

IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON ACADEMIC
WRITING AMONG CHINESE POSTGRADUATES

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FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

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IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON ACADEMIC
WRITING AMONG CHINESE POSTGRADUATES

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ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

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Field of Study: Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

The development and proliferation of web 2.0 technologies as well as Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have expanded tremendously now that Social Networking is part of everyone's life. With the expansion of SNSs, scholars assume that this new platform plays an important role in academic writing. On the other hand, many Chinese EFL learners over a decade failed to improve their English academic writing due to the ineffective classroom teacher centred models (Rao and Chan, 2010).

The aims of this study are to investigate the relationship between frequency of Chinese postgraduates using SNSs and English academic writing in terms of lexical complexity and to investigate the perception of the Chinese postgraduates on how SNSs usage affect their writing. This study uses two theoretical frameworks, the first one being the Typology of SNSs users which according to Brandtzæg and Heim (2011), SNSs users are classified as people who diversified behaviour into meaningful categories active SNSs users and inactive SNSs users, and second, the Lexical Richness Measurements which use the lexical variance (LV) and lexical sophistication (LS) formulas introduced by Laufer and Nation (1995).

This study uses a mixed research method of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the quantitative part of the research, a questionnaire was distributed to 61 Chinese postgraduates in University of Malaya. The written text of these 61 students were also collected after they answered the questionnaire. The active and inactive SNSs users were identified and three students from each group were randomly selected and

interviewed. The results of the questionnaire and written text findings indicated that there were no significant relationship between frequency of participation logging in SNSs and their academic writing in terms of lexical complexity. However the results of the interviews revealed that the inactive SNSs users had better agreement of vocabulary acquirement, attitude and motivation towards academic writing compared to the active SNSs users (the usage of SNSs in terms of the high participation of users are called active SNSs users).

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ABSTRAK

Pembangunan serta perkembangan teknologi Web 2.0 dan Rangkaian Sosial (SNSs) telah berkembang dengan pesat. Rangkaian Sosial kini merupakan sebahagian daripada kehidupan semua orang. Dengan perkembangan SNSs, para cendekiawan menganggap bahawa platform baharu ini memainkan peranan yang penting dalam penulisan akademik. Walau bagaimanapun, ramai pelajar Cina bagi bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa Asing dalam tempoh sedekad ini gagal untuk meningkatkan kemahiran penulisan akademik Bahasa Inggeris mereka kerana model berpusatkan guru adalah tidak berkesan (Rao dan Chan, 2010).

Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk 1) mengkaji hubungan antara kekerapan pelajar siswazah Cina menggunakan SNSs dan penulisan akademik Bahasa Inggeris dari segi kerumitan leksikal dan 2) mengkaji persepsi siswazah Cina mengenai cara penggunaan SNSs yang mempengaruhi penulisan mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan dua kerangka teori, yang pertamanya daripada Brandtzæg dan Heim (2011) dimana menurut mereka, keduanya, adalah Laufer dan Nation (1995). Kerangka teori yang pertama adalah Tipologi pengguna SNSs yang menyatakan bahawa, pengguna SNSs dikelaskan sebagai orang yang mempunyai pelbagai tingkah laku yang dikategorikan dalam kategori yang bermakna (Brandtzæg dan Heim, 2011). Kerangka teori yang kedua adalah “Lexical Richness Measurements” yang menggunakan formula variasi leksikal (LV) dan leksikal yang canggih (LS) (Laufer dan Nation, 1995).

Kajian ini menggunakan metod kajian campuran yang menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Dalam bahagian kuantitatif kajian ini, sejumlah 61 soal selidik telah diberikan kepada 61 pelajar Cina lepasan ijazah di Uninversiti Malaya. Teks bertulis daripada 61 pelajar ini telah juga diperolehi selepas mereka menjawab soal selidik. Para pengguna SNSs aktif dan tidak aktif telah dikenal pasti dan tiga pelajar dari setiap kumpulan telah dipilih secara rawak dan ditemuramah. Hasil dapatan soal selidik dan teks bertulis menunjukkan bahawa tiada hubungan signifikan di antara hubungan penyertaan dalam SNSs dan penulisan akademik mereka dari segi kerumitan leksikal. Walau bagaimanapun, dapatan dari temuduga mendedahkan bahawa pengguna SNSs yang tidak aktif mempunyai kefahaman yang lebih baik daripada perolehan perbendaharaan kata, sikap dan motivasi terhadap penulisan akademik berbanding dengan pengguna SNSs aktif.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

SNSs Social Networking Sites

LV Lexical Variance

LS Lexical Sophistication

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, the development and proliferation of web 2.0 technologies as well as social networking sites (SNSs) have expanded tremendously. From Lady Gaga to Barack Obama, everyone has a presence in an online social network. Social networks are a part of everyone's life now. The rapid diffusion of SNSs and the wide range of customer popularity have led many scholars to believe that social networking sites (SNSs) have made the learning of knowledge more accessible and more important than ever before (Warschauer,2010). And so, SNSs will continue to play an important role in future second language or foreign language learning (Brick, 2011).

Amazingly, the government of China has forbidden the operation of the most influential social networking sites (SNSs) of the western world such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. Instead, the most popular and well-known domestic SNSs in China are Tencent QQ, Renren and Weibo. These domestic SNSs are designed with the Chinese language as the language of communication among users. Therefore, English language learners from mainland China are deprived from having real conversations with native English speakers on SNSs in general. This leads to the lack of research studied among Chinese users in the use of English in SNSs. Moreover, since the Chinese in mainland China are segregated from English-based SNSs,

researchers can hardly conduct any studies about the effect of using English SNSs. However, Chinese-national students in the University of Malaya are excluded from China's SNSs policy and are exposed to various SNSs. Hence, this provides an avenue for the researcher to carry out a study on these international students who are studying abroad, beyond the limitations set by the government of China.

Clearly, with the rapid development of information technology, many societies have entered an information-based and knowledge-based milieu. More than half of one's amount of knowledge is gained from informal or incidental learning. Informal learning is a process of shared and collaborative learning (Li, 2013). Instead, incidental learning is in most cases unintentional from the learners' perspectives. It is obtained out of daily work-related or leisure activities. Also, it is neither organized nor structured (Tissot, 2004). So, the importance of informal learning cannot be ignored. The traditional English writing class restricts the collaboration and interaction of EFL college students. Conversely, the usage of SNSs is a method of informal writing practice for students beyond the classroom (Razak, Saeed & Ahmad, 2013). Li (2000) reports that e-mails enhance the language writing ability of users in aspects of sentence-building and vocabulary, since users tend to use more complex, diverse and richer vocabulary. Fellner & Apple (2006) found that a significant increase in the number of words used in the blogs of participants and a solid increase of more complex writing lexicons in their blogs. However, scholars still have limited studies on using SNSs for writing (Razak, Saeed & Ahmad, 2013), and even lesser amount of studies on Chinese SNSs users and their writing performance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Needless to say, globally the English language is at the leading edge of technological and scientific development, new literatures and entertainment genres (Graddol, 1997). Hence, the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca has impacted countries all around the world (Gil & Adamson, 2011). China has the largest amount of English language learners, with over 300 million people learning English (Wang, 2013). English has already been considered as one of the compulsory subjects in China for decades, and a part of the matriculation examinations for learners to deal with (Wang, 1986). However, native Chinese speakers have very little command of English (Gil & Adamson, 2011). They also fall short under the ineffective teacher-centred classroom model, especially in English language writing (Rao & Chan, 2010). According to Zhang (2008), that causes a detriment to their English language development, since Chinese EFL learners tend to use simpler vocabulary in their writing. This is unfortunate, as the writing ability is in fact vital for both academic and occupational success (Raimes & Jerskey, 2013). All the same, it is also a difficult skill to master especially for second or foreign language learners.

At present, “net English” clearly is a new domain on the Internet. Only 20 percent of the world’s electronic information is stored in languages other than English (Graddol, 1997). SNSs have become an electronic information database and a medium for communication across nations. It provides a landscape for its multilingual users (Chen, 2013). Besides that, SNSs have also played an essential role in writing (Warschauer,

2010). They allow diverse writing activities. Each writing practice affords and constrains certain contents, and demands users to possess certain digital literacy skills. For instance, users have to post text-based messages in order to leave comments on their friends' status (Chen, 2013). This leads to show that there is a connection between SNSs and writing in English.

The assessment of English language writing has long been a subject of discussion and study (Villanueva, 2008). Villanueva (2008) views writing proficiency mainly as something equal to grammatical and lexical competence that empowers communication. The methods of assessing writing are varied, such as measuring the mechanics of writing (e.g., conjunction, spelling, grammar), narrative skills (e.g., overall structure, vocabulary, ideas) (Dunsmuir et al, 2014) as well as analytical and holistic scoring of writing (Villanueva, 2008). Ellis (2005) highlights that Complexity, Accuracy and Fluency (CAF) of learners' language for both oral and written production can be measured in the field of analysing learner's language where assessment is concerned.

Meanwhile, the issues raised in college students' usage of social networking sites have been discussed in a number of studies (Chen & Peng, 2008). Previous researches centred around the investigation of computer usage that facilitated or promoted interaction, motivation and attitude, to aid language acquisition rather than to be on the measurement of language outcomes (Leloup, Ponterio, Cortland & Flteach, 2003). Besides that, at present, there is a void in research where the lexical complexity for Chinese learners is pondered upon (Zhang, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to fill the

gap on how the usage of SNSs affects Chinese students' writing performance on the aspect of lexical complexity. This also includes understanding how participants will consider SNSs as an online environment that facilitates their writing.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study looks at the effect or impact of social networking sites on users in their writing performance academically. More specifically, it focuses on the lexical complexity aspect of academic writing in the English language. It looks into the writing performance of Chinese international postgraduates and their usage in SNSs. Hence, the aim is to investigate the relationship between the frequency of participation in SNSs and English writing performance on a lexical complexity aspect. Additionally, it also looks at how SNSs affect the EFL learners' point of view in their writing performance. Besides this, the research also takes a look at whether participants consider SNSs as a helpful learning tool or environment that could reinforce and support their writing in English. This study would enable the researcher to identify and comprehend how SNSs affect English language writing. In addition, researchers would have a better view of how EFL learners could acquire more vocabulary and improve their writing performance through SNSs.

1.4 The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To ascertain the significance between the frequency of participation in SNSs and academic writing in terms of lexical complexity.
2. To investigate the perceptions of Chinese postgraduates on how the usage of SNSs affect their writing performance.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the frequency of Chinese international postgraduates' participation in SNSs and academic writing in terms of lexical complexity?
2. What are the perceptions of Chinese international postgraduates on how their participation in SNSs affect their writing?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between different types of SNSs users from a lexical complexity aspect. Therefore, the theoretical frameworks adopted for this study are the typology of SNSs users (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011) and lexical richness measurements (Laufer & Nation, 1995). According to Zhang (2008), lexical richness is referred to as lexical complexity.

Accordingly, Brandtzæg & Heim (2011) classified 5,233 Norwegian social networking sites (SNSs) users' diversified behaviour into five meaningful typologies:

(1) *Sporadics*, (2) *Lurkers*, (3) *Socialisers*, (4) *Debaters*, and (5) *Actives*. These five distinct categories conceptualise the usage of SNSs in terms of the high or low participation of users (intensity of use) and participation mode (objective and direction of participation). Consequently, in this study, the participants are further divided into two groups: inactive and active SNSs user groups. On one hand, the inactive group includes user-types such as (1) *Sporadics* and (2) *Lurkers*. On the other hand, the active group includes user-types such as (3) *Socialisers*, (4) *Debaters* and (5) *Actives*.

On another note, Laufer & Nation (1995) define lexical complexity as consisting of lexical variation (LV), lexical sophistication (LS), lexical density (LD) and lexical originality (LO). However, lexical sophistication (LS) and lexical variation (LV) represent the most important two dimensions of lexical complexity as lexical range and size of writing. Hence, this study will concentrate on lexical sophistication (LS) and lexical variation (LV).

Last but not least, Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin (2010) analyze the data of their interviewees on the aspects of the SNSs users' improvement of language skills, motivation, confidence and attitudes towards English language learning.

1.7 Definitions of Terms

1.7.1 Complexity

Ellis (2003: p340) defines complexity as 'the extent to which the language produced in performing a task is elaborated and varied.' And according to Wolfe-Quintero et al

(1998), complexity means a wide variety or a wide range of both basic and sophisticated structures and words available and can be accessed quickly. In Wolfe-Quintero's definition, the first half refers to syntactic complexity while the latter refers to lexical richness. In this study, the researcher will concentrate on lexical complexity known as lexical richness.

1.7.1.1 Lexical complexity

Lexical complexity is also referred to as lexical richness (Zhang, 2008). Flesch, Lennon & Burdick define (as cited in Arya, 2011: p110) lexical complexity as 'sentence length, typically an alias for syntactic complexity, is often, indeed almost universally, coupled with vocabulary difficulty in readability formulas in order to determine overall accessibility of a given text'.

1.7.1.2 Lexical richness

According to Laufer (1995), lexical richness consists of lexical variance (LV), lexical density (LD), lexical sophistication (LS) and lexical originality (LO).

1.7.2 Lexical Variation (LV)

Lexical variation is defined as the ratio in per cent between the different lexemes

(types) in a text and the total number of running words (tokens), also known as type/token ratio (TTR) (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

1.7.3 Lexical Sophistication (LS)

Lexical sophistication is defined as the percentage of correct advanced words to the word tokens in the text (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This research is conducted amongst a small sample size of 61 Chinese international postgraduates at the University of Malaya. Since the sample size is relatively small, the findings of this study may not be generalized for all Chinese nationals. This is such, because the participants study in different fields and faculties. They may have different English proficiency levels. For instance, the participants from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics might have a higher English language writing proficiency or better lexical complexity than those from other faculties.

