

The Impact of Social Media and Electronic Literature on Literary Studies, Language Learning and Acculturation: A Study Conducted in South India

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the impact of social media and electronic literature on young individuals' lives, especially in literary studies, foreign language learning and acculturation. The samples for the study were taken from young people in selected colleges in three South Indian states namely Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The objectives of this study were to determine the role of social media in the day-to-day life of youngsters, analysing major reasons behind social media usage, the role of social media and electronic literature in literary studies, foreign language learning and teaching, its impact on education and moulding language skills, and the extent to which it influences social change and acculturation. For the data collection, a structured survey questionnaire was prepared and distributed among the students. Purposive sampling was the sampling strategy used to collect the data and 355 samples were collected. A five-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire. The researcher employed various statistical tools and methods like percentage analysis, graphical analysis, and descriptive statistics to have a proper analysis of the collected data. Qualitative analysis was carried out using discourse analysis and grounded theory analysis. It is observed that social media and digital technology have a pivotal impact on the lifestyle of the youngsters. Digital media act as a means for English language development and electronic literature helps to enhance the mode of language teaching and make the classes interesting. Electronic literature tremendously supports literary studies, education and related initiatives.

Keywords: social media, electronic literature, language, education, culture, English

1. Introduction

In recent years, the advent and widespread adoption of social media platforms and electronic literature have revolutionised the way people communicate, share information, and engage with virtual communities. These interactive technologies have become an integral part of everyday life, shaping various aspects of society and profoundly impacting the younger generation. The influence of social media and electronic literature on literary studies, language learning, acculturation and education have become increasingly significant, warranting a comprehensive investigation into its effects.

2. Literature Review

Social media are generally defined as “internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content” (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Social networking sites are networked communication platforms in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

Adults between 18-29 exhibit the highest (90%) social media adoption rates. But other age groups also display an increased rate in social media adoption (Perrin, 2015). On the other hand, literary works that appear on digital platforms with audio/video elements and are often interactive, constitutes the body of electronic literature. This study explores the role of different social media platforms and electronic literature in facilitating English language learning and how it leads to acculturation. It also tries to comprehend the uniqueness of certain social media platforms and their role in youngsters' daily life.

Several social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook etc. allow people to share photos and status and thereby enable them to remain connected with their near and dear ones (Stec, 2015). The process of penetration and transition of novel ideas and

data into novel pastures happen not only at a psychological level but also at a physiological level (Kasaba et.al, 2021). It varies in different age categories and various spheres of human activities (Shalkov et.al, 2021). It is identified that the role of digital games (Acquah & Katz, 2020; Reinders, 2012; Zou, Huang & Xie, 2021) and digital platforms (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Barton & Lee, 2013) in language learning and online intercultural exchange (O'Dowd, 2007) are very significant. About 75% of the people with internet access have a Facebook account, and 70% of them use it daily. This underlines the customary and inevitable role of Facebook among its users (Duggan, 2015). Like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram, a mobile application, is another platform that enables the users to capture images, edit them and post it for the public (Stec, 2015). Snapchat, another popular social media mobile application allows the users exchange images and videos, for a limited time duration (Stec, 2015). It was also observed that the number of Snapchat users have crossed 100 million (Piwek & Joinson, 2016). According to Per Lenhart (2015), young adults or Generation Y use and adopt social media the most. For Generation Y social media is not only a socialisation and information gathering tool but also an instrument for many other purposes (Ling, 2008; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

2.1 Social Media, Electronic Literature and L2 Acquisition

The existing socio-economic status quo, all-inclusive multiplicity augmented by migrant movements, and the emergence of social media influence the question of L2 acquisition (Reinhardt, 2019; Hamadeh et.al., 2020; Pikhart et.al., 2020; Bujang et.al., 2020). Social media are ubiquitous and the research into the use of them in FLL (Foreign Language Learning) has become vast (Ayers, 2020). The mother tongue (L1) acquisition happens at an initial age, whereas L2 acquisition is comparatively slow and is dependent on factors such as the neuronal development, linguistic culture of the family and also the society in which the person lives (Morales, 2017; Saville-Troike, 2005; Chenu et.al., 2009). Social media provide knowledge about various aspects of a language from simple to complex language structures, from funny to serious nuances of the language (Sykes, 2019). Every aspect of human life including knowledge sharing, information transmission, human interaction and visual culture is constantly influenced by social media (Rieger et.al., 2018). Lin, Blake et.al. (2016) underscored the relevance of engaging with the indigenous speakers on social platforms in forming cultural identity during the process of learning a second language. "Teachers are social agents who affect students' cognitive and social behaviors" (Lai, et.al., 2017) and they should make sure that they are ready to encounter the paradigm shift that happens in the field of education – the shift from traditional pattern to a modern, technology-equipped teaching pedagogy.

