this digital age should be more autonomous and independent. Learners should be able to locate and research new information on a continual basis to endorse authentic

and experiential learning. Thus, instructors should help learners access and research information using the Internet. However, the appropriate use of the Internet should, ideally, be maintained in a networked learning environment. Therefore, instructors should promote the use of social network communities, such as Facebook to allow learners to have different experiences by providing the with more contact and practice. This also leads to the most important implication, which was discussed: making the teaching of English meaningful. This implies showing learners that English, as the target language, can be used in everyday life for real purposes, not just as a school subject. Most importantly, instructors should clearly understand the nature of meaningful interaction, in regards to the social constructivist theory and the affective filter hypothesis, to increase the learning effects of a learner's lifelong meaningful literacy and interaction.

To conclude, since research into how language learners use social networks is in its infancy, the effect of age, language fluency, and computer literacy on motivation to join social networks, studies looking more closely at the content and structure of the language on social networks would be beneficial. Although instructors are starting to use technology in their classrooms, it should be used more since this is a digital age. A lot of instructors today are utilizing Facebook in their language learning classes. Still, they are not using all of its features. Also, some instructors are using it only few times in the semester, and others might not use it correctly. Researchers can set up qualitative and quantitative studies that examine the effects of using Facebook groups in the second/foreign language classroom for a specific language skill, such as grammar. Additionally, there is still a lack of research in the textual analyses of writing products that learners co-construct in Facebook groups. A close examination into linguistic, rhetorical, and discourse features of learners' posts on Facebook groups will contribute more to the research body of both collaborative writing and genre analysis, and will be useful in designing appropriate classroom activities.

**Author the Author:**
**Ahdab Abdalelah Saaty** is an ESL lecturer at King Abdulaziz University, one of the largest public universities in Saudi Arabia. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate sponsored by the Saudi Government in the Composition and TESOL program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests are in using technology to teach second/foreign language writing, language literacy and technology, meaningful literacy, and second language socialization.

**References**
Al-Shehri, S. (2011). Connectivism: A new pathway for theorising and promoting mobile language learning. *International Journal of Innovation and Leadership on the Teaching of Humanities*, *1*(2), 10–31.
Bartlett-Bragg, A. (2006). *Reflections on pedagogy: Reframing practice to foster informal learning with social software*. Retrieved March, 20, 2007, from http://www.researchgate.net
Blattner, G., & Fiori, M. (2009). Facebook in the language classroom: Promises and possibilities. Instructional Technology and Distance Learning (ITDL), *6*(1), 17−28.
Ekoc, A. (2014). FACEBOOK Groups as a supporting tool for language classrooms. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education. 15*(3), 18- 26.

Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer- Mediated Communication*, *12*(4), 1143-1168.

Facebook (2015). About Facebook. Retrieved January, 15, 2015, from https://www.facebook.com/facebook/info/?tab=page_info

Facebook (2015). Popular features: Groups. Retrieved January 15, 2015, from https://www.facebook.com/help/162866443847527/

Godwin-Jones, R. (2008). Mobile computing technologies: Lighter, faster, smarter. *Language Learning & Technology*, *12*(3), 3−9.

Guamán, L. V. J. (2012). EFL teenagers' social identity representation in a virtual learning community on Facebook. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *14*(2).

Hanauer, D. I. (2012). Meaningful literacy: Writing poetry in the language classroom. *Language Teaching*, *45(*01), 105-115.

Hirumi, A. (2002). The design and sequencing of E-learning interactions: A grounded approach. *International Journal on E-learning*, *1*(1), 19−27.

Kabilan, M. K., Ahmad, N., & Abidin, M. J. Z. (2010). Facebook: An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education?. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *13*(4), 179-187.

Kramsch, C. (2009). The multilingual subject. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lantz-Andersson, A., Vigmo, S. & Bowen, R. (2013). Crossing boundaries in Facebook: Students' framing of language learning activities as extended spaces. *Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, 8,* 293–312.

Mazman, S. G., & Usluel, Y. K. (2010). Modeling educational usage of Facebook. *Computers & Education*, *55*(2), 444-453.

Mills, N. A. (2011). Situated learning through social networking communities: The development of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire. *CALICO Special Volume: Second Language Acquisition Theories, Technologies, and Language Learning (Eds., S. Thorne & B. Smith)*, *28*(2).

Mitchell, K. (2012). A social tool: Why and how ESOL students use Facebook. *CALICO Journal*, *29*(3), 471-493.

Muirhead, B., & Juwah, C. (2004). Interactivity in computer-mediated college and university education: A recent review of the literature. *Educational Technology & Society*, *7*(1), 12-20.

Reid, J. (2011). " We don't Twitter, we Facebook": An alternative pedagogical space that enables critical practices in relation to writing. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *10* (1), 58-80.

Shih, R. C. (2011). Can Web 2.0 technology assist college students in learning English writing? Integrating Facebook and peer assessment with blended learning. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *27*(5), 829-845.

Suthiwartnarueput, T., & Wasanasomsithi, P. (2012). Effects of using Facebook as a medium for discussions of English grammar and writing of low-Intermediate EFL students. Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 9(2), 194-214.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher mental processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wan, C. W. I. R. C., Prain, V., & Collet, P. (2014). Perceived learning strategies of Malaysian university students in Web 2.0-based English as a Second Language informal learning. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, *14*(1).

Wang, J., Lin, C. F. C., Yu, W. C. W., & Wu, E. (2013). Meaningful engagement in Facebook learning environments: Merging social and academic lives. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, *14*(1), 302-322.

Widdowson, H. G. (1998). Context, community and authentic language. TESOL Quarterly 32 (4), 705– 716.

Woo, Y., & Reeves, T. C. (2007). Meaningful interaction in web-based learning: A social constructivist interpretation. *The Internet and higher education*, *10*(1), 15-25.