Furthermore, lexical complexity consists of four aspects: lexical variance, lexical density, lexical sophistication and lexical originality. Yet in this research, the researcher only selects the two most frequently used measurements, namely lexical variance and lexical sophistication. These two measurements are represented in the lexical complexity of a writing piece in two dimensions: range and size.

1.9 Significance of the Study

There have been hardly any studies on Chinese nationals using English social networking sites. Due to the policy of the said country, there are even lesser studies focusing on finding the effects of using SNSs in language learning. The significance of this study is to gain a better understanding of the SNSs usage by Chinese participants and their lexical complexity in academic writing. Furthermore, the research may contribute to recognizing that such involvement with social networking sites could help users improve their writing of English.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the examination of significant preceding literature in this study. It gives a brief outline about social networking sites and lexical complexity in academic writing. This chapter is separated into ten main segments that comprise of literature reviews from previous studies related to social networking sites, typology of SNSs users, impact of SNSs on language learning, implications of social networking sites in writing, the importance of writing, writing in China, writing measurement, vocabulary, language measurement and a conclusion to the chapter.

2.2 Previous Study of SNSs

The Internet has created different types of data sharing systems, such as the World Wide Web and SNSs. As such, online social networking sites (SNSs) have gained significant participation and are now amongst the most popular sites on the Internet (Mislove et al, 2007). To put it more precisely, Boyd & Ellison (2007: p2) defined social network sites (SNSs) 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. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site’.

In fact, Boyd & Ellison (2007) argued on using the term “network” instead of “networking” for two reasons. Firstly, the term “networking” emphasizes relationship which often occurs between strangers. Secondly, “networking” cannot be differentiated from computer-mediated communication (CMC). With regards to this, since neither relationship with strangers nor differentiation from CMC is concerned in this research, the researcher will therefore use the term “social networking sites”.

Also, according to Boyd & Ellison (2007), the first social network site was launched in 1997 and currently there are hundreds of SNSs across the globe which are quickly gaining widespread popularity. Billions of users worldwide are creating accounts, writing content, uploading photographs, blogging, sharing videos, and chatting with friends through SNSs every day. Facebook, which is the network with the most users worldwide, as of March 2011, has had more than 640 million users (Hiles, 2011) and at least half of these active users log on to Facebook everyday (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). The next largest SNSs is Tencent QQ with around 310 million users and its population is only in China (Baran, 2011). This is followed by Twitter (with more than 41 million users) (Kwak et al, 2010) and MySpace (with over 190 million users) (Puttaswamy, Sala & Zhao, 2008) which are also popular SNSs. Besides that, there are many other social networking sites in the world as the map shows (Figure 2.1).

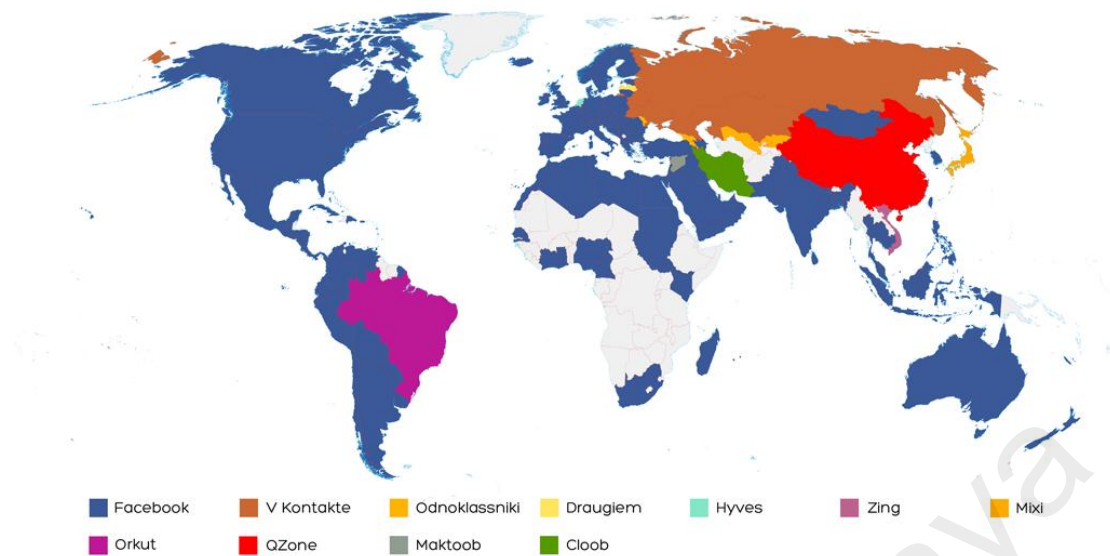


Figure 2.1: The World Map of Social Networking Sites

Apparently, the first social networking site called SixDegrees was launched in 1997. From the year 2003 onwards, many new social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have been launched. SNSs have attracted millions of users, which many of whom have integrated SNSs into their daily routine and lifestyle (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). With the advent of social network, it has become easy to obtain almost all sorts of information from around the world (Egedegbe, 2013). Media is no longer limited to newspapers, radio stations and cables. People can feel free and flexible to seek information day and night. On top of that, the issues around SNSs are varied in terms of different cultures, languages, nationals, ethnicities, religions, etc. As a matter of fact, the reasons and ways people use SNSs are crucial because studies have shown a wide range of potentially positive outcomes from such usage (Lampe, Vitak & Ellison, 2013). Previous studies have emphasised on the matter of privacy and safety of SNSs users, cross-cultural comparisons of SNSs usage, SNSs in education, SNSs in

language learning, etc. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). It is based on these evidences that prove that SNSs is undoubtedly a useful tool that has some impact on the lives of people.

2.3 Typology of SNSs Users

This section provides a brief introduction to several previous studies of user types that relate to SNSs usage.

2.3.1 Nielsen (2006)

Nielsen (2006) finds most users are inactive to participate in the contribution of SNSs. According to the unchangeable 'participation inequality' rule, he explains the user participation approximately following a 90-9-1 rule: 1% heavy contributors; 90% Lurkers who never contribute; 9% intermittent contributors. However, Brandtzæg & Heim (2011) have commented this 90-9-1 rule as no detailed descriptions of results, and it is only somewhat possible.

2.3.2 Networking (2008)

A report from Networking (2008) has indicated that based on attitudes and behaviours towards SNSs that the population distinguished as two groups: users and non-users of SNSs. SNSs users are as follows: Alpha socialisers; Attention seekers; Followers; Faithfuls; Functionals. However, Brandtzæg & Heim (2011) have indicated that this

study relies on the data from 39 interviewers and theoretical judgments rather than quantitative statistics. Regardless of that, they confirmed the typology of Networking (2008) is the only one that addresses SNSs particularly.

2.3.3 Hargittai & Hsieh (2010)

In Hargittai & Hsieh's (2010) study, they take both user visit frequency and number of SNSs that people engaged in consideration. Four types of users have been identified: Dabblers; Samplers; Devotees; Omnivores. The study investigates the relationship between SNSs usage typology and factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, parental education, net access at home, living with parents, time spend online and internet skills. All these factors may lead users to engage with different sites at varying levels of intensity.

2.3.4 Brandtzæg & Heim (2011)

Brandtzæg & Heim (2011) conducted a survey where they classified the diversified behaviour of 5,233 Norwegian respondents into five distinct SNSs user types: (1) *Sporadics*, (2) *Lurkers*, (3) *Socialisers*, (4) *Debaters*, and (5) *Actives*. Their study conceptualised the usage of SNSs in terms of users' high or low participation (intensity of use) and participation mode (objective and direction of participation).

Firstly, Brandtzæg & Heim (2011) define that *Sporadics* are those users whose participation level is low and tend to be more toward an informational mode.

Sporadics only give a few reasons for visiting the SNSs. The second one, the *Lurkers* are quite low in participation where they participate in activities that are more related to recreation. They describe the purpose of visiting SNSs as to ‘kill some time’. Third are the *Socialisers*, whose participation level is high. They score high on factors like ‘write letters or messages’, ‘contact others’, and ‘look for a new friend’. Concurrently, the fourth user-type, *Debaters* are also described as high participation level users. They are highly involved in discussions, reading and writing contributions in general. Lastly, *Actives* are the ones who participate in almost all sorts of activities.

Pertaining to Brandtzæg & Heim’s (2011) specific criteria of user types, the above five types of SNSs users can be further categorized into an inactive group and an active group. The inactive group includes the types of (1) *Sporadics* and (2) *Lurkers*; whereas an active group includes the types of (3) *Socialisers*, (4) *Debaters* and (5) *Actives*. In this study, the researcher will follow this typology to classify SNSs users.

2.4 Impact of SNSs on Language Learning

Several decades ago, no one could have imagined the enormous impact provided by the Internet. Today, SNSs allow people to easily and simply create their personal online page or profile and to construct and display an online network of contacts (Egedegbe, 2013). Nowadays, the Internet is changing the way people study, work, communicate and operate businesses around the world (Manyika & Roxburgh, 2011). And it has continued to accelerate the expectations of online users. In fact, a large number of online activities are dependent on social networking sites (SNSs), and the

entries are richer than the Encyclopaedia (Kinsella et al, 2009). More importantly, it provides a platform for learning content—a platform in which people can find out anything they need and communicate with anyone they want to (Li, 2013). As a consequence, people text more than they make phone calls; they leave their mobile phones permanently on and SNSs continue to be in a running mode by their side, even while they are asleep (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Indeed, users of SNSs can communicate with their family and friends or people outside their list of contacts, via their profile accounts. On a productive note, SNSs makes it easy for students to communicate with classmates, discuss class assignments and even submit projects to lecturers, apart from less productive activities like watching videos, making comments on their friends' page, etc. (Egedegbe,2013). SNSs expand the horizon for learners to acquire and apply English naturally, as well as with communicative purposes (Li, 2000). What's more, EFL learners also use social networking sites as a tool to practice informal English online (Razak, Saeed & Ahmad, 2013). The social networking sites allow users to log into the network, present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others (Phulari et al, 2010). These activities turn SNSs users into content creators and collaborators, and not merely just website readers (Li, 2013).

Surely, the phenomenal social networking sites will draw scholars to study them. Li (2013) says that the users of online tools are more active being contributors, editors, authors, etc. All in all, SNSs support a wide range of interests and practices (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) and allow SNSs users to develop online communities of shared

interests. In recent years, more and more researchers have focused on language acquired from SNSs. Language learners are willing to provide information and share them by writing blogs, posting videos, and giving comments through Facebook and Twitter (Li, 2013). The said activities, especially ones that involve reading and writing texts digitally would provide new opportunities and incentives for personal writing (Godwin-Jones, 2008). Similarly, Razak, Saeed & Ahmad (2013) state that SNSs provide opportunities for foreign language learners to access the online interactive environment and practise English. They add to say that EFL learners collaborate through SNSs to learn English and this has indeed become a popularly fashionable way. The various functions in SNSs enable language learners to gain input of authentic target language by reading, watching and listening to practical target language usage, and by having opportunities to produce output in the means of expressing themselves or interacting socially with others (Ota, 2011). Supporting this, McBride (2009) believes that through communication and connection in SNSs, language learners will establish relationships with other language learners and thence become autonomous learners. This leads to show that SNSs are a potential tool for foreign language learners in the process of their language practicing. Furthermore, the satisfaction of social needs through interaction in SNSs would be an element to enhance the enthusiasm of SNSs users toward language learning (Ota, 2011).

However, in Selwyn's (2007) research, the data shows Facebook as an SNS that is not a learning resource. Likewise, a similar result has been discovered by Melrose (2012) of which less than a quarter of respondents in his research have used SNSs like

Facebook to support their learning. In contrast, Brick (2011) states that there are both negative and positive reactions from participants who use SNSs as a language learning tool. For instance, reading online differs from reading books. When reading online, people tend to not read thoroughly. Instead, they would rather scan the text carelessly (McBride, 2009).

Nonetheless, the disparate fields of SNSs have been examined by scholars, in order to understand the practices, meaning, and implications of SNSs, as well as the engagement of users with them (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Even so, researchers investigate the usage of SNSs in classes which are involved with how SNSs can best be used; as well as the role played by teachers; and most importantly, the benefits and disadvantages or challenges of using SNSs as a tool for language learners (McBride, 2009; Godwin-Jones, 2008; Boyd, 2008). SNSs have both negative and positive effects on communication (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). The benefits of using SNSs are that they provide a platform for learners to enter an interactive and collaborative learning environment (Razak, Saeed & Ahmad, 2013). Plus, SNSs have a potential to be the tool for foreign learning activities (McBride, 2009). This is because the standard educational environment cannot cater for the interests and affinities of learners. Conversely, shared community spaces and communication with others in SNSs encourage users to contribute and be motivated to learn (Mason & Rennie, 2008). The instant online space to document the reading, writing, and language work of the class transforms the ordinary components of English

composition courses into more useful and productive materials from which everyone can learn through (Nakamaru, 2011).