The quest to understand why people utilise media remains a crucial empirical query that increases with its growth. Information sharing, expression of opinion, amusement, communicative utility, surveillance or knowledge about others, information seeking, relaxation, convenience utility, passing time, and social engagement were among the ten reasons Whiting and Williams (2013) listed for utilising social media. Although many studies about the impact of social media on the society were conducted in the recent years, certain areas are yet not taken into consideration. The impact of social media in youngsters' life, especially, in the process of foreign language learning, acculturation, literary studies, education and socialisation is such an area. Word recognition speed, grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, knowledge of the cultural background are the important differences between L1 and L2 readers. (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Koda (2005), too, states that the erstwhile literacy experience of the readers, their limited linguistic scholarship, and dual-language connection (i.e., text processing involving L1 and L2) are of paramount importance in L2 reading.

In the current scenario, digital texts have become more accessible and popular and a corpus of studies has emerged on digital reading in the last two decades. (Kuijpers, Kral & Meijer, 2021). It is observed that much emphasis has been given by the researchers to L1 whereas L2 remained almost neglected. (Anderson, 2003; Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This research, therefore, tries to bridge this gap and focuses on the impact of electronic literature and social media on L2 learning in particular and foreign language teaching (FLT) in general. It also focuses on the influence of social media and electronic literature on literary studies and acculturation. Considering the limited number of studies in the mentioned fields, this research delves into the depth of these aspects in a deep-rooted manner.

3. The Objectives of the Research

The following are the primary objectives of the research:

- a) To examine the use of social media in the day-to-day life of youngsters
- b) To identify the major reasons behind social media usage
- c) To comprehend how far social media and electronic literature help in the process of English language learning in particular and education in general.
- d) To analyse the extent to which social media influence social changes and acculturation
- e) To understand how social media and electronic literature can be used for foreign language teaching (FLT), literary studies and its role in moulding language skills.

4. Methodology

A cross-sectional survey of youngsters studying in different colleges/universities in three South Indian states with varied cultural backgrounds serve as the sample for the study (N=355). The data was collected by distributing a survey questionnaire among the students. A five-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire. Purposive sampling method is employed to conduct the survey. They were asked different questions related to the use of social media in their day-to-day life, major reasons behind social media usage, the role of

social media and electronic literature in literary studies, foreign language learning and teaching, its impact on education and moulding language skills, and the extent to which it influences social change and acculturation. 355 samples were collected and the results were analysed. The researcher employed various statistical tools and methods like percentage analysis, graphical analysis, and descriptive statistics to have a proper analysis of the collected data. Qualitative analysis was carried out using discourse analysis and grounded theory analysis.

5. Findings of the Study and Discussion

This research was carried out among youngsters of the age group 15-35. A survey questionnaire was prepared and sent to collect the data. Out of 355 respondents, 46.2% constituted male, 52.7% were female and 1.1% preferred not to reveal their gender. That is, 164 males and 187 females contributed to this study.

Table 1. Age Group of the Sample

15 – 20		21 – 25		26 – 30		31 – 35	
Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
73%	259	18%	64	3.9%	14	5.1%	18

Table 2. Educational Qualifications

Post-Graduation		Graduation		Plus-Two/Diploma		Others	
Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
12.4%	44	43.4%	154	39.4%	140	4.8%	17

5.1 Use of Social Media

Out of 355 respondents, it is observed that 29.3% of the total sample use social media more than 3 hours a day. That is, 104 respondents make use of it in one way or the other in their day-to-day life for various purposes. 96.9% of the respondents use smartphone to access social media. It is also observed that 45.9% of the youngsters use social media five times and above a day.

