

國小學童使用 Livemocha 英語學習系統的英語學習經驗

沈昱璋¹ 葉惠菁²

摘要

語言學習社群網站的出現帶動一股新的語言學習風潮——語言學習者和母語人士的互惠學習。然而，過去關於這方面的研究鮮少以國小學生為對象。對於國小學生用語言學習社群網站學習的經驗及他們的看法所知甚少。因此，本研究在探討國小學生使用全世界最大的語言學習社群網站 Livemocha 學習英語的經驗及其看法。實驗對象為台灣中部某國小的四十位六年級學生。研究資料包括學生使用網站的活動記錄、一份研究問卷及焦點團體訪談的記錄。收集的資料以描述性統計及主題分析法加以分析。結果顯示學生普遍對於用 Livemocha 網站學習英語有正面的看法，並且認為 Livemocha 是一個有用的語言學習工具。學生們也指出幾項 Livemocha 系統中的缺點並提出改善的建議。此研究的發現將有助於語言教育者改善其教學，並對於語言學習者使用不同方式學習有啟示作用。

關鍵詞：電腦輔助語言學習、社群網站、Livemocha

1 雲林縣橋頭國民小學英語教師

2 國立雲林科技大學應用外語系特聘教授兼系所主任
通訊作者：葉惠菁，E-mail: hyeh@yuntech.edu.tw

1. Introduction

Many previous studies have indicated that students in Taiwan are deficient in their English competency. There are two major problems in English learning in Taiwan. First, the most serious problem of the education of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Taiwan is that students have few chances to practice outside classroom as lack of English speaking environment. (Yang & Chang, 2008). According to Krashen (1989), learners acquire language through comprehensible input. However, students in elementary schools in Taiwan have only two English classes—eighty minutes in a week. Students do not have much time practicing English with the teacher or other students in class and the limited lesson time discontinue students' learning motivation. These are in line with Bruff (2009), lacking interactions among students and contact with the teacher is believed to reduce students' motivation and participation.

The second major problem is that students' English level in Taiwan shows a bimodal distribution, with a low-achievement peak and a high-achievement peak within each stage of formal education (Chang *et al.*, 2007). It was found that the situation could be partly due to the existence of numerous English cram schools in Taiwan and many parents send their children to cram schools to obtain high scores in their English achievement tests. Students who go to cram schools receive English instruction for more than two hours a week and consequently have higher English proficiency than those who do not. On the other hand, ordinary school teachers find it difficult to teach English in class with a large proficiency gap between students, as teachers have problems in preparing teaching materials to fulfill the different needs of students in various levels. Wide proficiency gap between students in a class is a serious problem challenging Taiwan's EFL teachers.

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is the possible solution to the addressed problems in English education for Taiwan. Garrett (2009) suggested that "CALL is the answer" (p.724) to address foreign language needs. Since the emergence of CALL technology in the 1960s, a large amount of CALL programs have been designed to promote language learning and teaching. With the rapid growth of multimedia technology and the widespread of the internet, language learners and educators can easily get access to considerable authentic materials and programs for language learning. In recent years, there is an increasing interest in using Web 2.0 technology for educational purposes (Stevenson & Liu, 2010). Web 2.0 technology not only allows users to view the content as typical websites, it also allows users to interact and collaborate with others to create user-generated content instantly in an

online community. Web 2.0 technologies are widely used in websites nowadays, such as blogs, wikis, video sharing sites and social network sites.

The research on social network sites (SNSs) which adopt Web 2.0 technologies, has become a current trend in the field of online language learning. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social network sites are:

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. (para. 5)