On the other hand, an empirical study by Ducate & Lomicka (2008) has been done on the use of blogs to see if its usage improved foreign language acquisition. They have pointed out the disadvantages of using SNSs. Firstly; language learners are not totally satisfied in using blogs. Secondly, the insights into exotic language culture are less attractive than expected. Hirvela (2007) reports that language learners are encouraged to interchange ideas with a writer in the writing course. It is shown that creating a collaborative environment for learners to interact with each other and practise their writing skills is much lower than expected. Furthermore, an empirical study reports that there is negative impact in using social networking sites to learn writing. To be more precise, the students reveal that they sometimes forget writing tasks on SNSs because they only focus on the games and chatting. Besides this, learners also reportedly rely on the automatic online correcting software, resulting in the bad habit of software-dependency. More to the point, students believe that SNSs have a limitation on the number of characters allowed on the message board. As a result, this makes it harder to express one's standpoint during a communication with their group members. On another hand, SNSs are valued by scholars as tools for those shy students who avoid oral communication, bringing confidence to their learning journey (Yu & Wu, 2010). Apart from writing, SNSs also provide functions supporting listening and speaking. For instance, applications such as Line and Viber are used as programs especially for oral communication.

Nevertheless, most research conceives a link between informal and recreational online writing with formal and academic writing (Godwin-Jones, 2008). Pertaining to this, the majority of scholars believe that social and technological trends should not be ignored. Knight (2011) concludes that 'e-Learning = enhanced learning' and technology-enhanced learning remains a source of concern for institutions (JISC, 2011). Technologies are needed because they transform the nature of learning (JISC, 2011). And so, learners can explore the World Wide Web for language learning (Yunus, 2009). This can help the enhancement of their English language learning. On top of that, Mason and Rennie (2008) discovered that the relationship between the phenomenon of new technologies and learners is changing. In recent years, young learners grow up with iPad, smart phones, the Internet, and SNSs. Those technologies are an integral part of their environment. To add on, Siemens (2004) suggests that researchers should recognize the impact of such technologies as new learning tools. As Clay (2011) reports in JISC (2011), it is not about the technology itself; it is about changing people's thoughts and attitudes. In this case, SNSs users are the most prominent subjects that scholars should research on.

2.5 Implications of Social Networking Sites on Writing

The emergence of SNSs allows the rapid exchange of knowledge which becomes possible in different spheres for people of all ages. According to Prensky (2001), today's language learners think and process information fundamentally differently from the older generation. These differences go further and deeper than most scholars

suspected or realized. One of the reasons is due to the fact that technology has changed the world and people's cognitive structure completely. Along with this fact, language will necessarily be affected by technological variables (Herring, 2001).

With the increased usage of e-mails, mobile messages and SNSs, people are more frequently using redundant letters for emphasis (e.g.: lovvvvve), omitting punctuations (e.g.: dont), and slang (e.g.: scaggy). Other features that appear in the writing text of SNSs users are such as multiple languages within a sentence, abbreviations, incorrect grammar, broken sentences, and phonetic spellings (Thelwall, 2009). Texts such as 'haha yooo i was thinkin that 2' and 'Next time u nd ur son' are some basic examples. To point it out further, SNSs users pay more attention in getting their message across rather than concentrating on the standard of English language produced. Some SNSs users have too much fun on the Internet that they care less about language forms and standards. Yunus (2012) reports that the short-formed writing or abbreviations by users might affect their message and create uncertainty or inaccuracy in the information displayed online. It is common for users to receive those inappropriately framed sentences without punctuation marks (Shafie, Azida & Osman, 2010) or to have much reliance on the online correction tools in their writing (Shih, 2011). The scholars are mainly concerned about the typing style of language learners used in SNSs which will bring about negative effects on their language proficiency. Besides that, users of SNSs who have poor self-management skills will have vague learning goals and plans, and would not be able to resist temptations by SNSs.

Even so, the attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar are declining. For example, '2' is more commonly written instead of the intended 'too' in SNSs and Short Messaging Service (SMS). But then again, Shafie, Azida & Osman (2010) still believe that when it comes to formal writing, writers will diligently use standard and proper English. This is considered true because writers should be able to distinguish the degree of formality needed in a text. However, Shafie, Azida & Osman (2010) mention that by using a lot of incorrect spelling forms, the writer may not be able to recall the correct spellings when a formal writing necessity arises. This habit will especially influence the language performance of those who have weak English language proficiency. As a matter of fact, different orthographic forms are scarcely a distraction for those with a higher proficiency in English and well-educated language users. Besides, most reading materials and news are in formal forms over the SNSs. Therefore, the incorrect spelling forms should not affect the English language proficiency and performance of SNSs users.

Interestingly, Fitze (2006) finds that there was no statistically significant difference in total production by word count in face-to-face and writing electronic conferences. Additionally, in Hargittai & Hsieh's (2010) research, no significant difference have been found between different types of SNSs users in their Grade Point Average (GPA) scores. So they concluded that the intensity of engagement in SNSs has no relationship with academic achievement.

Nonetheless, Kabilan, Ahmand & Abidin (2010) pose that writing in SNSs can help users become better writers. Trends in the use of the internet, blogs and SNSs provide

new opportunities and motivation for writing (Godwin-Jones, 2008). The explosion in SNSs is widely regarded as an exciting opportunity especially for the youth (Livingstone, 2008). Overall, students could improve their language ability through SNSs especially in terms of reading, writing and vocabulary (Kabilan, Ahmand & Abidin, 2010). In comparison with face-to-face conference, online writing has been found to be statistically significant in improving their lexical range (Fitze, 2006). Razak, Saeed & Ahmad (2013) state that SNSs can facilitate the writing processes of users. Moreover, SNSs also provide an environment which users can interact, share and discuss with each other. The way people learn collaboratively and build learning communities are very much relevant to the way users utilize SNSs (Kabilan, Ahmand & Abidin, 2010). E-mail and message text writings create authentic audiences and purposes for writing, which compensate for traditional writing in classrooms (Li, 2000). In a nutshell, people still prefer to consider SNSs writing as a form of 'communication' or 'informal writing' rather than 'formal, academic writing'. Yet, the connection between these two forms of writing is impartibly an account of SNSs writing. Plus, they can be platforms in academic writing situations.

2.6 The importance of Writing

In general, English speaking forms contain various dialects. In contrast, English writing tends to be less diverse than English speaking. However, this does not indicate that writing is easier than speaking. Language in the written form is required to be more standardized than that of the oral form. Writings demand logical steps of

arguments or illustrations from writers. A composition of vocabulary, sentence structure, logical concepts and idioms into a written piece requires more complex thoughts. Writers provide well-chosen output to handle each writing task, specifically. It means that written language requires explicit norms and rules to handle the overall writing system. And language learners write compositions to convey thoughts or messages to the reader in different contexts and for different purposes. To conclude, writing is assuredly the premier issue in language learning (Shafie, Azida & Osman, 2010).

2.7 Writing in China

The traditional teaching-learning situation in China emphasizes on grammatical accuracy rather than on reading or communicative competence. According to Maniruzzaman (2010), all writing tasks are conducted for the purpose of exam preparations because the writing needs of students are presumed to be limited to answer-writing abilities in their examinations. On top of that, writing in English is considered a boring task and is found to be discouraging for many students (Maniruzzaman, 2010). In fact, many adult English speakers also find writing difficult (Shafie, Azida & Osman, 2010).

As for Chinese students, the English course is compulsory for them to undergo from the stages of primary school up to university levels. Despite the long time provided for English language learning, many students are yet to be competent in composing an accurate, creative and convincing written assignment. The paucity of grammatical

competence and written practices may lead to anxiety on learners, thus causing writing to seem like a harder task (Shafie, Azida & Osman, 2010). Krashen (1989) believed that better writers read more outside of school compared to weak writers. However, reading beyond the school gates in China is almost non-existent. The Chinese education system focuses on nurturing and correcting the grammatical error of its learners rather than seeing to the improvement of their lexical resources, with little or no emphasis on communication (Li, 2013). At the end of the day, there is no improvement in the writing competence of learners. Ultimately, Chinese students bear a tremendously high pressure in order to produce well-written texts.

2.8 Writing Measurement

A good writer would need some time when he or she is confronted with an unfamiliar topic. But the said writer would not leave a blank answer sheet. As Cooper (1984) says, a good writer will be able to write well, in spite of the new topic. Cooper (1984) deems that the combination of essays with multiple-choice questions to test the writing ability of any individual is the best kind of measurement. However, quantifying the knowledge of vocabulary can be a good predictor of one's writing performance (Linnarud, 1986). Therefore, writing can be measured solely by the vocabulary used in the essay of the writer.

On a second note, English essay writing can be hampered by the lack of language proficiency, especially in vocabulary. Vocabulary size has been found to be the single largest factor in writing quality (Wong, 2012). Language learners from elementary to

advanced levels need rich lexical schemata in generating ideas for a writing assignment (Engber, 1995). As for academic writing, vocabulary is said to be the most important element among language skills (Leki & Carson, 1994).

2.9 Vocabulary

A word is the minimal unit to form discourses or sentences (Lou & Ma, 2012). Vocabulary functions as the first layer or the base of a pyramid in a language learning process. Wong (2012) cited Schmitt, Schmitt & Clapham (2001:55), who described vocabulary as the 'single most important area' of second and foreign language competence. In addition, vocabulary has been considered as one of the best single components of second and foreign language proficiency (Laufer & Goldstein 2004). A large vocabulary size is essential for mastery of English (Krashen, 1989). Furthermore, the functional reading, writing, speaking and listening of a language all rely on the vocabulary of that language. Due to its importance in language learning, lexical knowledge is often regarded as the foundation in acquiring the four skills in English (Wong, 2012). Nevertheless, for one to be expected to know all existing vocabulary in a language is an over-ambitious goal and is rather impossible to achieve even for native speakers (Nation, 2001). On top of that, vocabularies of low frequency are less likely to be acquired by language learners who are exposed only to foreign language surroundings like in China (Read, 2007).

2.9.1 How Large a Vocabulary is Needed for English Language Learners?

A large number of studies have revealed the strong relationship between vocabulary size and language use (Nation, 1988). Lexical resources, different frequencies of word usage and ratings of writing are highly inter-correlated (Laufer and Nation, 1995). Along with this, a limited vocabulary size reduces a writer's ability to express ideas in the target language (Schoonen et al, 2003).

In the English language itself, generally 2,000 word families provide the coverage of over 80 per cent of most written texts (Nation, 1988). However, a vocabulary of that size is not sufficient for functional language proficiency (Groot, 2000). According to Nation and Waring (2002), a well-educated adult native English speaker would have a receptive vocabulary size of about 20,000 words. Of these, 3,000 words are needed for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). However, Hazenberg & Hulstijn (1996) think that non-native speakers might require 5,000 words for a university entry. Groot (2000) declares that 5,000 words is a minimal requirement of general consensus, but larger vocabulary size is required for university studies. Furthermore, a minimal vocabulary of 10,000 base words is needed (Hazenberg & Hulstijn, 1996). On the other hand, the compulsory test CET4 (College English Test Band 4) only requires learners to recognize and spell 4,200 English words, thus the mastering of 2,500 words in China (Du, 2004). The majority of Chinese university students know less than 3,000 words (McNeill, 2006). Even though English is considered a foreign language and not really a second language in China, students are made to learn English from the age of 7 years up to 22 years. Yet, after approximately 5,500 days in

those 15 years, their vocabulary size has yet to reach the expected 4,000 words. That is to say, the average new word learned by students is less than 1 per day. On the contrary, English native speakers store an average of 1,000 new word families a year. It is also assumed that the storage of 1,000 words annually can be managed by target language learners. In reality, it is beyond most second and foreign language learners' capacity (Nation, 2001).

In general, Chinese students should take intensive reading courses in order to increase their vocabulary size (Du, 2004). Du (2004) claims that learners can learn 50 new words in each period. And with over 50 periods for six months, the learners will acquire 2,500 new words. It sums up to 5,000 new words annually and the rest can be done in the same manner. If this pace of growth continues, within only two years 10,000 new words will be acquired by learners. However, that argument is rather an ideal theory. Only young native speakers can acquire new vocabularies that fast. A five-year-old native English speaker has a vocabulary size of around 5,000 words. That pace of growth is 1,000 words each year on the average (Nation & Waring, 2002).

2.9.2 What do We Count as a Word?

There are several ways of how words are counted. The first way is by counting tokens, which means that every single word form in a spoken or written text is accounted for. The second way is by counting the types of unique word forms that appear in a written text, (Nation, 2001). Furthermore, Engber (1995) gives a concrete explanation that plural and singular forms of the same lexeme are counted as two items, which

means *student* and *students* are considered as two lexical items or tokens. Also, plural and singular forms, as well as past and present tense forms of the same lexeme are counted as only one different item, in which *student* and *students* are regarded as one item: student.

2.9.3 Is SNSs the Way to Acquire Vocabulary?

Except for the first or second thousand high-frequency words, vocabulary acquisition predominantly occurs through extensive reading (Huckin & Coady, 1999). Most scholars seem to agree that vocabulary learning occurs through incidental reading (Gass, 1999). Therefore, vocabulary acquisition and reading occur at the same time (Huckin & Coady, 1999). According to Krashen's (1989) Input Hypothesis, language learners acquire vocabulary and spelling through reading. Large vocabulary knowledge is essential for the mastery of a language. Moreover, people who are good in writing and have a strong intellect in vocabulary tend to have more free voluntary reading (Krashen, 1989). Additionally, Krashen (1989) finds that those with large vocabulary size do not claim to have developed them through school vocabulary programs. Therefore, it is crucial to bring the vocabulary knowledge of learners into language usage which involves communication and writing (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

On the other hand, social networking sites consist of reading materials which are available for language communication and writing. It is more individualized and user-based. The vocabulary acquired is dependent on the learner's own selection of browses on SNSs. Whether it is comedy, news or a short article, it functions as a

selected reading material. Since vocabulary teaching programs cannot be a source of developing a large vocabulary size (Krashen, 1989), it is reasonable to assume that incidental vocabulary learning takes place in the realm of using SNSs.

