# A Review of EFL Learners' Anxiety Influenced by Social Media

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*Abstract.* This study explores how social media(SM) affects language anxiety in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. In recent years, SM was widely used in language learning, and its influence on learning anxiety (LA) has aroused extensive interest from scholars. This research focuses on the application of SL in second language learning, as well as its dual effect on LA. This article used the method of literature review, selecting and analysing 17 high-quality literatures published in the past 10 years from Google Scholar and the Web of Science database. The study found that the use of SL can alleviate EFL's foreign language anxiety (FLA) and improved their language skills to a certain extent. However, excessive use of SL may aggravate anxiety and foster their perfectionism tendency. The relationship between SL and LA is complex, which requires comprehension from different aspects. This study has refined the theoretical framework of second language learning, which offered guidance to educational practice. Future researches are supposed to concentrate on the influence of factors such as individual differences and cultural background, and formulate strategies to maximize the positive impact of SM.

*Keywords:* Second language learning, foreign language anxiety, social media, EFL learners.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the rapid rise of SM has sparked concern in the academic community. It has been found that the use of SM is closely related to EFL learners' learning anxiety (LA) problems. As SM is widely used in language learning, its impact on second language anxiety is becoming increasingly prominent. The subjective sensation of uneasiness and trepidation associated with autonomic nervous system activation is known as learning anxiety (LA)., and in specific language learning situations, it may lead to symptoms such as difficulty in concentrating, confused thinking, slow action, palpitations, and even avoidance behaviours, which may hinder students from making progress in this area of learning. Second language learning anxiety is one of the key issues in second language learning research, but most of the previous studies have focused on analysing anxiety factors in traditional classroom contexts.

Given the foregoing context, this thesis will organize the findings of previous study, summarise the shortcomings of current research, improve the theoretical system of second language learning

anxiety; enhance the public's awareness of the role of SM, and prompt SM to empower teaching and learning activities more efficiently.

## 2. Research methodology

This study is based on the literature mainly from Google Scholar academic platform and Web of Science database, synchronously searching for results in the fields of second language teaching, applied linguistics and educational psychology. The main focus was on articles investigating the use of SM as a second or foreign language teaching tool by language learners and teachers during the critical period of SM technology iteration between 2015 and 2025. The search for Chinese and English articles were based on the keywords "social media","digital platform","foreign language anxiety" and "second language anxiety", and selecting articles for review by reading their titles and abstracts, non-academic literature (e.g., conference abstracts, book reviews), and articles only exploring the traditional classroom, book reviews), literature that only explored traditional classroom anxiety, and studies that did not distinguish between types of SM were excluded. After a thorough reading of the full text, a total of 17 high-quality documents were identified as being related to SM and second language learning.

## 3. Research findings

### 3.1. The current status of SM in English as a Second Language learning (ESL)

The impact of SM in SLA has emerged as a research hotspot over the past years, with studies concentrating how various kinds of applications affect language proficiency, motivation and emotional factors. These SM are classified into five types according to their different forms: social networking sites, videoconferencing, Wikis, Blogs, and forums [1]. Among the SM, Telegram, as an instant messaging social application, can significantly reduce learners' foreign language anxiety through instant feedback and interactive learning, and can help to increase the motivation of shy or introverted students by teaching in a form that breaks through the limitations of time and space, and reduces the time spent on direct dialogue between students and teachers [2]. Whereas research on social networking platforms (Facebook) has found that a large number of communicative functions are executed through interactive learning on Facebook, which can be categorised as: cognitive, metacognitive, organisational and socio-emotional, and through the execution of which learning outcomes can be greatly improved. In Dizon's study, the test of writing fluency was divided into two independent variables, Facebook and pen and paper tests [3].The results showed that significant progress in the pre-test period and there was no discernible difference in the degree of progress [3]. However, the two group differed significantly in the post-test period (control Mdn=3.5, experimental Mdn=33.5), with a statistical significance (U=51, p=0.1), demonstrating that Facebook improves writing fluency more than pen and paper tests [3]. Özdemir randomly assigned all participants in the study to two groups for control analysis and took a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach to data collection [4]. Then, Özdemir divided the study into 20 items with 6 subscales for quantitative analysis, and through semi-structured interviews and students' papers for qualitative analysis [4]. The final study found that the scores of the group talking on Facebook were significantly higher than those of the classroom discussion group [4]. This study proves that discussion through Facebook is more efficient for improving intercultural communication competence compared with classroom discussion [4]. However, teachers need to be aware of behavioural choices, such as avoiding viewing student profiles or browsing student posts, which are

negative behaviours that may affect language learning. Videoconferencing tools became more popular after the epidemic (e.g., Zoom), which was studied through a mixed scenario design approach and showed that Zoom could help students practice second language skills by creating an autonomous learning environment [5]. In the case of blog-based and forum-based applications, there are studies that point to the positive effects of the applications on learning.