Boyd added a fourth feature in his later research in 2011, referring to the enhancement of peripheral awareness, by allowing users to show temporal patterns of their everyday life. Users are able to express their opinion on various topics, display pictures or video clips of their daily life, or search for information on SNSs. Some of the most popular SNSs are Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, LinkedIn and Ning. These sites connect billions of users all over the world every day. According to the statistics reported on the newsroom page on Facebook, there were 2.01 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2017. SNSs bring a revolutionary change in the way people connect to each other, and therefore SNSs are generally agreed to be one of the most significant of the Web 2.0 tools (Harrison & Thomas, 2009; McBride, 2009). There has been an increasing interest in SNSs for language learning. Among the array, some SNSs are designed specifically for language learning, such as Livemocha, Busuu, Palabea, Lang-8 and Babbel. However, “the use of social networking sites to learn a foreign language has been little investigated” (Clark & Gruba, 2010, p. 164). Lin (2012) further pointed out that “little is known about users’ attitudes toward this new learning approach, what practices people engage in, or what kinds of interaction they are involved in” (p.2). In order to fill the knowledge gap in the field of SNSs for language learning, this study aims to investigate learners’ experiences and their attitudes toward Livemocha, a typical example of SNSs designed for language learning.

2. Literature review

2.1 Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Computer-assisted language learning refers to the use of computer technology for language learning (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Computers have been used in language learning for more than 50 years and numerous of CALL systems have been invented since 1960s. The history of CALL can be categorized into three stages:

Structural CALL, Communicative CALL, and Integrative CALL (Warschauer, 2000).

Table 1 shows the three stages of CALL.

Table 1 *The Three Stages of CALL* (Warschauer, 2000)

Stage	1970s-1980s: Structural CALL	1980s-1990s: Communicative CALL	21st Century: Integrative CALL
Technology	Mainframe	PCs	Multimedia and Internet
English-Teaching Paradigm	Grammar-Translation & Audio-Lingual	Communicate Language Teaching	Content-Based, ESP/EAP
View of Language	Structural (a formal structural system)	Cognitive (a mentally-constructed system)	Socio-cognitive (developed in social interaction)
Principal Use of Computers	Drill and Practice	Communicative Exercises	Authentic Discourse
Principal Objective	Accuracy	And Fluency	And Agency

Structural CALL

The first stage of CALL was employed in the 1960s and 1970s. In this period of time, education was essentially influenced by the dominant behaviorist theories. Behaviorists believed that all behavior can be reduced to a simple stimulus-response association, and external behavior can be changed through reinforcement. Based on the theory, most language teachers used audio-lingual method, in which repetitive language drills were the main activities in their instruction. In this stage, programs of CALL were invented to provide repeated drills and exposure to the learning materials of the target language. The computer served as a mechanical tutor which never got bored with presenting the same material and immediate non-judgmental feedback. (Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Structural CALL programs provided word processor, text reconstruction, simple games, and exercises with automatic (and unsophisticated) feedback for learners. The PLATO system, which combined vocabulary drills, grammar explanation and drills, and translations tests, was one of the typical Structural CALL systems.

Communicative CALL

Structural CALL gradually diminished in the late 1970s and 1980s owing to theoretical and pedagogical changes in language learning, along with the advent of microcomputers which brought more potential help to language learners. Arguing that authentic communication benefits more than the drill and practice programs, advocates of the communicative approach developed Communicative CALL to teach grammar implicitly and encourage students to create original utterances. Communicative CALL conformed to cognitive theories which emphasized that

learning was a process of discovery, expression, and development (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). There were mainly three types of Communicative CALL programs. In one type, Communicative CALL provided the drill and practice programs, but the process of finding the correct answer included plenty of choices, control and interaction. The computer served as a tutor which knows the right answer. In another type, Communicative CALL programs, the computer served as stimulus and the CALL activity is to stimulate students' discussion, writing, or critical thinking, rather than finding the right answer. In the third type, Communicative CALL involved the computer as tool. In this type of Communicative CALL, processors, spelling and grammar checkers and concordancers were designed to empower learners to understand or use a language.

Integrative CALL

Although Communicative CALL was considered a great advance over structural CALL, criticism appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Language teachers changed their viewpoint from a cognitive view of communicative approach to a more social view, which lay great stress on language use in authentic social contexts (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Language educators were seeking ways to teach in a more integrative manner rather than teaching separate skills or structures. For the same purpose, advocates of CALL made efforts to develop models which could help integrate the diverse aspects of the language learning process (Warschauer, 1996). This led to a new stage of CALL: Integrative CALL.