2.10 Language Measurement

2.10.1 Complexity, Accuracy and Fluency (CAF)

In order to find out the impact of social networking sites in the field of language acquisition, measuring the language output of SNSs users is necessary. The complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF) of a learner's language for both oral and written production can be measured in the field of analysing learner's language (Ellis, 2005). CAF have been used both as performance descriptors for the spoken and written assessment of learners as well as indicators of the proficiency underlying a language learners' performance (Housen & Kuiken, 2009).

Language fluency and accuracy are important for writing in academic contexts. They can be measured in many different ways (Kol & Schcolnik, 2008). However, neither fluency nor accuracy is taken into consideration in this research. The researcher will concentrate mainly on language lexical complexity.

2.10.2 Lexical Complexity

The term 'lexical' is defined as relating to the words or items of vocabulary in a language, especially as distinguished from its grammatical and syntactical aspects (Collins English Dictionary, 2012). On the other hand, Ellis (2003: p340) defines the

term 'complexity' as the extent to which the language produced in performing a task is elaborated and diversified.

Naturally, language elements (e.g., phonetic, semantic, or lexical) play an important role in the acquisition of the English language (Kol & Schcolnik, 2008). Along with this, complexity measures can be grouped according to the aspect of language: (1) interactional, (2) propositional, (3) functional, (4) grammatical, and (5) lexical (Ellis, 2005). The most commonly used measurement is grammatical complexity. However, the important measurement to be noted is lexical complexity because lexical errors often produce holistic errors that hinder apprehension of communication and academic achievement (Crossley & McNamara, 2009). Besides that, Read (2007) mentions that the de-contextualised learning of isolated lexical units is the basis for the effective proficiency development of a second or foreign language. As for the assessment of written work, vocabulary plays a significant role (Nation, 2001). Some learners may employ relatively simple grammatical structures in the written work but with a wide range of different words. An example given by Fellner & Apple (2006) describes that even though the English speakers are fluent writers in English, they are unlikely to share the same level of grammatical proficiency in their writing.

All in all, lexical complexity is the only one of a variety of elements that affects the overall quality of writing (Laufer & Nation, 1995). Plus, lexical complexity consists of lexical variance, lexical density, lexical sophistication and lexical originality (Laufer, 1994). It is important to note that Laufer & Nation (1995) define lexical density as the percentage of lexical words in a text. Also, lexical originality is defined

as the percentage of words in a given piece of writing that is used by one particular writer and no one else in the group (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

Among these four measurements are the lexical variance or variety (or variation), lexical density or diversity, lexical sophistication or rareness, and lexical originality or individuality. First of all, lexical variation and sophistication are related to second or foreign language development (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Hae-Young, 1998). Secondly, the most frequently used measurements are the lexical variation and lexical sophistication types (Zhang, 2008). According to Kol & Schcolnik (2008), the analysis of lexical complexity looks at how many different words are used or how sophisticated the words are. The lexical complexity of writing is reflected in two dimensions: range (lexical variation) and size (lexical sophistication).

2.10.3 Lexical Variation (LV)

Lexical variation, also known as lexical diversity (Yu, 2009) or lexical range (Crystal, 1992), is defined as the type/token ratio (TTR), i.e. the ratio in per cent between the different lexemes (types) in a text and the total number of running words (tokens) (Laufer & Nation, 1995). And the formula is:

$$LV = \frac{\text{Number of types} \times 100}{\text{Number of tokens}}$$

According to Šišková (2012), tokens are the total words in a particular text. This unit of measurement is used mostly for quantifying the length of texts. The phrase ‘running words’ is the same concept with ‘tokens’. (e.g. In the sentence “He is a teacher.” that consists of 4 tokens). Types are all the unique word forms in a particular text. And those words are counted only once, without repeated counting. (e.g. In the sentence “He is a teacher, a good person.” that consists of 7 tokens but only 6 types because the word *a* is repeated twice).

2.10.4 Lexical Sophistication (LS)

Lexical sophistication, is also labeled as lexical rareness (Lu, 2012). Read (2000) defined it as the proportion of relatively unusual or advanced words in a text. In Laufer & Nation’s (1995) study, lexical sophistication is defined as the percentage of correct advanced words to the word tokens in the text. The formula is shown below:

$$LS = \frac{\text{Number of advanced tokens} \times 100}{\text{Total Number of lexical tokens}}$$

The word “advanced” depends on the researcher’s definition, because the researcher has to take the writers’ level into consideration. (Laufer & Nation, 1995). According to Laufer & Nation (1995), the lexical frequency profile (LFP) provided the categories of different levels of vocabulary in the writing text: the most frequent

words are known as the first list (the first 1,000 words), the more sophisticated lexis consists of the second list (the second 1,000 words), and the rest is done in the same manner (East, 2006). The first and the second list consist of a total number 2,000 high-frequency vocabulary of English. The first 1,000 vocabulary cover about 77% and the second 1,000 vocabulary cover about 5% of the running words in academic contexts (Nation, 2001).

Lexical variation and lexical sophistication are the important dimensions of lexical complexity. In order to find out the relationship between intensity of engagement in SNSs and academic achievement, formulae of LV and LS are needed to be used in measuring Chinese students' writing performance.

2.11 Perceptions of the Participants

The feelings and perceptions of interview participants can be hard to capture and present, especially when the researcher is required to hold the subjective opinions and record and analyze the participants' thoughts and perceptions objectively (Lichtman, 2013). On the other hand, the participants are required to give an in-depth and honest answer on their views of how SNSs effect their writing, enhance their motivation to write in English and influence their attitude toward using SNSs in writing.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the widespread population of social networking sites, types of SNSs users and writing in the English language. Each section has further discussed

the connections between them: the usage of SNSs and language learning, the usage of SNSs and writing, writing proficiency and English vocabulary, vocabulary and SNSs, and lastly, lexical complexity and writing.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the details of the research design and methods for the present study. As identified in Chapter One, the major issues addressed in this thesis are (1) the frequency of participation in SNSs academic writing in terms of Chinese postgraduates' lexical complexity; and (2) SNSs users' perceptions towards SNSs that affect their writing.

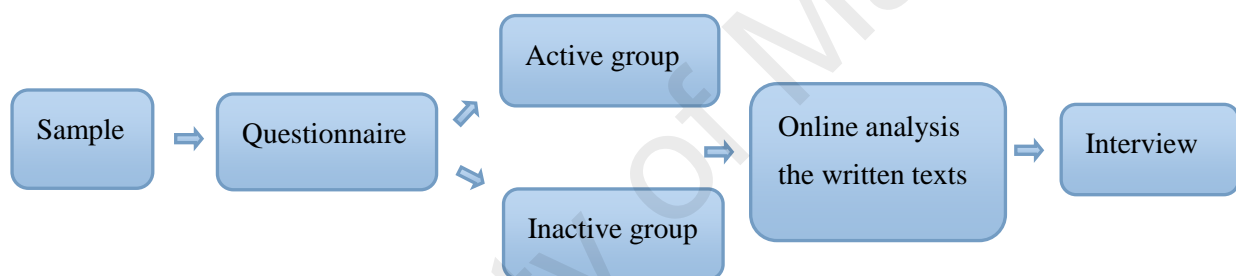
This chapter describes the main issues concerning the research design, and hence is divided into three sections. In the first section, there is an introduction to the participants that participated the current study. Here, the data source, data collection instruments and procedures will be explained in detail. In the next section, data analysis and a brief summary of the analytic frameworks will be described by the researcher. Finally, Section Three deals with the pilot study of this research.

3.2 Research Design

A mixed method is conducted in this research. The data are collected from 61 Chinese postgraduates of University of Malaya whom have been randomly selected by the researcher in the main library. The researcher asks basic information of people in the main library of University of Malaya, and randomly selected those who are qualified

for this study. A survey questionnaire link is given to them. The procedure contains two parts: an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaire is for the purpose of answering the research question one which is separating the active participants from inactive participants in SNSs academic writing in terms of international Chinese postgraduates' lexical complexity. Interview is answering the research question two that find out SNSs users' perceptions towards SNSs writing.

3.2.1 Instruments and Procedures



Flow Chart 3.1: Instruments and Procedures

3.2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire of this study is adapted from Brandtzæg & Heim (2011), Wong (2012) and Zhi & Hegelheimer (2013) of which the articles are called as “A typology of social networking sites users”, “An investigation of the predictors of L2 writing among adult ESL students”, and “Mobile-assisted grammar exercises: effects on self-editing in L2 writing”, respectively (refer to Appendix A). All the questions are for the purpose of acquiring detailed information of participants and distinguishing the active users from inactive SNSs users.

Brandtzæg & Heim (2011), Wong (2012) and Zhi & Hegelheimer (2013) apply those questions in similar studies with this research, they explore the field of SNSs users' type and gather information on it. Furthermore, they provide detailed description of SNSs users' type in the questions of their questionnaires. The questionnaire is attached with a consent form and it is composed of three parts. The first part is formed from two basic information questions which has adapted from Wong (2012). It consists of questions regarding the gender of the participants and a confirmation from them that they do use any English social networking sites.

Then, the second part consists of questions regarding the frequency of logging in to English SNSs by the respondents per day, the number of hours they spend daily on SNSs, language used for SNSs interaction and choice questions using 5-level Likert scales. This section is adapted from Zhi & Hegelheimer (2013) which talked about mobile device using experience, and the statements for using English SNSs are adapted from 18 SNSs usage variables (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011).

Last but not least, the written texts are collected from 61 Chinese international postgraduates in the University of Malaya. This section is for the purpose of analyzing lexical variance and lexical sophistication of participants' written language. The participants are instructed to send out their academic writing texts to the e-mail of the researcher which consists of at least 250 words disregarding the field of their academic programme. Thus, the first 250 words of each written text can be extracted and used by the researcher. The instruction of submission of written task is at the end of the online survey questionnaire. According to Harmer (2006) one of the two keys

to test the effectiveness of an essay test is to ensure that the test is valid. For example, essay writers might have a paucity of knowledge of astronomy and lead to a poor performance, but it is not invalidity of the language itself. In order to ensure the test is valid, the writing texts are unlimited in all fields and topics and can be drawn out from the participants' previous or current academic writing, writing project, thesis or dissertation. And these writing texts are only extracted from abstract, introduction or conclusion of their academic writing in order to avoid ample use of jargon and indicate their ability to use vocabulary.

3.2.3 Interview

Interview section is for the purpose of investigating the perceptions of Chinese international postgraduates on their participation in SNSs which affect their writing. The semi-structured interview (refer to Appendix B) is composed of two sections. The first section consists of three questions for the purpose of confirming the information from the previous questionnaire the participants filled up. This section is for the purpose of double checking and confirming information with the participants. The second section consists of several key questions which are adapted from Mehmood & Taswir (2013) and Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin (2010). It focuses on four aspects of SNSs users' improvement of vocabulary, as well as participants' motivation and attitude towards English writing.

The first three questions in the interview section are extracted from the questionnaire.

Due to the purpose of confirming and double checking with interviewees, the

questions are unnecessary to be exactly same questions. Interview question numbers 7 and 15 are adapted and adopted from Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin (2010). And the remaining questions are adapted and adopted from Mehmood & Taswir (2013).

Since it is a semi-structured interview, the researcher will add more questions when further information are required. For instance, the interviewee is asked on how frequently the SNSs have been used by him or her per day, and then, the researcher would pose further questions such as “Why?” or “Is it busy working because you aren’t active using SNSs?” or “You don’t think SNSs can help your academic writing?”. This section explores the view of individual interviewees and also allows the interviewer to pursue more detailed responses.

3.2.4 Data Collection

For the purpose of answering the two research questions, it is necessary for the researcher to collect data from participants, identify the active and inactive SNSs users, and look into perceptions of the participants.

First and foremost, the researcher uploads the questionnaire into a free online survey tool called ‘e-Surv’ and randomly distributes this online survey link (https://A1Surveys.com?s=LJELG_aa3772c4) to 61 Chinese international postgraduates in the University of Malaya. 25 male and 36 female participants of the age around 24-30 are involved. The questionnaires have been collected by the researcher within 2 weeks. Second, the researcher analyzes the response from the survey questionnaires based on Brandtzæg & Heim’s (2011) typology of SNSs users.

According to Brandtzæg & Heim's (2011), the researcher divides the samples into active group and inactive group. Third, written texts are collected from both active and inactive groups. In the next stage, 3 active and 3 inactive SNSs participants are randomly selected from 61 Chinese international postgraduates and these 6 participants are interviewed individually by the researcher. Becker (2012) mentions all the experienced researchers know the question of 'how many interviews is enough?' has no reasonable answer. And the only possible answer is to have enough interviews to say what the researcher think is. The 6 interview participants are nearly 10% of the total sample size, and with this sufficient sample size, interviews may produce reliable answers to the research questions. The researcher uses iPhone voice memos to record all interviews during 3 days. The language used during the interview depends on the interviewee's choice, because some interviewees might be comfortable speaking in English and some might prefer using Chinese. However, in this study, all the interviewees choose to speak in English.

3.3 Data Analysis

According to the questionnaire data, the researcher categorizes the 61 participants into active group and inactive group (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011). The active group consists of three user types: *Socialisers*, *Debaters* and *Actives*. The inactive group includes two user types: *Sporadics* and *Lurkers* (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011).

In order to answer Research Question 1: Is there a significant relationship between frequency of participation in SNSs and academic writing in terms of lexical

complexity? The VocabProfilers software and IBM SPSS Statistics 21 software will be used in this research.