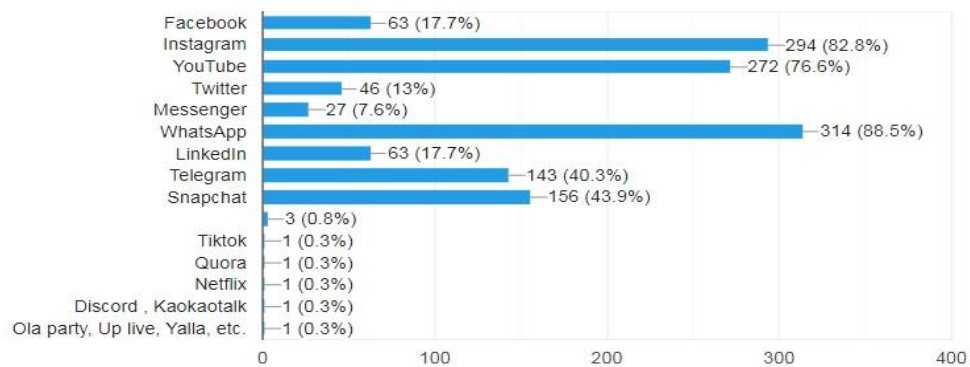


Figure 1. Social media platforms youngsters use in their day-to-day life

It is lucid from the above given graph that 88.5% of the youngsters use WhatsApp in their daily life. Instagram occupies the second position with 82.8%.

5.2 The Major Reasons Behind Social Media Usage

On various stages of the study, it is also observed that people are making use of social media for different purposes like staying in touch with friends and society (60%), to gather data for career growth (60.5%), educational purposes (63.1%), and to maintain physical and mental fitness (27.6%). This data shows that the usage of social media for educational purpose is relatively high compared to other mentioned criteria.

5.3 Social Media, Electronic Literature, English Language Learning, and Education

Nowadays, youngsters use social media for varied purposes. One of the significant purposes among them is language learning and education. Social media play a pivotal role in helping youngsters to excel in language learning and education and to collect the required study materials. A digitally wise L2 learner is one who takes advantage of the social affordances that internet mediation provides for L2 learning in order to legitimize his or her social power as an L2 speaker beyond the socially limited setting of the L2 classroom (Klimanova et.al., 2013). For instance, in the case of EFL, it is vivid that English “has a prestigious reputation and is taught almost everywhere in the world” (John, 2021). In order to teach English and other foreign languages, teachers can use digital media, electronic literature, and other

technological tools. Such approaches help students to have a better understanding of the concept and gain practical knowledge. As John (2021) notes, “the role of the English language in the post-modern era ultimately leads to English Eminency”. It is understood that 58% of the youngsters depend on YouTube to find majority of language learning and education-related materials.

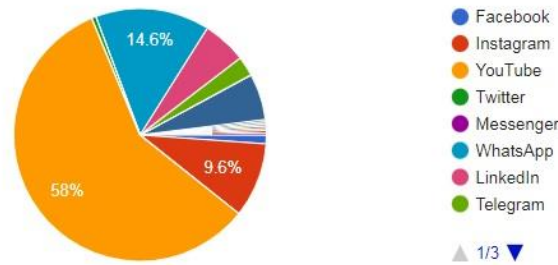


Figure 2. Youngsters using social media to collect education-related materials

It is also observed that 42% of the youngsters spent 15 to 30 minutes on social media daily for educational purposes. They also participate in academic group discussions and group learning via social networking platforms. Social media platforms also play a crucial role in conducting academic research. 48.8% of the population make use of social media for research related purposes. Only 16.3% of the youngsters do not seek the support of social media in research related activities. Youngsters also find social media as a means to learn more about their academic topics/syllabus. 69.1% supported this idea. For the preparation of exam, they use social networking sites and the percentage of the population who does so is 75.2. It is also understood that the use of social media enhances English skills of an individual. 73.5% of the collected sample supported the idea that social media help crucially in English language learning and EFL teaching. This makes it clear that the role of digital technologies and social media are vital in the development of language skills. The respondents also rejected the view that English grammar and spelling are negatively affected by the social media. In another study, it was observed that the “success of learning a new language is basically linked to the attitude of the person” (John, 2020). 43.4% of the population supported the usage of social media in improving the language skills, whereas 33% had a neutral point of view. 61.7% people stated that teachers should use social media for educational purposes. Only 10.2% opposed this idea. It is also evident that youngsters interact with their teachers on social media for academic assistance. Only 8.8% of the sample disagreed with the idea of using social media for academic purposes.