Integrative CALL sought to integrate various language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and to integrate technology more completely into the language learning process (Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). The development of Integrative CALL was based on two crucial technologies: multimedia technology and the Internet. Multimedia technology allowed language learners to use different types of media (text, graphics, sound, video, and animation) in a single machine (Warschauer, 1996), and to learn in a more authentic environment, in which reading, writing, listening and speaking were combined together. Learners could have great control over their learning, since they could decide when and how to use the various media integrated in the learning activities. Although multimedia technology brought great advantages for language learning, the programs are not yet intelligent enough to understand a learner's spoken input and evaluate the appropriateness.

The wide spread of the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a significant impact on language learning. Through the Internet, language learners are able to communicate directly with other learners or speakers of the target language around the world 24 hours a day. Communication between users can be synchronous

through tools such as instant messenger or chat rooms, or asynchronous through electronic mail. Computer-mediated communication allows users to share graphics, sounds, video, and documents. A rich variety of authentic materials from the target culture produced by its people are available within minutes in the World Wide Web for learners (Liontas, 2013; Warschauer, 1996).

A considerable amount of literature reviews has been published on CALL involving various aspects in language learning. Previous research suggests that CALL can improve vocabulary learning (Chen & Li, 2010; Greifnieder, 1995; Hirschel & Fritz, 2013; Kang, 1995; Kim & Gilman, 2008; Li, 2010; Mahmoudi, Samad, & Razak, 2012; Nakata, 2008), develop grammar concepts (Cardillo, 1996; Lam & Pennington, 1995; Morris, 2005; Ngu & Rethinasamy, 2006; Nutta, 2013), enhance phonemic awareness and pronunciation (Lai, Tsai & Yu, 2009; Neri, Mich, Gerosa, & Giuliani, 2008; Sun & Dong, 2004), improve reading comprehension (Chen, Chen, & Sun, 2010; Johns, Lee, & Wang, 2008; Kramsch, 2000; Lan, Sung, & Chang, 2009; Liaw, 1997), grow writing skill (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006; Cohen, 1993; Dekhinet, Topping, Duran, & Blanch, 2008; Fidaoui, Bahous, & Bacha, 2010; Young, 2003), facilitate listening comprehension (Nachoua, 2012; Kettemann, 1995; Liu, 2009; Liu & Chu, 2010; Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007), and increase speaking ability (Johnston & Milne, 1995; Morton & Jack, 2010; Murphy, 2009; Troia, 2004).

2.2 Social Network Sites and Language Learning

Internet has become a major part of our daily lives, in particular for knowledge sharing and communication (Dudeney & Hockly, 2012). Technology-mediated communication operates as a critically important medium for all kinds of human interaction now (Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become widespread as the rapid growth of the Internet. With the support of CMC technologies, users can share text, graphics, sounds, and video with others all over the world. Web-based tools using Web 2.0 technologies encourage users to create and share user-generated content and knowledge (Diaz, 2011) and provide users the chance to become an active author, contributor, editor, or specialist (Stevenson & Liu, 2010). The common CMCs such as blogs, video sharing, social networking and podcasting which form socially connected webs in which people can contribute as much as they can consume (Andersen, 2007).

One of the most commonly used CMCs is social networking provided by hundreds of social network sites (SNSs) around the world. Despite the similar basic technological features, the cultures that derive from SNSs are different. Most SNSs provide services for keeping pre-existing relation, while some SNSs help users to create new relations with strangers who share the same interests, political views, or

activities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). While different SNSs have various features, the processes to become a member of them are similar. Users are asked to provide information about themselves, such as name (nickname), gender, age, location, interests, and e-mail address, during the registration. Most sites encourage users to upload a profile photo. These descriptions shape the unique profile of a user. After registering in an SNS, the user becomes a member of the virtual community which is composed of all the members on the particular SNS. Members of SNSs can use applications provided or supported by the system to participate in various activities in their communities. As different SNSs emphasize on different features, the main activities implemented on different SNSs vary accordingly. For example, the main activities on Youtube are video watching and video sharing, as QQ provides services such as news reading and message leaving, music listening and music discussing on Myspace, and photo sharing and message leaving on Facebook. These activities draw much attention of SNSs members and become a must in their daily life. Facebook reports its daily active users as 936 million on average for March 2015.