The VocabProfilers software is a web-based lexical complexity analyzer. It computes certain indices of lexical complexity in the text. Lexical complexity is measured in terms of two most revealing indices: lexical variance (LV) and lexical sophistication (LS) in this study (Zhang, 2008). VocabProfilers can create a graphical representation to visualize the results of lexical variance and lexical sophistication. Figure 3.1 is an example of the results in VocabProfilers.

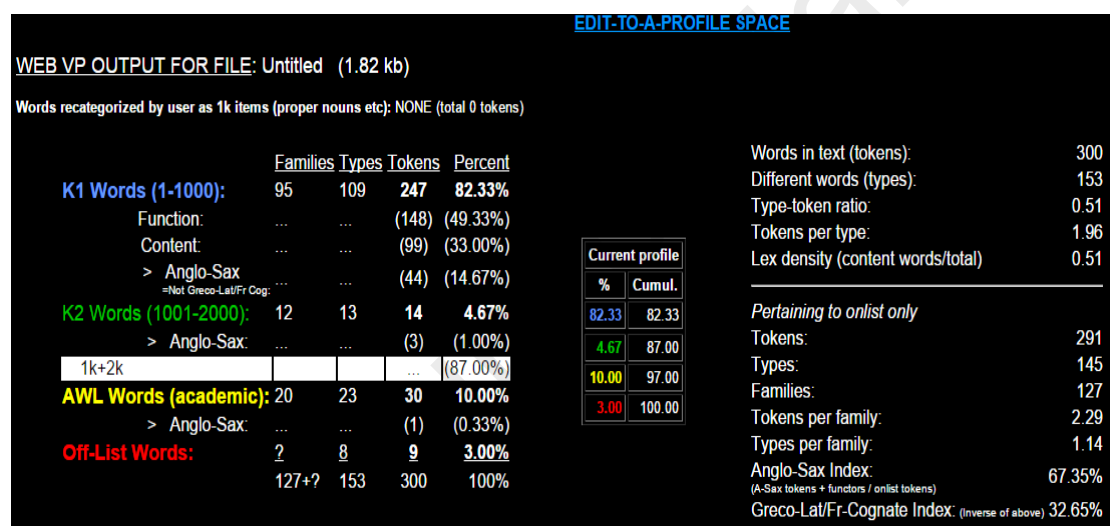


Figure 3.1: An Example of Results in VocabProfilers

VocabProfilers analyzes writing words into four criteria:

1. K-1 Words means 1 to 1,000 most common word families.
2. K-2 Words means 1,001 to 2,000 most common word families.
3. AWL (Academic Word List) Words means 570 academic word families.
4. Off-list Words means words not appearing on any of the particular three lists; these “Off-list Words” is often called “low frequency words”.

Coxhead's (2000) set of 570 word families occurs frequently in written texts across a range of university disciplines (Read, 2007). The Academic Word List (AWL) has been very influential in testing English for academic purposes as a reference list for the sub-technical vocabulary that students are assumed to need in undertaking university studies through the medium of English.

In order to find out how significant the relationship is between active and inactive SNSs users on the lexical complexity aspect, IBM SPSS Statistics 21 software is used to support independent samples *t*-test to analyze the data (Cao, Pauleen & Bathurst, 2012).

For answering Research Question 2: What are the Chinese postgraduates' perspectives of how their participation in SNSs affects their academic writing? The researcher listens to the recordings and transcribes them into written form (refer to Appendix N, Appendix O, Appendix P, Appendix Q, Appendix R and Appendix S) so that they can be studied in detail. In a previous study, Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin (2010) focus on participants' improvement of language skills, motivation, confidence and attitudes towards English language learning. So, this study will analyze interviewees' data on the aspects of SNSs users' improvement of vocabulary, and participants' motivation and attitudes towards English writing.

3.4 Pilot Study

A pilot test was conducted in order to rectify any unexpected circumstances such as repeated questions in the questionnaire, enabling it to be carried out more effectively.

It also can assess and evaluate the instruments and methods of research. The researcher launched the e-Surv and randomly distributes the survey link to 15 Chinese international postgraduates in the main library of the University of Malaya. And the 15 samples from pilot study will not be involved in the main study.

From this, 6 male respondents and 9 female respondents responded with “Yes” to confirm that they are English SNSs users. Figure 3.2 shows that the engagement of logging onto one’s account of an English SNSs (e.g. YouTube, Facebook) can be as frequent as one to three times per day. It is around 47% of the total respondents. Of this number, 20% of the respondents answer that they log into their SNSs less than 1 time per day. The option of “more than 12 times” and “4-6 times” are around 13% of the responses.

*4) 3. The frequency of your daily logging in to English social networking sites (eg. YouTube, Facebook) account.

		Response (%)	Responses
Less than 1 time		20.00	3
1-3 times		46.67	7
4-6 times		13.33	2
7-9 times		6.67	1
10-12 times		0.00	0
More than 12 times		13.33	2
Answered Question			15
Skipped Question			0

Figure 3.2: The Frequency of Daily Logging into the English SNSs Account

*5) 4. Roughly how many hours per day do you spend on social networks?

		Response (%)	Responses
Less than 1 hour		33.33	5
1-3 hours		46.67	7
3-4 hours		6.67	1
4-5 hours		6.67	1
5-6 hours		0.00	0
More than 6 hours		6.67	1
Answered Question			15
Skipped Question			0

Figure 3.3: The Hours Participants Spend on SNSs Per day

Figure 3.3 shows that on the question of how many hours per day respondents spend on SNSs, roughly 47% respondents have chosen 1-3 hours. That is the highest-chosen option among all. And “less than 1 hour” is the second highest choice from the respondents.

Based on the frequency of using SNSs and reasons of the usage, 15 respondents have been divided into inactive and active groups with 5 and 10 respondents, respectively. The researcher uses the letter “R” to represent an individual respondent. As for the lexical complexity, it is measured in terms of two most revealing indices: lexical variance (LV) and lexical sophistication (LS). VocabProfilers is used to analyze and calculate the data, and the indices are shown below (full data, refer to Appendix C and Appendix D):

Table 3.1: Five Inactive SNSs Users and Their LV, LS Results

Five Inactive users	Type-token ratio (LV)	LS
MEANS	0.53	26.57

Table 3.2: Ten Active SNSs Users and Their LV, LS Results

Ten Active users	Type-token ratio (LV)	LS
MEANS	0.49	27.66

Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 show that the mean of lexical variation (LV) of the inactive SNSs group is higher (0.53) than the active group (0.49). However, the mean of lexical sophistication (LS) of the inactive group is lower (26.57) than the active group (27.66).

From the pilot tests, the researcher is able to comprehend whether the questionnaire reaches participants' understanding level. At the same time, experience and comments are gathered to improve the effectiveness of the actual research. The feedback from participants is that they have to spend longer than 30 minutes to write an essay after they fill up the questionnaire. The researcher had provided an IELTS essay writing task, requiring about 250 words from each respondent. However, the respondents have treated the essay writing as a stressful task and have perfunctorily done their compositions. Most important, some compositions did not even reach 250 words as the task required. The average composition words were around 120. Therefore in the main study, the participants were instructed to email their writing texts which consist of at least 250 words. And the first 250 words of each written text can be extracted and used by the researcher. Furthermore, the texts can be drawn out from participants' previous or current academic writing, writing project, thesis, or dissertation, regardless of fields and topics.

3.5 Conclusion

The chapter attempts to present a detailed overview of the conceptual and methodological framework for the current study. It is hoped that this will provide the

background for the discussion regarding data analysis and interpretation of results which follows in Chapter 4.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The findings of this study will be presented in this chapter. The discussion and interpretation of the results about qualitative and quantitative research are the most vital parts of the study.

This chapter presents the findings and discusses the results in three steps. First, a general description of the different types of SNSs users will be provided. Then, the relationship between frequency of participation in SNSs and their English writing in terms of lexical complexity will be discovered. Finally, responses' perceptions of how participation in SNSs affect their writing will be presented.

The above Steps One and Two will answer Research Question 1 and Research Question 2: Is there a significant relationship between frequency of participation in SNSs and academic writing in terms of lexical complexity? Step Three will answer Research Question 2: What are the Chinese postgraduates' perceptions on how their participation in SNSs affect their writing?

4.2 Users' General Practices of SNSs

The first section of the questionnaire requires participants' background information about gender and their confirmation of English social networking sites usage. The

total 61 participants consist of 25 males (around 41%) respondents and 36 females (around 59%) respondents. They have all responded “Yes” to confirm that they are users of English in social networking sites.

The second section of the questionnaire investigates the SNSs types of respondents. Questions for the frequency of daily logging in and detailed usage of SNSs require participants to give their honest response. Users could perform different types of actions when they visit SNSs including texting, watching videos, searching for information and playing online games. There appears to be a high logging-in frequency among SNSs users in their daily lives (Naizabekov, 2012). In this research, Figure 4.1 shows the level of frequency that participants logged into their English social networking sites (e.g. YouTube, Facebook) account. The highest chosen entry is 38.33% (engaging between 1-3 times). The second chosen entry is 26.67% of ‘less than 1 time’. Next, 16.67% engaged between ‘4-6 times’ of daily logging in. And the lowest choice is ‘10-12 times’ which is only 1.67% of the total responses. In short, around 82% respondents logged in less than 6 times a day of logging into English social networking sites. This indicates that a high frequency of logging into social networking sites is rather rare.

*4) 3. The frequency of your daily logging in to English social networking sites (eg. YouTube, Facebook) account.

	Response (%)
Less than 1 time	26.67
1-3 times	38.33
4-6 times	16.67
7-9 times	6.67
10-12 times	1.67
More than 12 times	10.00

Figure 4.1: Frequency of Logging into SNSs

In terms of the number of hours participants spend on social networking sites per day, the highest response rate is '1-3 hours' for 43.33% of the respondents. And 33.33% of the participants have chosen the entry 'less than 1 hour'. For entry '5-6 hours' only, 1.67% responded. Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 show similar patterns of frequency of logging into SNSs with the time spent on SNSs.

*5) 4. Roughly how many hours per day do you spend on social networks?

	Response (%)
Less than 1 hour	33.33
1-3 hours	43.33
3-4 hours	10.00
4-5 hours	6.67
5-6 hours	1.67
More than 6 hours	5.00

Figure 4.2: Time Spent on SNSs

Table 4.1 shows in terms of language use, the highest percentage of using Chinese language only is under the statement 'Frequently' (36.07%) in social networking sites interaction. And 1.64% respondents indicate that they have never used only Chinese on SNSs. The highest percentage under statement 'sometimes' (49.18%) is the entry

using ‘English only’. And 3.28% respondents indicate that they have never used only English on SNSs. The highest percentage of using a mix of English and Chinese language is under the statement ‘Frequently’ (36.67%). Whereas, the lowest percentage (6.67%) is under the statement ‘Always’. Also 66.67% of the respondents have never used other languages besides Chinese and English. No one has chosen ‘Frequently’ in using other languages. In a study on Facebook among Malaysian users, researchers have found a similar pattern with Table 4.1 (Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin, 2010). They have reported that Bahasa Malaysia (the national language of Malaysia), English and a mix of English and Bahasa Malaysia are frequently used by the participants to interact in Facebook. As for the current study, Chinese language, and a mix of English and Chinese are the most frequently used by respondents in social networking sites interaction. In conclusion, the participants still prefer to use Chinese language on SNSs, even when they are in a foreign region.

Table 4.1 Language Use for SNSs Interaction

*6) 5. What language do you use for Social Networking Sites (SNSs) interaction? Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by choosing whether you perform these statements (1) Never (2) Seldom (3) Sometimes (4) Frequently (5) Always.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Responses	Total
Chinese only	1.64%	8.20%	24.59%	36.07%	29.51%	61	25%
English only	3.28%	13.11%	49.18%	24.59%	9.84%	61	25%
A mix of English and Chinese	8.33%	15.00%	33.33%	36.67%	6.67%	60	25%
Other languages	66.67%	18.33%	13.33%	0%	1.67%	60	25%

Besides frequency, the reasons for participants using SNSs are shown in Table 4.2 (for full lists, see Appendix E). The highest three reasons for respondents to

'Frequently' use SNSs are writing letters or messages (42.86%), watching videos (42.86%) and sending or receiving mails (39.68%). Watching videos (22.22%), sending or receiving mails (19.05%) and seeing if somebody has tried to contact the participant (14.29%) are high reasons for 'Always' on SNSs. The reasons for 'Frequently' and 'Always' using SNSs are almost similar with one another. The highest three reasons for respondents to 'Never' use SNSs are playing games (31.75%), publishing diaries or journals (20.63%) and looking for a new friend (19.05%). Four reasons for 'Seldom' usage of SNSs are publishing diaries or journals (42.86%), looking for a new friend (38.10%), profile surfing (34.92%) and running community groups (34.92%). It reveals a similar response of 'Never' and 'Seldom' from the respondents. Especially 'publish diaries or journals' is up to 20.63% and 42.86% of 'Never' and 'Seldom', respectively. And 'look for a new friend' is up to 19.05% and 38.10% of 'Never' and 'Seldom' respectively. SNSs are designed to connect people with a large set of strong ties, such as family and friends. It also effectively helps to keep in touch with acquaintances and new ties (Burke, Kraut & Marlow, 2011). However, this study had similar results with Cao, Pauleen & Bathurst (2012); they report that Chinese international students in New Zealand use social networking sites as a way of keeping their existing social connections, rather than to look for new friends.