5.4 Social Media, Social Changes, and Acculturation

It is observed that social media have a tremendous impact on the way of living of youngsters. 58.1% of the collected sample agreed with this observation. 45.6% of the population stated that their thought processes are influenced by social media and other digital media. 37.5% had a neutral opinion.

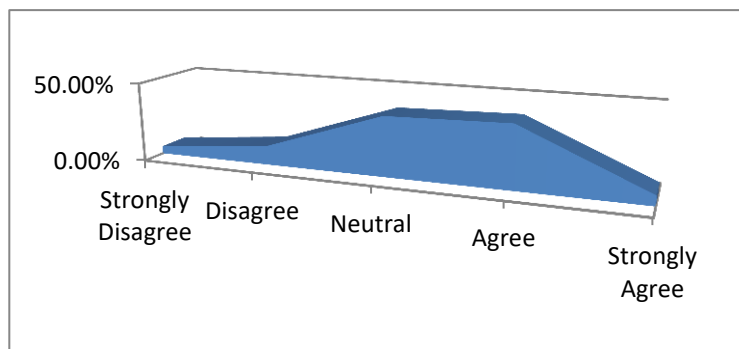


Figure 3. My thought process is influenced by social media and other digital media

It is also observed that social media play an important role on the fashion choices of youngsters. 65.1% of the population agreed with this concept. That is, 231 samples out of 355 stated that social media influence their fashion choices. 22.8% had a neutral perspective.

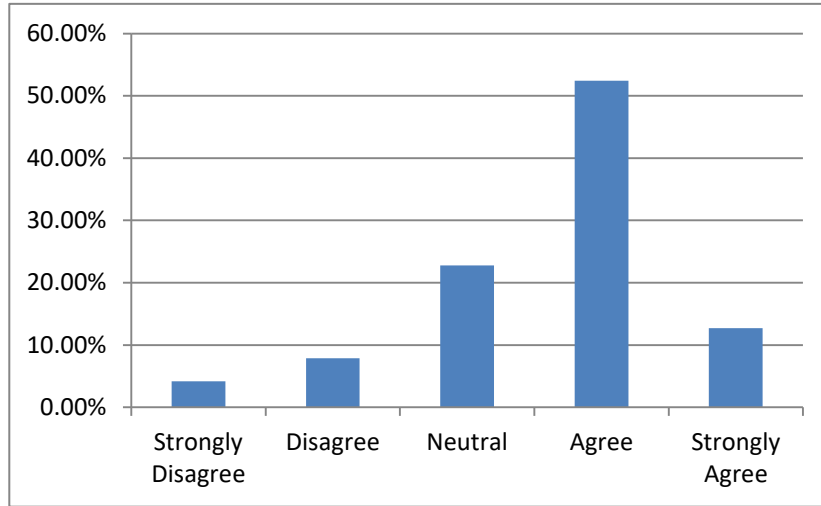


Figure 4. I believe that social media has an impact on my fashion choices

It was interesting to notice that the eating habits and customs that youngsters follow are not very much influenced by ads and contents on social media. 41.7% of the population stated that social media do not play a significant role in their eating habits. 26.2% of the population had a neutral opinion on this notion. On the other hand, 36.9% of the total sample stated that their customs and beliefs are not influenced by social media and stayed neutral. It was also observed that the ethical beliefs and religious beliefs of youngsters are not very much influenced by what they see on social media. Only 16.9% of the population stated that their religious beliefs are influenced by what they see on social media and 51.6% of the total sample opined that their religious beliefs are not influenced by what they observe on social media.