## 3.2. The impact of SM on Second Language Learning Anxiety(SLLA)

### 3.2.1. The alleviation of SLLA by SM

SM creates an authentic language environment and interaction opportunities for EFL learners. It can also expose EFL learners to real and authentic language can promote the development of EFL learners' language skills in order to reduce the problem of language anxiety among EFL learners. Studies have shown that allowing students to discuss and communicate in groups through emojis in informal learning environments using SM can effectively alleviate the stress of face-to-face interactions. In their study, 60 Iranian EFL students were split up into two groups by Zhao's team and tested the learners' reading, grammar, and vocabulary sections in the experiment and took a questionnaire to collect the participants' attitudes towards using Telegrame to learn English and after data analysis [2]. It was found that EFL learners who used Telegram (an instant messaging social platform) had significantly lower levels of foreign language anxiety(FLA) [2]. By comparing the motivation before and after the study, it was found that there was a significant gap between the motivation of the two groups (Sig=0.00<0.05), and that the experimental respondents outperformed those who take part in motivation tests [2]. The results demonstrated that students' motivation rose and that using Telegram improved their language learning [2].This effect can be credited to the informal learning environment of SM [2]. In addition, in a study of college students in Taiwan, China, pointed out that the integrated use of Facebook and Skype creates a familiar and less stressful environment for second language learners to use and practice the language, alleviating EFL learners' language anxiety problems due to environmental stress [6].Wiki platforms facilitate the co-construction of linguistic knowledge through collaborative editing. Anto 's team conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 UK university students, interviewing participants about their views and feelings towards SM [7].The final interview result showed that students shared learning strategies and encouraged each other to support each other and relieve each other's academic stress through forums, and in the survey SM was described by the students as a way to escape from study anxiety that gives them a sense of calm and relief [7]. Zhao 's team used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the psychological changes of EFL learners, in the course of the experiment, the learners conducted one-to-one online dialogue sessions via Skype with real-time recordings, and questionnaires with semi-structured interviews [2]. The final results of the experiment showed that the online sessions via Skype were effective in decreasing beginner's anxiety (pre=4.00, after=1.75), and learners' speaking ability showed higher fluency [2].

### 3.2.2. The aggravation of SLA by SM

Even though SM is beneficial for language education, it also brings challenges to ESL learning, including its impact on learners' LA. Shu's research focused on how problematic usage of SL influence students' classroom anxiety, perfectionism and language attainment [8]. Combining quantitative with qualitative research methods, 480 Chinese EFL learners was recruited during the qualitative stage [8]. Data was collected by questionnaires such as SM Usage, Perfectionism Scale,

Foreign Language Anxiety Scale and CEFR [8]. Then, descriptive statistical analysis as well as Pearson correlation analysis was conducted by using SPSS [8]. In the quatitative stage, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the opinions of 20 students, and theme analysis was used [8]. There is a significant positive correlation between problematic usage of SL and FL (M=65 □ SD=15), the average level of FL is 75 (SD=17.5), and FL and language attainment are significantly correlated negatively (M=71, SD=24) [8]. However, samples of this research are limited to Chinese EFL learners. Future research requires samples from wider linguistic and culture background.

Any learner, regardless of age, may exhibit perfectionism as a result of their high performance expectations and critical self-evaluation [8]. In Barabadi's study, perfectionism included two specific dimensions: personal standards, and concern about mistakes [9]. In this study, 1349 Iranian secondary school students and 59 English teachers were selected to collect data on students' perfectionist perceptions, anxiety, willingness to communicate, and achievement through questionnaires, as well as teachers' data on perfectionism [9]. The structure of the dimensions of perfectionist perceptions was determined through theories related to the EFA and CFA [9]. Finally, two structural equation models were constructed to test the role of anxiety in the relationship between perfectionist perception and willingness to communicate and mediating role between perfectionist cognition and bilingualism [9]. The findings demonstrated that perfectionism, second language proficiency, and communication willingness were mediated by anxiety, and that worry about errors had an indirect impact on SL proficiency and communication willingness through SL anxiety [9].In the study by FLett's team, perfectionism made learners overly concerned about accuracy, very sensitive to possible mistakes and the consequences of making mistakes, and even afraid of of being ridiculed by their classmates, which in turn deprives them of their ability to communicate fluently [10]. Shu's study interviewed 20 Chinese learners of English in which some of the interviewees may compare their online persona with their real-life interactions, which promoted anxiety during face-to-face interactions [8]. Social comparisons cause users to feel fatigued when using SM, which may promote perfectionism. Although there is relatively little academic literature on SM fostering perfectionism and causing second language anxiety. But a synthesis of the current research findings reveals that SM may exacerbate individual perfectionist tendencies, which are closely related to social anxiety, and together they affect learners' SL achievement. Furthermore, SM use may permeate SL instructional situations, where students may be reluctant to make mistakes and fear unfavorable peer evaluations. This can impact their engagement and learning results and result in SLA.

## 4. Conclusion

In summary, the connection between SM and SLA is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, SM alleviates LA by creating less stressful learning environments for students through a variety of SM platforms, easing the pressure of face-to-face interactions, and promoting the advancement of proficiency in languages. On the other hand, SM also brings challenges. Information overload in a public digital space and perfectionist demands on oneself can exacerbate anxiety. In addition, excessive use of SM may negatively affect various aspects, distract attention and hinder effective learning.

At the theoretical level, this study systematically reviews the gaps in SL acquisition theory in terms of the psychological mechanisms of SM affecting learners, improves the theoretical framework of SM in educational applications, and critically contemplates the impact of SM on SLLA in two ways. In practice, Students can enhance their learning mindset and experience through SM, provide a basis for teachers to innovate their teaching strategies. This article point out the

direction for developers of educational technology platforms to promote the birth of platforms and tools that better meet the needs of SL learning, as well as to promote the development of the field of SL teaching and learning research.

For limitations, on the one hand, in the collection of research literature, most of the literature focuses on the impact of SM on the anxiety of EFL learners, but fails to explore and analyse from the perspective of students' individual differences, such as students' personalities or SM habits. On the other hand, in analysing the impact of SM on SLA, the impact of SM on EFL learners has not been taken into account. These factors may result in limitations of the study to provide help or guidance to some regions or populations, and it is hoped that future research can improve and refine these aspects.

Future research should focus on developing strategies to find suitable programmes that can maximise the positive impact of SM and minimise its negative impact. This could involve strategies for teaching students how to use SM for language learning in an efficient manner, ways for educators to properly guide students on how to use SM and process information, and ways for platform developers to create the right and efficient digital language learning environments.

## Authors contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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