Table 4.2: Participants' Reasons and Frequency of Using SNSs

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Play games 31.75%	Publish diaries/journals 42.86%	Profile surfing 42.86%	Write letters or messages 42.86%	Watch videos (YouTube etc.) 22.22%
Publish diaries/journals 20.63%	Look for a new friend 38.10%	Discuss 42.86%	Watch videos (YouTube etc.) 42.86%	Send/receive mails 19.05%
Look for a new friend 19.05%	Profile surfing & Run community groups 34.92%	Find an announcement or an event 41.27%	Send/receive mails 39.68%	See if somebody has tried to contact me 14.29%

4.3 Types of SNSs Users and Lexical Complexity

The amount of time participants spend on SNSs is a standard measure of overall use of SNSs (Lampe, Vitak & Ellison, 2013). Based on the questionnaire response from participants and Brandtzæg & Heim's (2011) typology types of SNSs users (refer to Section 2.3.4), the total 61 participants have been divided into inactive and active groups with 31 and 30 respondents, respectively (for full lists, see Appendix F and Appendix G). And "R" stands for individual respondent. Active or inactive type is from the Brandtzæg & Heim's (2011) concept that the usage of SNSs in terms of users' high or low participation (intensity of use) and participation mode (objective and direction of participation). Lexical complexity is measured in terms of two most revealing indices: lexical variance (LV) and lexical sophistication (LS) (refer to Appendix H and Appendix I). In this section, the relationship of lexical variance and lexical sophistication among inactive and active users will be revealed.

4.3.1 LV Among Inactive and Active Users

Lexical variation of texts is measured by the type/token ratio (T/T ratio) (refer to Section 2.10.3). This is the percentage of lexical words that appeared only once in the total number of words in the text. In view of the foregoing circumstances, a high figure of type/token ratio represents little repetition of vocabulary in the text (see Appendix H for details of inactive and active users in LV). Table 4.3 below shows the test comparing active and inactive social networking sites users in writing lexical variance (LV).

Table 4.3: SPSS Result of LV

LV			
Indicators	Mean	SD	N
Inactive	53.5161	4.18626	31
Active	53.0667	5.16576	30

Based on the results of independent samples t-test (refer to Table 4.3), inactive SNSs users' mean ($M = 53.52$) is slightly greater than that of active SNSs users' ($M = 53.07$). The result shows no statistically significant difference between the inactive group ($M = 53.52$, $SD = 4.19$) and active group ($M = 53.07$, $SD = 5.17$), $t(59) = .374$; the significant value $p = 0.710$, 95% Confidence Interval (CI) [-1.96, 2.85]. According to Gorman & Johnson (2013) a result where $p < 0.05$ is generally labelled

as statistically significant in the social sciences. Since the significant value was greater than alpha at .05 level of significance, a conclusion can be drawn that there is no significant difference between active and inactive social networking sites users on lexical variance. Furthermore, Lu (2012) says the measures of lexical variation showed the strongest effect for quality of a text. Therefore, lexical variance has no significant difference between active and inactive SNSs users.

4.3.2 LS Among Inactive and Active Users

The percentage of “advanced words” in the text is lexical sophistication (LS) (refer to Section 2.10.4). The VocabProfilers software counted the total tokens and categorized them into K-1 words, K-2 words, AWL, and Off-List (refer to Section 3.3). Calculating the “advanced words” by plus K-2 words, AWL, and Off-List together and then dividing it by the total number of tokens. The results are shown in Table 4.4 (see Appendix I for details of inactive and active users in LS).

Table 4.4: SPSS Result of LS

LS			
Indicators	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Statistics			
Inactive	29.3584	7.39597	31
Active	27.2120	5.22978	30

Based on the results of independent samples t-test in Table 4.4, the mean of inactive SNSs users ($M = 29.36$) is slightly lower than the mean of active SNSs users ($M = 27.21$). The result shows no statistically significant difference between inactive group ($M = 29.36$, $SD = 7.40$) and active group ($M = 27.21$, $SD = 5.23$), $t(59) = 1.305$, the significant value $p = .197$, 95% Confidence Interval (CI) $[-1.15, 5.44]$. Since the significant value is greater than alpha at .05 level of significance, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between active and inactive social networking sites users on lexical sophistication.

Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) report that SNSs users have lower academic performance and spend fewer hours studying per week than non-users of SNSs. And Kol & Scholnik (2008) report that there is no significant difference found on language complexity after observing forum users through a period of time. Moreover, this research shows that no significant differences are found between the lexical complexity in the active and inactive SNSs users.

However, no significance in lexical complexity has been found and it is not surprising for a reason; SNSs provide various functions and activities, so the participants may be keen to do different activities on SNSs and that leads to the different results even though they spend a same amount of time on SNSs. Nevertheless, this does not have the same amount of impact on language. For example, 'see if somebody has tried to contact me' (14.29%) and 'send and receive mails' (19.05%) both are high selected entries in the questionnaire. However, in terms of impact on language, 'send and receive mails' has much greater impact than 'see if somebody has tried to contact me'.

All in all, participants might spend the same amount of time, but it is not the same amount of impact on lexical complexity.

4.4 The Influence of Different Types of SNSs Users

Table 4.5: Basic Information of Six Interviewees

		Frequently used SNSs	Friends	Functions	Kind
Active Users	R1	Facebook, YouTube	Chinese , Malaysians & international	Communication, gain information	Informational
	R3	YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp	Malaysian, Chinese, native speakers	Connection, make order, check friends, watch video, listen music	Educational, informational , entertainment
	R4	Facebook, YouTube, TED, LinkedIn	Chinese, Malaysian & international	Listen to radio, communication, get information	Educational
Inactive users	R5	WhatsApp	Most of them are Malaysian Chinese	Get information	Informational
	R6	YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp	Chinese, Malaysian, international & native speakers	Browsing information, contact friends	Educational, informational
	R2	Blog, WhatsApp, YouTube, WeChat	Colleagues, Malay friends	Communication, exchange information, watch movies and videos	Informational

A qualitative data have been interpreted by the researcher to answer the second

research question of this study which is, “What are the Chinese students’ perceptions on how their participation in SNSs affect their writing.”

The construct of academic writing in SNSs was derived from Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010). Instead of focusing on the aspects of motivation, attitudes, confidence and improving language skills towards English language, this present study emphasizes on whether SNSs may have meaningful impacts on the aspects of: (1) SNSs users’ improvement of English writing or vocabulary; and (2) SNSs users’ motivation and attitude towards academic writing. In view of the foregoing circumstances, four aspects emerged from the qualitative data analysis: (1) perspectives on improvement of English vocabulary; (2) perceptions on SNSs and motivation to write; (3) perceptions on SNSs and negative attitude to write; and (4) perceptions on SNSs and positive attitude to write. These themes are discussed both independently and comparatively between active and inactive SNSs users.

4.4.1 Perceptions on Improvement of English Vocabulary

Extracts 4.1 and 4.2 highlight the active and inactive SNSs users’ perspectives on their improvement of English vocabulary (for a full list, refer to Appendix J). All the extracts are cited word by word from the interviews and have not been concerned for language or grammatical errors.

Extract 4.1: Improvement of English Vocabulary on Active SNSs users

Active SNSs Users	
R1	1. When some other people share something new, which I'm not clear about I'll try to translate and try to memories some the new words.
R3	1. ...I didn't know what is it and after that, I asked a friend ... and I Google it, check websites on those words, and I know it, and I can understand what they say.
R4	1. Yes, I guess. Because you know, sometimes in the English environment, you may not know the exact meaning of the word, but from the context... 2. ...because this one is quite informal, you can't get it in a dictionary.

SNSs provide learners with opportunities to assess others' writings and improve their vocabulary (Shih, 2011). Extract 4.1 above shows the three active SNSs users: R1, R3 and R4 who believe that from writing contexts, new vocabulary can be acquired through asking friends or online checking and so on.

Extract 4.2 Improvement of English Vocabulary on Inactive SNSs users

Inactive SNSs Users	
R2	1. If they sent to me too.... (complex short forms), I still can't understand. If only a simple sentence, I can guess... 2....I'll look from the context, but if I can't guess, I'll ask them. 3...I'll check the dictionary first, if I can't find out, then I will ask them.
R5	1. Guess, I try to guess the meaning.
R6	1. I didn't really learn those informal or short forms of words. I immerge myself in the context. And for the regular new words I do learned a lot. 2. SNSs are useful to acquire new English vocabulary, for example, simple slang and words.

Extract 4.2 above shows the three inactive SNSs users: R2, R5 and R6 who believe that asking friends, dictionary checking and guessing are useful for acquiring new English vocabulary. However, R5 declaims she is not interested in acquiring vocabulary online at all.

Active and inactive SNSs users believe that informal language used on SNSs are more widespread than formal language. And it is possible on SNSs, informal vocabularies are more accessible for them than formal vocabularies. Due to this fact, distinguishing informal vocabulary from formal ones is quite hard to do. Besides, Tunde-Awe (2015) reports that more than half of the respondents have indicated that they never used SNSs like Facebook for academic purpose. However, holding casual chats and discussions in social communications with their classmates or friends, SNSs such as Facebook enable them to acquire new vocabulary which helps them improve English writing. Despite many users of SNSs, it is unclear for the substantive theoretical reasons of why SNSs may influence their academic performance (Ahn, 2011). However, from the perspective of incidental learning, a platform like SNSs are suitable for learning. The features of SNSs engage learners in meaningful language-related activities even though their initial intention of using SNSs is to socialize (Tunde-Awe, 2015). Despite informal and formal vocabulary that participants mentioned, in this section, the researcher simply focuses on new words that SNSs users have acquired.

All in all, active and inactive SNSs users have quite a lot of similarity on ways to improve their acquisition of English vocabulary. R1 believes that if SNSs users 'put some concern on the new words, maybe he or she can learn something'. Because of

the interest being limited to entertainment such as playing games on SNSs, one cannot gain new words subconsciously. R3 mentions that when people send her a message in a short form like 'wlc' for 'welcome', she will have to ask friends or Google it. R2 also says that her writing class on Blog gives her an opportunity to check words that she does not know. She says 'I might not remember all the new words, but I'm sure I learned some new words'. At the same time, contextual guessing has been used by many interviewees. The six participants consider SNSs 'will not be effective on improving writing' or 'I don't really learn from FB', because the vocabulary and sentence on SNSs normally is 'not in a formal form' but 'short and simple'. Learning of regular words and the net-used words (e.g.: Looool) from SNSs is conceded by R1. Some examples of R1's statements are:

- (1) 'When some other people share something new, which I'm not clear about. I'll try to translate and try to memorize some of the new words'.
- (2) 'I try to follow the step of the networking sites, sometimes I still have problems with that, but I'll try to use that, because other people use it, so I'll try to use them as well'.
- (3) 'When I use English to write a comment, I'll pay attention to whether my sentences are correct or not, I try not to make any mistake on it. Yeah, I try to make a good sentences'.

Some examples of R2's statements are:

- (1) 'If they sent to me too (complex short forms), I still can't understand. If only a simple sentence, I can guess'.
- (2) 'I'll look from the context, but if I can't guess, I'll ask them'.
- (3) 'I'll check the dictionary first, if I can't find out, then I will ask them'.
- (4) 'Like the way they write, I saw it, remember it, and the next time I will use it too'.

According to Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin (2010), the learners acquire words and use them within the right context in four steps: (1) noticing new words on SNSs; (2) learning of new words through SNSs friends; (3) finding out meanings of the new words on SNSs; and (4) practicing the new words acquired from SNSs in their own writings. Even though some of the participants claim 'I don't really learn from FB', the three statements from R1 and four statements from R2 still show that they construct the four-step cycle of acquiring new vocabulary, and R6 confirms that he has learned new vocabulary. However, R3, R4 and R5 have failed to complete this cycle.

Krashen (1989) indicates that incidental acquisition of new words occurs through the Input Hypothesis. Most vocabulary is acquired in an incremental way through repeated encounters during extensive reading (Hulstijn, 2001). And the most successful learners believe words should be picked up through natural exposure complemented by some intentional study (Huckin & Coady, 1999). Other factors such as contextual guessing, and skilful dictionary use are positively correlating with vocabulary acquisition (Huckin & Coady, 1999). In current research, all the

interviewees are positively correlated with contextual guessing or skilful dictionary. For example, R4 indicates he may not know the exact meaning of the word, but the contextual guessing has made it possible for him to understand.

In summary, even though the research questionnaire result shows that 42.86% of the participants frequently use SNSs to write letters or messages, 19.05% and 39.68% of the participants always and frequently use SNSs to send or receive mails (refer to Table 4.1). But still, only R1, R2 and R6 claim that they construct the four-step cycle of acquiring new vocabulary. On the other hand, R3, R4 and R5 fail to acquire new vocabulary. The number of inactive SNSs users is more than the number of active SNSs users in the aspect of acquiring new vocabulary.

4.4.2 Perceptions on SNSs and Motivation to Write

Extracts 4.3 and 4.4 present some examples of active and inactive SNSs users' motivation to write (for full list, refer to Appendix K).

Extract 4.3: Writing Motivation of Active SNSs Users

Active SNSs Users	
R1	1. Yes, when I use English to write a comment, I'll pay attention to whether my sentences are correct or not, I try not to make any mistake on it. Yeah, I try to make good sentences.
R3	1. Motivation for writing? I think... not much...
R4	1. And before using SNSs I already have a good attitude and motivation toward language writing. The SNSs just give me the platform, to let me talk to friends, my attitude didn't change.

Learning through SNSs allows learners to adjust their strategies according to their own needs and interests at any time. SNSs can improve learners' interests of learning and cultivating their language communicative competence in order to improve the effect of language learning (Li, 2011). Besides that, interest and motivation can directly influence students in many ways (Millington & Smith, 2012).