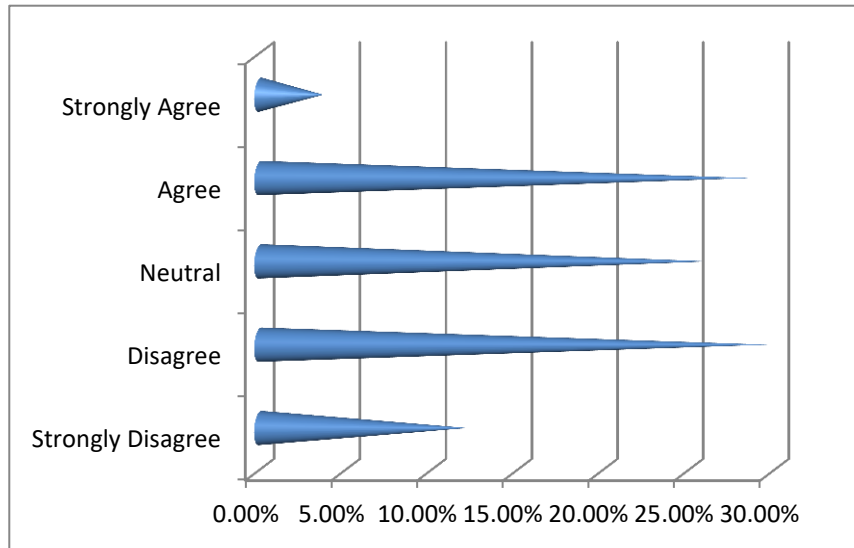


Figure 5. My eating habits are influenced by ads and social media

Moreover, the products which youngsters choose for their day-to-day life are also influenced by social media. 42.6% agreed with this perception whereas 37.7% of the total population had a neutral opinion on the same. Out of 355 responses, 135 people stated that social media play an important role in shaping their spending habits. 82 respondents disagreed with this idea. It is also revealed that youngsters spend at least 15 to 30 minutes on social media every day. 44.2% of the collected sample supported this notion. 19.7% of the collected sample uses social media above 1 hour whereas 18.3% of youngsters use it nearly 1 hour daily for socialisation process.

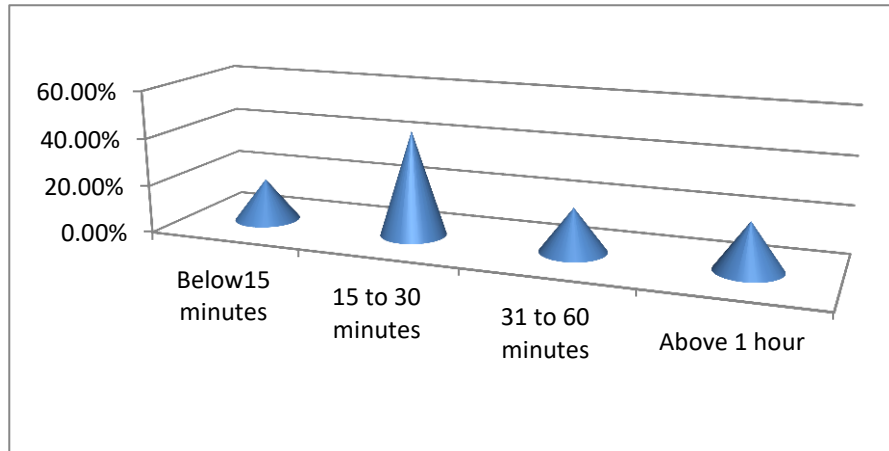


Figure 6. Time spent on social media for socialisation process

Instagram was rated as the best social media platform that youngsters use (40.8%) for the process of socialisation. 59.2% of the collected sample emphasised the significance of social media to have a better understanding of the society. They also stated that social networking websites are the platforms that helped them to stay connected with the society. The study also pointed at the role of social media in propagating the beliefs, attitudes, values and skills. It is understood that social media help youngsters to imbibe values, attitudes, skills and beliefs that are necessary to function within the society. 51.3% of the total sample supported this perspective. An analysis of the collected data also shows that social media help an individual to be socially responsible. When 42.8% of the sample had a neutral perception of this idea, 42% of the population stressed the importance of social media in keeping an individual socially responsible being. The role of social media is vast and enormous. It also helps youngsters to easily adapt to changing social roles (50.4%). It has a pivotal role in formulating the cultural identity of youngsters. Social identity formulation is also enhanced by social media.

5.5 Social Media, Electronic Literature, FLT and Literary Studies

It was found that the vocabulary of youngsters is highly influenced by social media and electronic literature. It also contributes to language learning and literary studies. The language which youngsters use has vocabulary that is mostly perceived and adopted via social media and electronic literature. The analysis of the study shows that 30.7% of the total respondents use words that they see in digital literary works and social media. 46.8% of the collected sample had a neutral opinion on this whereas 3.4% of the population strongly agreed with this point of view.