In addition to the features on friends making and information sharing, some SNSs designers pay attention to the potential use of SNSs for language learning and teaching. SNSs such as Livemocha, Busuu, Palabea, Lang-8 and Babbel are designed to provide useful language learning materials as well as learning environment. Livemocha (<http://livemocha.com>) and Busuu (<http://www.busuu.com>) allow members to get access for free language courses, to communicate with native speakers by giving or receiving feedbacks on speaking and writing tasks, and to chat with language partners from all over the world. Palabea (<http://blog.palabea.com>) provides video lessons as well as articles regarding language learning. Lang-8 (<http://blog.lang-8.com>) focuses on the exchange of comments and feedbacks on journals among language learners and native speakers. Babbel (<http://www.babbel.com>) provides priced services of language learning and online chat.

Educators and researchers are getting interested in SNSs for language learning. Several studies related to this field can serve as good references for better understanding. Boyd and Ellison (2007) gave a definition as well as detailed description of the features, history and development of SNSs. McBride (2009) reviewed relevant learning theories and evaluate SNSs as a potential tool or environment for foreign language activities. Stevenson and Liu (2010) focused on three popular SNSs (Palabea, Livemocha and Babbel) to investigate how language learners use the SNSs for learning and social purposes, as well as technical and pedagogical issues regarding SNSs.

2.3 Research Related to Livemocha

Among the SNSs for language learning, Livemocha draws a lot attention because it forms the largest online language learning community (over 16 million members). Livemocha provides free language learning materials of 35 target languages as well as opportunities to communicate with native speakers. Members of Livemocha can also get corrective feedbacks from language experts, language partners, or other community members for their writing and speaking works. Educators and researchers are getting interested in the potential use of Livemocha for educational purposes in recent years.

There have been several studies aimed at various topics related to Livemocha (see Table 2). Harrison and Thomas (2009) conducted a research which focused on Livemocha to examine issues on SNSs for language learning such as impression management, friendship performance, networks and network structure, and privacy issues, and the potential to provide opportunities for language exchange between native and non-native speakers. Results showed that users were not satisfied with the impression management level on Livemocha, but had positive attitude towards synchronous interaction with native speakers. The evaluation of Livemocha done by Jee and Park (2009) also suggested that learners getting feedback from peers were more motivated by using Livemocha. Huffman (2011)'s study further supported that peer review could strengthen the connection between community members. However, as Brick (2012) and Lin (2012) argued that the feedback between learners were actually in poor quality because they were without proper grammar training, and learners could not receive professional support or guidance to improve the language proficiency.

Table 2 *Research Related to Livemocha*

Year	Author	Topic	Participant	Findings
2009	Harrison & Thomas	Social Interaction	6 postgraduate students aged between 21 and 25	SNSs can be used by language learners to explore new relationships rather than merely maintain existing ones.
2009	Jee & Park	Evaluation of Livemocha	Livemocha	Peer feedback enhances motivation.
2010	Clark & Gruba	How may online social networking sites be used to acquire a language?	2 ESL teachers (auto-ethnographic approach)	Suggestions for improvement of pedagogy
2010	Stevenson & Liu	Pedagogical and technical usability of Palabea, Babbel and Livemocha	164 users	Users wanted the ability to access lessons, vocabulary, and other types of traditional learning content before interacting with other users.
2011	Brick	The strengths and weaknesses of Livemocha; users' reactions and perceived easiness	7 undergraduate learners from various L1 backgrounds	Participants had both good and bad experiences on Livemocha in the communication with other members.
2011	Huffman	Evaluation of Livemocha	Livemocha	The more the "social protocol" of receiving and giving feedback is repeated, the stronger the connections between community members become.
2011	Liaw	Evaluation of Livemocha	Livemocha	Exercises require memorization more than comprehension. Keyboards do not support the target language. The score system can enhance motivation and performance.
2012	Brick	Strengths and weaknesses of Livemocha and Busuu	Livemocha and Busuu	Lack of grammar exercises; the quality of feedback is poor
2012	Lin	Users' attitudes and practices on Livemocha	20 case-study participants (adults)	Learners will need support, guidance, and well-structured activities to ensure success in language learning.
2012	Lloyd	Users' experiences of using Livemocha	eight undergraduate students	Participants exhibited generally positive attitudes towards Livemocha. Online flirting is a problem.
2012	McIntee	Weirdities and transliteracy	Students of a high school and a university	Students gained culture-specific understanding by interacting with real people.