A student's inner wish to perform well in academic life has been described as motivation (Rouis, Limayem & Salehi-Sangari, 2011). And Naizabekov (2012) presumes that there are some connections which occur between motivation and the usage of SNSs. Motivation is revealed when users express the need to use English to participate among the SNSs communities like Facebook because the desire to socialize requires reading and writing (Rose, 2014).

According to active user R1, writing comments or communicating with foreigners in English motivates her to write on SNSs. She takes pride in the sense of 'I can communicate in English' on SNSs. According to Rose (2014), users might be satisfied about the meaningful communication with other English speakers. Plus, encouraging thoughtful communication in English can promote language learning and allow the development of writing skills. SNSs could offer some effective writing practice and increase writers' motivation to write in English (Kol & Schcolnik, 2008). SNSs users also feel writing or communication on SNSs is more meaningful and authentic than traditional classroom writing, and feel motivated to post writings that attract others to comment (Prichard, 2013).

Extract 4.4: Writing Motivation of Inactive SNSs Users

Inactive SNSs Users	
R2	1. He is only give the task, and I have to finish writing an article, and then I have to post on Blog, so the teacher will know I finished my task. He will motivate me to write, and my other classmates are in that Blog as well, so we can all post on it, and we can have a look of others' works too. Blog is really good website for writing English, on the one hand, I can writing, on the other hand, I can read others' writing.
R5	1. A: In SNSs Everything is in English, do you feel motivated to write? R5: No.
R6	1. A: Do SNSs enhance you motivation to write in English? R6: No, I only use SNSs for communicate with others, check their shared experience and knowledge on SNSs.

Inactive user R2 feels frustrated whenever the unknown words prevent her from understanding the text. Miura & Yamashita (2007) construct two causal models of psychological and internal factors (personal traits/benefits/satisfaction) and social and external factors (feedback from readers), which are hypothesized to motivate blog writers to continue their writing. In R2's case, it is the internal factor that satisfied and motivated her to have this urge to improve her writing, as R2 states that 'I really want to improve writing'. The external factor she mentions is that the Blog allows the 'teacher' to monitor and motivate other Blog users in that group to finish their writing task.

On the other hand, R3, R4, R5 and R6 do not consider SNSs as a motivation for English writing. R3 believes that writings on SNSs are too simple to improve users' academic writing. R4 indicates that intrinsic motivation drives him through all the

learning processes. He also claims that SNSs do not change his motivation either way. This is since R4 always holds a good attitude and motivation towards writing, despite the means of learning. Whereas, R5 is surrounded by Chinese speakers from mainland China and Malaysia which has created a comfort zone for her to use her mother tongue in her everyday life. R5 claims that SNSs have no motivation on her writing, because she has no intention to improve neither her speaking nor writing ability in English. R6 states “I basically don’t think SNSs can affect my writing, or if it helps, maybe because that person’s writing proficiency is low. SNSs used words, I suppose, should be helping to learn simple and useful words. Those words are not gonna appear in academic writing. So, I don’t think it improves our English.” Nevertheless, a different result has been found by Yunus & Salehi (2012), which shows that a high number of respondents believe that they are more inspired and confident in writing on SNSs. However, a small number of the participants state that it does not change their motivation level.

In summary, active SNSs user R1 and inactive SNSs user R2 are motivated by online writing. Others, however, do not consider SNSs as a motivation for English writing

4.4.3 Perceptions on SNSs and Negative Attitude to Write

Extract 4.5 and Extract 4.6 present some examples of active and inactive users’ negative attitude towards writing on SNSs (for full list, refer to Appendix L).

Extract 4.5: Negative Writing Attitude of Active SNSs Users

Active SNSs Users	
R1	1. When you write comments on the others, the sentence normally will not in a formal form. So, it is short, the most important thing is short and simple, so I think it will not be effective on improve writing.
R3	1. Because those English are so simple, I don't think it can improve my writing. Even when I was a degree (student) in China, I also can use those sentences, so I don't think I'm improving.
R4	1. I think we should take the advantage of SNSs, rather than let the SNSs take the advantage of you. You control the time, you can use it, but you can't use it all the time. I don't think the SNSs improve my writing a lot.

Overall, active SNSs users believe writing on SNSs is informal, shortened and simple. It is only for the purpose of communication and fun. Using SNSs does not influence users' attitude towards English writing and sometimes using SNSs can be distracting from writing.

Extract 4.6: Negative Writing Attitude of Inactive SNSs Users

Inactive SNSs Users	
R2	1. I think it will help students writing, but the help from others is very small.
R5	1. If I know a lot of foreigners, I will improve (my writing), but the people I know all write in Chinese, so it's hard to change anything.
R6	1. I basically don't think SNSs can affect my writing, or if it helps, maybe because that person's writing proficiency is low. SNSs used words, I suppose, should be helping to learn simple and useful words. Those words are not gonna appear in academic writing. So, I don't think it improves our English.

Attitude may influence English writing, either in a negative or positive effect of social networking sites (Wong, 2012). Most users benefit from using SNSs, but some users suffer from negative impacts (Chen & Peng, 2008). The negative effect of SNSs on students are such as reduced learning and research capabilities, time wastage, bringing down creative writing, and loss of motivation in individuals (Kshirsagar & Kulkarni, 2013). Individuals who spend a great amount of time on SNSs often experience academic difficulty (Chen & Peng, 2008). R6 mentions “for English writing, basically, it is not helpful. Because the precise and appropriate of vocabulary used in (SNSs) writing are sheer different (from academic writing)”. Simplified and shortened English sentences and language structures can be detrimental individual academic performance.

Inactive SNSs users mention that on SNSs, writing is informal, simple and casual and SNSs are suitable for lower level of English proficiency. Negative writing attitude of using SNSs is demonstrated by R1 for the short and simple forms of sentences ‘will not be effective on improve writing’. R2 states the same opinion: SNSs ‘conversation is simple and casual; it’s not enough for formal writing. Maybe there is a little effect, but I think it’s very little’. R4 mentions ‘I don’t think I can learn something from the SNSs, I just chat with others, and it’s a tool for communication. I learned my English from formal platform’ and SNSs ‘is for fun, it’s not for learning’. Probably, it is because, as R3 and R6 state ‘the words we used in SNSs are very frequently simple words’ and ‘words and structures of English on SNSs are shortened and simple’. In this study, participants’ SNSs contacts are mostly Chinese, Malaysians and a few

international students. And those international students are from English as a second or foreign language countries but not English speaking countries. Rose (2014) reports in her study, a number of participants express a positive attitude in that they could learn new vocabulary and communicate with speakers of English on SNSs. However, Rose (2014) does not specifically describe “speakers of English”. Besides this, Millington & Smith (2012) state that interactivity with native speakers is crucial for second language learning.

R1, R2 and R3 believe writing on SNSs is ineffective. R1 says ‘When you write comments on the others’ (Facebook), the sentence normally will not in a formal form’. ‘The normal conversation is simple and casual, it’s not enough for formal writing. Maybe there is a little effect, but I think it’s very little’ R2 says. They believe formal writing is much more helpful. R3 suggests ‘if you really want to learn words. I think you’d better read English newspapers, and watch videos with subtitles. I think that will make more progress than communicate on SNSs’.

Yunus, Salehi & Chen (2012) report that Facebook usage may consume a lot of time, encourage negative attitudes and students may depend on Facebook too much and affect their social growth detrimentally. Time spent on SNSs will take time and attention away from important academic responsibilities such as studying (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Participants claim that their attitude toward writing has not improved. R4 describes SNSs as ‘very distracting’. SNSs can be a reason for users to consume a lot of time for people who indulge themselves in it. More importantly, SNSs have become a habit for many people; they consume a lot of time on SNSs

uploading or downloading, chatting with friends or watching videos. And for some people, they cannot pass one day without their cell phones to access SNSs (Egedegbe, 2013). Some students find it difficult to study for one hour without logging into SNSs and checking what their friends are doing at the moment or whether anybody has contacted them. It may result in the inability of those students to manage their time efficiently. Most of the students who are involved in the extensive usage of SNSs indulge themselves into the social networking sites and the fleetingly updated information it brings. It takes away the attention from their academic achievements. And those students might forget the more important things like work or study (Naizabekov, 2012). Rouis, Limayem & Salehi-Sangari (2011) also report that highly self-regulated students have shown low frequency in usage of SNSs and spent less number of hours on it. From this point of view, spending more time on SNSs may have negative influence on users' academic achievement by interrupting them from the learning process (Naizabekov, 2012). Tess (2013) says the users do not fancy the massive information or the added time constraints that SNSs may bring.

Naizabekov (2012) suggests that students should develop efficient-time managing skills so they can use time separately for SNSs and study, because SNSs have been considered as only a social connection tool and not related to academic purposes. Only an insignificant number of students claimed that they were using Facebook for academic purposes (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). R4 has a better suggestion 'we should take the advantage of SNSs, rather than let the SNSs take the advantage of you'. However, for most of the young adults as university students, they should have

individual self-discipline and concerns in their studies or future career. Egedegbe (2013) reports in his study that university students use SNSs for academic work more than for just leisure. The students multi-task in SNSs activities and concentration on completing their academic tasks are possible. It can be considered as learners' potential to carry out educational tasks with the simultaneous SNSs usage (Naizabekov, 2012).

R4 considers SNSs as a fun tool, but writing should be serious instead of only having fun. He says 'Because this is for fun, it's not for learning', and 'I think we can have fun together to use these informal words. But in an academic world, we shouldn't use this'. Obviously, for some participants, they tend to separate the pleasant SNSs life from the painful study (Tess, 2013). And students tend to consider SNSs as a social platform and entertainment system rather than the tool that can contribute in the academic field (Naizabekov, 2012).

For effective communication, Tess (2013) believes that people reflect and leave comments on other people's SNSs more effectively than in a face-to-face situation. However, in this study, the interviewees prefer having eye contact, oral and face-to-face communication rather than communicating on SNSs. As Yunus & Salehi (2012) report, certain language learners prefer to stand on the more traditional way of learning languages or face-to-face communicate and discuss with the teacher to improve their writing in an actual class, but not on SNSs. R5 claims that face-to-face communication is clearer. R6 adds on that face-to-face allows a 'quick feedback'. R4 says 'I think it's easy to access, but you can't show your real feeling to others,

actually I like the physical communicate with others, better. Because we can have feeling, have eye contact, we have the real communication. There is something emotion to be entered to the communication, but through the network, we can't have the real communication'.

On the other hand, R5 is forced by the environment to use the English version of SNSs only because she has to receive announcements. She neither wants to participate nor write on SNSs, because as she says 'I use it passively'. R5 does not pay attention to her friends' lives on SNSs. And she does not contact any non-Chinese speakers who are both English native speakers and local Malaysian non-Chinese speakers. However, she actively participates on Chinese SNSs. It shows not only that she is not keen to use English SNSs but also not interested in learning English at all.

In summary, active and inactive SNSs users all reveal some negative attitudes towards using SNSs for English language learning.

4.4.4 Perceptions on SNSs and Positive Attitude to Write

Extracts 4.7 and 4.8 below show active and inactive SNSs users' positive attitude to write (for full list, refer to Appendix M).

Extract 4.7: Positive Writing Attitude of Active SNSs Users

Active SNSs Users	
R1	1. ...you can get more idea when you do writing, because you get news, latest information from it. And also like you said reading, reading, your vocabulary will improve when you use social networking sites.
R3	×
R4	×

'×' stands for no positive attitude has been mentioned.

Active SNSs users believe using SNSs can help them in writing and increasing vocabulary on a certain level. However, they hold on to a neutral attitude towards writing online being effective.

Extract 4.8: Positive Writing Attitude of Inactive SNSs Users

Inactive SNSs Users	
R2	1. Yes, for me, it's useful, helped for my formal writing too. E.g. SPSS, Almost all the things I wrote in my thesis, are learned from YouTube, not all, some of them I learned online.
R5	1. A: So do you think WhatsApp helps your writing? R5: Sometimes helps.
R6	1. Yes, it does help for academic improvement. For instant, some academic communities like acmet... I can't remember the name. Anyway, the website helps researchers in their varies studies, researchers can share their experience and knowledge. The website supports you to search for their published articles as well.

Inactive users are slightly more willing to positively consider SNSs as a useful tool for improving their writing.

According to Tajudeen, Madarsha & Ahmad (2010), attitude and perceived usefulness are strong predictors of learners' intention to use SNSs. In general, the benefits of participating in SNSs as shown in the extracts are (refer to the Appendix Extracts 4.8): improvement of vocabulary size, getting more ideas or information for their writing, and as R2 indicates 'helped for my formal writing too', as well as gaining SPSS knowledge and other lessons from YouTube. People consume a lot of time on SNSs getting information concerning their career, academic work or doing research (Egedegbe, 2013). Having a positive attitude towards SNSs is a pre-condition for using them and accepting them for being used for academic purposes (Mahmoud, 2014).

R2 indicates that Blog has been 'very very helpful' for improving her English writing. She calls other participants in their group as "classmates" and one Algerian as "teacher". Harrison & Thomas (2009) write the same in their research, that users of Livemocha create roles for themselves as 'buddies' and 'tutors', R2 continues 'because we are a group, so I called them classmates, when we post, the teacher can see it, he will know you did your work'. She submerges herself into the group, and she believes getting the writing assignment done is the way to attract attentions of 'classmates' and 'teacher'. Blog writers are motivated to have some potential readers. Therefore, Blog users will be encouraged and they might try to write more excellent sentences in the future (Yunus, Salehi & Chen, 2012). In fact, more than half of the respondents in Egedegbe's (2013) study say that SNSs do affect the way they

communicate with people both in speaking and writing. Mahmoud (2014) reports that students have positive attitudes toward using SNSs tools as a means of learning writing. SNSs provide users' convenience and attractive means to engage in discussions with the teacher and other users. At the same time, SNSs change the monotonous way of learning into an interactive and group-oriented environment. As mentioned by R6, some SNSs provide open platforms for researchers to share their experience and knowledge on academic research. Shih (2011) reveals that students indicate that using SNSs in the English writing is beneficial and helpful for them to learn English writing and to exchange opinions and ideas.