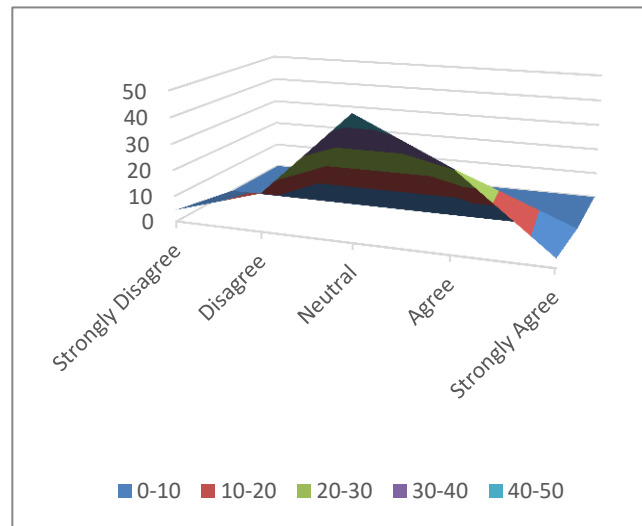


Figure 7. The language which youngsters employ has vocabulary that is mostly perceived and comprehended via social media and electronic literature

On the other hand, 261 respondents out of 355 supported social media and digital literary works and stated that they enhanced their English language skills. When majority of the population (73.5%) supported electronic literature in its role in improving foreign language skills and stated that it enhances their English language skills, only 3.4% of the collected sample had a contradictory opinion. Other respondents stayed neutral. It shows the significance of incorporating social media and digital literary works in foreign language teaching (FLT) and learning. Educators can make use of social media, electronic literature and similar technological means to transform an inactive language class to a

hyperactive and interesting foreign language class.

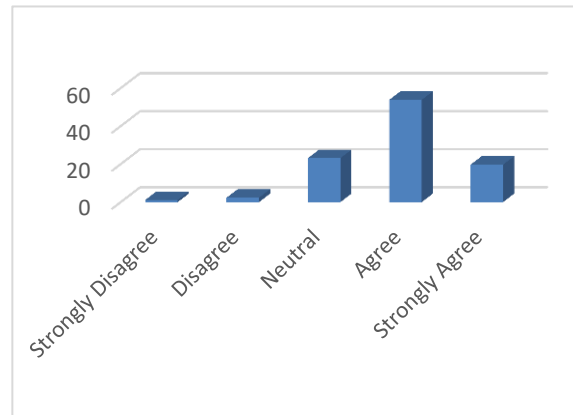


Figure 8. The use of social media and digital literary works enhance English language skills

6. Conclusion

From the study, it is evident that social media play a pivotal role in the day-to-day life of youngsters. They make use of social media for various purposes. Some of the reasons for using social media are to stay in touch with society and friends, to gather data for career growth, language learning, literary studies and educational purpose. Many youngsters depend on YouTube to find majority of education-related materials and use it as a means to develop their English language skills and vocabulary. In many instances, social media act as a means for English language development. It is observed that the use of electronic literature and electronic literary works help to enhance the mode of language teaching and make the classes interesting. Electronic literature tremendously supports literary studies, education and related initiatives. Social media and digital technology have a pivotal impact on the lifestyle of the youngsters. Social networking websites are the platforms that help them to stay connected with the society. Many youngsters use it as a panacea for resolving numerous personal problems. It has a vital role on their cultural understanding, learning patterns and daily routine. Unknowingly, it also leads to acculturation and ultimately, it paves way for cultural and social changes. The analysis of the data shows that the students felt motivated and were very positive in using social media and electronic literature for foreign language learning. Although, many youngsters consider social media as a stress reliever and helping hand to learn a new language, it is also observed that excessive use of the same leads to sadness and anxiety.

7. Limitations

In spite of the important contributions of the study, the results must be viewed in light of its limitations. First, the quantitative data in this study were collected from youngsters in selected colleges in three South Indian states. The students marked their opinion based on subjective evaluation. Future studies can be conducted with better objective indicators. Another limitation is that the data is collected only from selected colleges in South Indian states. This study can be conducted on a broad basis and the views and observations may change in different parts of the country or the world. The researchers may conduct future studies considering these limitations.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Aby John was responsible for the effective conduct of the research. Ms. Emil George was responsible for preparing the questionnaire and data collection. Dr. Aby John drafted the manuscript and Ms. Emil George revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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