Livemocha provides not only the opportunities to communicate with native speakers, but also free language learning materials. The two key concepts in language learning, knowledge sharing and communication, are neatly integrated in Livemocha. Previous studies reported mainly on the strengths and weakness of Livemocha, and the participants were mostly adults. Few studies focused on elementary students' experiences or attitudes toward Livemocha. This study was conducted in order to fill the knowledge gap.

3. Purpose of the study

This study aims to explore EFL elementary students' learning experiences on Livemocha and their attitudes toward Livemocha. The research questions guiding this study are as follows: (1) What language learning experiences did the EFL elementary students have for Livemocha? (2) What were the EFL elementary students' attitudes toward using Livemocha for language learning?

4. The language learning social network site: Livemocha

Livemocha (see Figure 1), which connects over 16 million community members from over 195 countries, forms the largest online language learning community at the present time. Launched in September 2007, Livemocha declared its goal as creating a world in which everyone can be fluent in multiple languages.



Figure 1 The Home Page on Livemocha

After filling in some personal information, including the native language and target language on the Sign Up page (see Figure 2), users can create an account and become members. Livemocha members can take free courses in learning 35 different languages.

Figure 2 The Sign Up Page on Livemocha

The main features for language learning on Livemocha are:

- (1) Mochapoints and beans: All language contents and activities on Livemocha are accessible either using Mochapoints (which you earn) or beans (which you buy).

Livemocha will give 40,999 points to each new member. Users can earn Mochapoints by reviewing lessons or others' exercise submissions. The other way to get access to new lessons is to purchase beans with real money.

- (2) Free lessons for language learning (see Figure 3): Users can learn 35 languages through the free courses. Up to 240 free English lessons are available on Livemocha. The lessons are divided into 9 levels. To get new lessons, users have to redeem (or pay) 6,999 Mochapoints.

Figure 3 The Lessons Page on Livemocha

There are eight activities in each lesson:

- (a) Introduction: The main topic is introduced in a short film.
- (b) Vocabulary: The target words are taught with flashcards and recorded sound.
- (c) Usage: Phrases or sentences related to the target topic are taught with written words and recorded sound.
- (d) Usage Practice: A quiz is given to learners to test their understanding about the target lesson. Learners can get the correct answer immediately after they choose or type the answer.
- (e) Read/Write: Learners read a prompt and write the response, and then submit the work to native speakers and language experts for help and feedback.
- (f) Read/Speak: Learners read a prompt and record their response, and then submit the work to native speakers and language experts for help and feedback.
- (g) Listen/Write: Learners listen to a prompt or example and write the response, and then submit the work to native speakers and language experts for help and feedback.
- (h) Listen/ Speak: Learners listen to a prompt or example and record their response, and then submit the work to native speakers and language experts for help and feedback.

Activities (e), (f), (g), and (h) are referred to as Submission Exercises, which provide the chances for a learner to help others and to get help from native speakers.

- (3) Language partners: Users can invite other members who are native speakers of the target language to be language partners. Language learners can chat with their partners by sending messages, or help them by giving feedback on their speaking and writing work (exercise submissions). In the same way, learners can get help from partners and other Livemocha members.
- (4) Blog: Users can share their learning experiences or ideas about language learning in the blog.

5. Method

5.1 Participants

The participants of this study were EFL sixth-grade students from an elementary school in central Taiwan. There were 152 sixth-grade students in the school, and 62 agreed to join in this study. Among the students who agreed to participate, 40 students were selected to be the target participants. The selection criteria were: (1) the students were Chinese (Mandarin) native speakers, (2) the students were familiar with English alphabets, and (3) the students had basic computer literacy. All the 40 participants aged from 11 to 12, and studied English for three years in the elementary school.

5.2 Data Collection

The data were collected over 10-week Livemocha course. The collected data in this study included: (1) the students' action records (2) the attitude questionnaire of English learning on Livemocha, and (3) transcripts of focus group interviews which were conducted one week after the 10-week Livemocha course.