R2 has been writing on Blog for half a semester, and she says 'if I do carry on, I believe I can improve a lot'. When a written task is given by the teacher on Blog, the participant is willing to post a good written article. This is because the environment of Blog motivated R2. Learners' attitudes toward the use of blog helps learners find opportunities to practice English writing outside the classroom (Mahmoud, 2014). And in some classroom environments, using blogs as teaching tools has the benefit to strengthen skills in English and English writing (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). R2 continues by saying, 'when I writing, there are some words I don't know I'll check. I might not remember all the new words, but I'm sure I learned some new words'. R1 gets more ideas from the latest information and news for her writing. She says the vocabulary size will increase 'when you use social networking sites'.

R3 points out 'YouTube, it is entertainment and also educational website. I learned some lessons from videos'. R2 agrees 'My SPSS knowledge is learned from YouTube.

Almost all the things I don't know and I'll learn from YouTube. It's very useful. Helped for my formal writing too. E.g. SPSS, almost all the things I wrote in my thesis, are learned from YouTube, not all, some of them I learned online'. Apart from that, Prichard (2013) indicates that shared videos on social networking sites could potentially increase language learners' motivation.

Egedegbe (2013) says 85% of the respondents believe that SNSs is an effective tool for learning. Because students can interact, share ideas or discuss with their group members and classmates. Razak, Saeed & Ahmad (2013) find out that most of the participants have expressed their positive perception of the effectiveness of SNSs in enhancing their writing through communication, socialization and sharing information. However in this study, most of the participants reveal a neutral attitude towards SNSs. R4 reveals his neutral attitude by stating that he has a 'neutral' consideration towards using SNSs. Because as Tufekci (2008) says, it is not only beyond the internet itself, but also what one does with it, as well as what kind of person one is. Shin (2010) indicates that the attitude toward SNSs is positively related to the intention to use SNSs. R4 claims that a combination of SNSs and formal learning are a good learning mode for him. And R5 holds a positive attitude that SNSs sometimes help in her writing, as whether it is online or face-to-face, she says 'a communication is a communication', by all means 'I'll improve'.

To conclude, inactive SNSs users have a positive attitude towards writing on SNSs compared to active users. Inactive users consider SNSs as very useful and it can help

in academic improvement from a certain perspective. Instead, active users tend to reveal a neutral reaction to it.

4.5 Participants' Perceptions on Using SNSs

In this study, the researcher analyzes the Chinese participants' perceptions from the aspects of vocabulary acquisition, motivation, as well as negative and positive attitudes towards writing on SNSs. The results of comparing active and inactive SNSs users are shown in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Participants' Perceptions on Using SNSs

Participants		Vocabulary	Motivation	Negative Attitude	Positive Attitude
Active	R1	√	√	√	√
	R3			√	
	R4			√	
Inactive	R2	√	√		√
	R5			√	√
	R6	√		√	√

In general, there are similar perceptions of active participants and inactive participants on using SNSs affect their writing. Inactive SNSs users with less negative attitude towards the usage of SNSs, and agree more that SNSs can help English vocabulary and writing.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presents results of the analysis and discusses the findings in light of the research questions posed in Chapter One. In the chapter, the researcher presents the general data of participants, analyzes the different types of SNSs users, discovers the relationship between different level of participation and their lexical complexity and provides active and inactive participants' perceptions of using SNSs. In the next chapter, a summary of the findings will be provided and some implications of the study will also be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study embarks on Chinese international postgraduates' writing performance and SNSs usage, aiming to investigate the relationship between the frequency of participation in SNSs and English writing performance on a lexical complexity aspect. In addition, it also looks at how SNSs affect the EFL learners' point of view on their writing performance. In the first section of Chapter Four, the lexical variance (LV) and lexical sophistication (LS) in the groups of active and inactive SNSs user types have been analyzed. In the second section of Chapter Four, the qualitative data are analyzed from interviews which are presented in the aspect of: (1) Improvement of English writing and vocabulary; (2) Motivation; and (3) Attitudes towards writing. In Chapter Five, the features will be summarized in the conclusion of this study. It will revisit the two research questions mentioned in Chapter One and gives an overview of the findings. The final part of the chapter presents the contributions of this study and gives suggestions for future study.

5.2 Research Questions Revisited

The research questions given in Chapter One are listed as a guide to sum up the findings of this study.

Question 1: Is there a significant relationship between the frequency of participation in SNSs and academic writing in terms of lexical complexity?

To answer this question, there is a need to look at the different indices of lexical variance (LV) and lexical sophistication (LS) between active and inactive SNSs users (see Chapter Four). Li (2000) reports higher level of lexical complexity when the writers were given more freedom and control of the e-mail task activities. However, Li (2000) avoids making claims about the relationship between e-mail writing tasks and academic essay writing. Therefore, since there are few previous researches that relate to SNSs and lexical complexity, this study focuses on finding the significance on different levels of SNSs participation and lexical complexity. And in Chapter Five, the researcher concludes that no significant differences have been found between lexical variance and level of participation of the SNSs users. Also, no significant differences have been found between lexical sophistication and level of participation of the SNSs users.

Cao, Pauleen & Bathurst (2012) have conducted independent t-tests in their study, and the results show that no differences have been found between SNSs users and non-SNSs users of their English writing. Similarly, El-Badawy & Hashem (2015) report that whether the students spend a low, average or high amount of time in a day (ranging from less than one hour to more than six hours), their academic performance is not affected. No correlation or negative relationship has been found between heavy SNSs users and academic achievement as measured by GPAs (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). There is also no positive or negative impact on the academic performance of

students who use SNSs. Hence, there is no significant relationship or difference between the frequencies of using SNSs with the English performance (Egedegbe, 2013, El-Badawy & Hashem, 2015).

Question 2: What are the Chinese postgraduates' perceptions of how their participation in SNSs affect their writing?

In Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin's (2010) study, researchers find out that by holding casual discussions or online communications with Facebook friends, the participants are able to learn new words, build their confidence, increase motivation and positive attitude towards learning English. Furthermore, researchers claim that Facebook could be utilized as an online environment to facilitate the learning of English.

In this research, one active and two inactive SNSs users construct the four steps for acquiring vocabulary. According to Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin (2010), the four steps are: (1) Noticing new words on SNSs; (2) Learning of new words through SNSs friends; (3) Finding out meanings of the new words on SNSs; and (4) Practicing the new words acquired from SNSs in one's own writings. Previous researchers have identified an accelerating use of SNSs in formal learning environments (Schroeder, Minocha, & Schneider, 2010; Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012). However, active SNSs users have disagreed that SNSs can help in gaining English vocabulary and improving English writing in this study. And most of the interviewees indicate that they tend to consider SNSs as an informal environment and it does not affect their academic writing. Same results as Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) report, the majority of

participants claim that using SNSs does not have an impact on their academic performance. Baliya, Kumar & Lata (2014) reveal in their study that there is no significant relationship between scores of attitude towards SNSs usage and scores of the achievement of academic performance. Rouis, Limayem & Salehi-Sangari (2011) even believe that the usage of SNSs leads to a decrease in the users' academic performance.

On the other hand, this study shows that inactive SNSs users tend to have agreed more that SNSs can help in English vocabulary and writing. And Chinese participants' motivation towards using SNSs and their perspective towards confidence between active and inactive users are the same amount of pros. However, all of active SNSs users and two inactive users are pros of negative attitude towards the usage of SNSs. On top of that, one active and two inactive SNSs users have a positive attitude towards using SNSs. There is an uneven amount of pros on vocabulary, as well as negative and positive attitude of active and inactive participants.

5.3 Overview of the Findings

The result shows that Chinese international postgraduates in the University of Malaya try to manage the time they spend on social networking sites, and they have made objective statements of the way SNSs affect their vocabulary and their English writing. Students are exposed to the internet and they are not shy in using it for their writing improvement and to upgrade their academic knowledge.

This study offers an investigation of how users' social practices on SNSs differ and whether different levels of engagement have consequences for writing performance. Heavy SNSs users have better social integration than light users, they participate more in organizations and are in more frequent contact with family and friends (Burke, Kraut & Marlow, 2011). Therefore, active SNSs users engage potentially higher English writing proficiency. However, in this study, in terms of lexical complexity, no significant differences have been found between lexical complexity and participation on social networking sites.

Based on the views expressed by SNSs users, the result of this study is different from Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin's (2010) result of which a majority of the participants expressed that Facebook has contributed positively to their confidence, motivation and attitudes in learning English. Generally speaking, most participants of this study agree that social networking sites have slightly contributed to their motivation of English writing. And inactive users are more positive in acquiring vocabulary and attitude of writing through SNSs. Active SNSs users express negative attitude towards using online social networks to facilitate writing more than inactive SNSs users.

Furthermore, Veletsianos & Navarrete (2012) mention browsing on social networking sites like reading others' entries but not responding is also important. Lurking on SNSs may be a vital form of participation. Therefore, maybe participants' inactivity on SNSs might not mean their absorption in English is low. In a similar finding by Hargittai & Hsieh (2010), they report that neither usage intensity nor social practices performed on SNSs exhibit a systematic relationship with academic performance.

Paul, Baker & Cochran (2012) even conclude that the increasing time spent on SNSs will cause SNSs users' academic performance to deteriorate. Statistically, inactive SNSs users are significantly better in academic grades and learning satisfaction than active users (Chen & Peng, 2008). Extroverted personalities can also lead to poor academic performance among extensive SNSs users (Rouis, Limayem & Salehi-Sangari, 2011). And students with extroverted personalities are situated more on the active end of the continuum (Liu, 2001) and are very active in SNSs (Rouis, Limayem & Salehi-Sangari, 2011). Also, a significant negative relationship between SNSs usage and academic performance has been established by Kirschner & Karpinski (2010). It is pernicious to implement those two processes at the same time. Since the usage of SNSs allures students to elude studying while not giving them the feeling that they are wasting time or not working (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Therefore, students being active on SNSs may not mean that their academic performance is high.

5.4 Contributions of this Study

There have been only few studies on Chinese using English social networking sites in English writing. Within the very limited number of studies which are conducted in Chinese, only one study has reported that non-heavy users who are Chinese university students have better academic performance than heavy users of SNSs (Chen & Peng, 2008). In general, there have not been many studies done regarding the impact of

social networking sites on the academic performance of university students or young adults (El-Badawy & Hashem, 2015).

This study had found that the active involvement with SNSs cannot help users to improve their writing proficiency. The findings fill a gap between Chinese SNSs users and their lexical complexity, and the effect of SNSs users' vocabulary improvement, motivation, and attitude in writing. At same time, the research challenges some previous claims to the contrary. Chinese participants point out that different social networking sites have different functions. They believe that YouTube and Blog will help users' English writing better than Facebook or WhatsApp.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

This study is on the small range of participants that were studied to test the effects of SNSs on Chinese international postgraduates in the University of Malaya. Due to the small sample size, the generalisation cannot be made to the entire population of Chinese international students. Therefore, it is suggested that similar studies could be done over a larger range of participants for further research.

Furthermore, time spent on different activities may lead to different results. Users spend more time on academic and non-academic information searching, and reading school messages are scored higher than those who spend more time on shopping, playing games and browsing stock information (Chen & Peng, 2008). Based on statistical data and the personal point of views expressed by the participants of this study, interviewee R2 says YouTube and Blog helped in her writing, and R4 says

learning from a journal discussion forum improved his academic writing. Even though some SNSs have integrated additional functions into each social media platform, different social networking sites offer certain differentiable core functions and satisfy different primary needs; photo and video sharing sites like Instagram, bookmarking sites like Digg, language learning sites like Livemocha and popular micro-blogging sites like Twitter (Chan-Olmsted, Cho & Lee, 2013). Chinese participants indicate the different functions of SNSs. YouTube and Blog are believed to be more helpful for users' English writing than Facebook or WhatsApp. And those SNSs that facilitate better at knowledge distribution, opinion exchanges and communication involvement might need to be studied. Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) alert researchers that social networking sites is a multifaceted phenomenon where there are many factors that can influence each other. And they encourage researchers to explore more.

On the other hand, this study only enforces one control variable (i.e., active and inactive participation of SNSs), and fails to control for other confounding variables such as personality of the participants, gender and major of study (Kirscher & Karpinski, 2010). In order to evaluate the connections between the usage of SNSs and academic performance of students, Naizabekov (2012) at the end of their research suggests further study should focus on the factors of culture, gender, social status, personality of participants, education systems, academic procrastination and motivation. In view of the foregoing circumstances, future research can categorize SNSs into different groups and measure different SNSs' impact on writing, as well as consider factors such as participants' culture and personality.

5.6 Conclusion

This research acknowledges past research done on SNSs but what seems missing in other researches is the rudimentary aspects in the level of participation. Unlike other studies, this study undertakes a qualitative-quantitative research design to unveil the lexical complexity aspects that links SNSs as platform. By discovering the users' different levels of participation on SNSs, it may enlighten people interested in SNSs into seeing the aspect of effect on users in gaining new vocabulary or improving their English writing.

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