In this study, the action records documented the students' performance in the free language courses as well as the conversation between the students and their language partners. When the students signed in Livemocha, the actions on Livemocha were recorded immediately and automatically by the system.

The transcripts of the focus group interviews were used to explore the information which was not recorded by the system and further probed into their online learning experience, such as their perception of the programs on Livemocha, and their feeling of chatting with people from other countries.

The attitude questionnaire on English learning on Livemocha and the transcripts of the focus group interviews were used to answer the second research question. The questionnaire was adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explore the students' attitudes toward using Livemocha for language learning. In TAM, which was proposed by Davis in 1986, the ease of use and usefulness of a technology were considered to affect users' intention to use it. Therefore, users' willingness to accept technology can be predicted based on their perception by using TAM model (Liu, Chen, Sun, Wible & Kuo, 2010). The transcripts of the focus group interviews were used to include detailed information about the students' experiences and opinions of using Livemocha.

All of the 40 participants completed the 10-week Livemocha course in this study. The students' action records, questionnaires and responses to the interview questions were collected.

5.3 Data Analysis

The students' action records and the transcripts of the focus group interviews were the major data sources for the first research question. Thematic analysis was adopted to explore the students' English learning experiences on Livemocha. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.79). The process of thematic analysis involves a back-and-forth movement of searching for meaningful patterns or themes. In this study, the process of thematic analysis consists of four phases, as follows.

Phase 1: Identifying meaningful utterances

It is necessary to identify meaningful utterances of the interview transcripts as the basic units of data analysis in the beginning. In this study, a meaningful utterance

refers to an expression of a complete idea about Livemocha. There were 334 meaningful utterances in total were identified in the interview transcript.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Secondly, the utterances were coded to identify particular aspects of the data set. There were total of 23 initial codes such as “comments regarding help options”, “comments on improving free lessons” and “effects of writing activities” were generated from the meaningful utterances.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

After all data had been initially coded and collated, the 23 different codes were compared and sorted into overarching themes. Codes with similar concept were categorized in the same theme. There were three major themes emerged from the categorization, including strength, weakness, and suggestion of Livemocha.

Phase 4: Triangulating results to increase the credibility of the study

After the interview transcripts were transcribed, all participants were asked to check their utterances in the transcripts to ensure the consistency. The researcher revised the words in the transcripts until every participant confirmed the agreement. In addition, the students' action records served as evidences to support the expression in the transcripts.

Then descriptive statistics were used to analyze the attitude questionnaire of English learning on Livemocha, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcripts of the focus group interviews to explore students' preferences and suggestions on Livemocha. Patterns of the students' preferences and suggestions for certain features of Livemocha were analyzed in the process of thematic analysis. The results of the data analysis of the two research questions were reported in the following chapter.

6. Results

6.1 Results for RQ1: What language learning experiences did the EFL elementary students have for Livemocha?

The students' main activities on Livemocha included taking free lessons, chatting with language partners, giving and receiving feedbacks on speaking and writing works. The action records of activities and the transcripts of focus group interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. Totally 334 meaningful statements were found in the transcripts of the focus group interviews. In the 334 statements, 163 statements (49%) pertained to the free lessons, 85 statements (25%) pertained to the chatting with language partners, 62 statements (19%) pertained to the feedbacks, and 24 statements (7%) pertained to the whole system. Two major themes emerged from

the statements during the process of data analysis, (1) pleasant experiences, and (2) drawbacks and suggestions. Results of the data analysis regarding the three major themes are presented according to the four main activities mentioned above.

6.1.1 Free Lessons

(1) Positive Experiences

Table 3 shows the most mentioned statements by the students during the focus group interviews. Most of the students expressed their pleasant experiences in taking the free lessons on Livemocha.

Table 3 *Students' Positive Reflections on Free Lessons of Livemocha*

Statements	Frequency (<i>N</i> = 40)
Taking the free lessons on Livemocha is useful for English learning.	39
The free lessons provide a lot of language learning materials.	37
It is convenient to learn English on Livemocha.	36
There are many new words in the free lessons.	35
The free lessons enhance my listening ability.	33
The free lessons are accessible with no limit of time and place, and the system never gets tired.	32

Within the 40 students, 39 of them considered that free lessons of Livemocha could help their English learning, and 36 students mentioned that the Livemocha website provided a convenient language learning environment, in which they could choose the lessons they liked and took the lessons at their convenient time. Regarding the English abilities, 35 students claimed that taking the free lessons of Livemocha enhanced listening ability and increased their vocabulary knowledge, and 21 students asserted that the lessons promoted their English grammar. For example, one student with low English proficiency expressed her experience in taking the free lessons with great excitement: "Livemocha helps me a lot in English learning. I can review any lesson that I am interested again and again until I understand the content."

Students were encouraged to complete a test practice in the system prior taking the lessons, and to complete the test again after lessons were taken on Livemocha. According to the action records, all of the students had experience of improving their performance on the practices (see Figure 4).

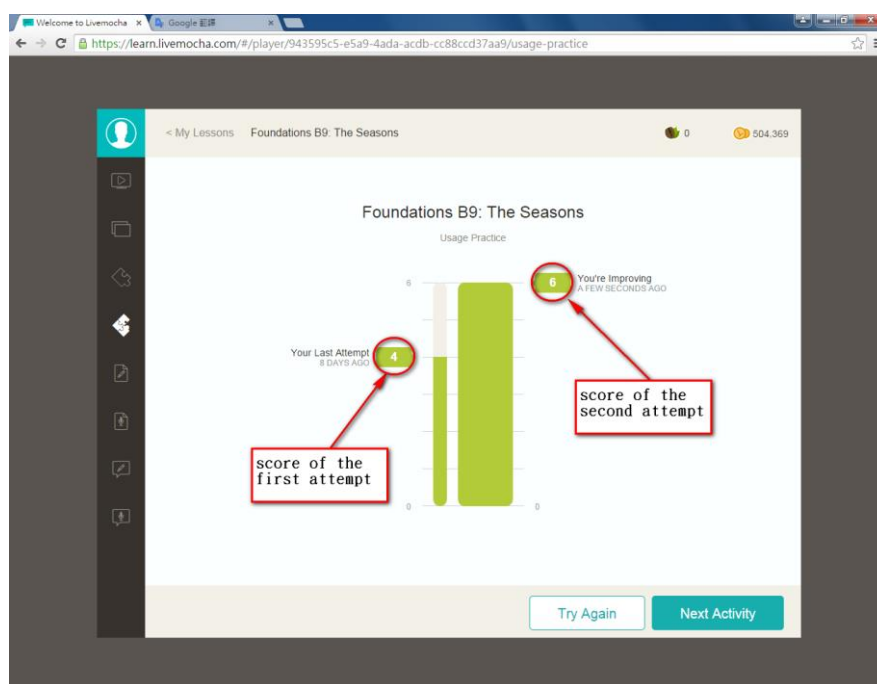


Figure 4 Sample of a Student's Action Record in the Free Lessons

Focus group interviews showed similar results. Among the 40 students, 34 of them asserted that they spent much more time on free lessons than on other activities of Livemocha. This indicated that students were interested to take the free lessons on Livemocha. Both of the results suggested that students had enjoyable experiences in taking the free lessons.

(2) Drawbacks and Suggestions

Although the students had pleasant experiences in learning English by taking the free lessons, some students reported the drawbacks they found in the free lessons. As shown in Table 4, the issue that the students criticized the most was the translation service. Other drawbacks included the language for explanation and the quality of the pictures.

Table 4 *Students' Report on the Drawbacks of the Free Lessons*

Statements	Frequency (N = 40)
The translation service did not provide appropriate translations.	21
It is hard to understand the content when the explanation is presented in English, not in Chinese.	19
The pictures in the lessons are in poor quality.	15

In the focus group interviews, the most complaint on Livemocha was the translation services. 21 participants doubted the usability of the translation, and chose

not to use it again after the first trial. 15 students claimed that they preferred explanation spoken or written in Chinese, not in English. Explanation presented in English did not help them understand the content.

Besides, 15 students mentioned the poor quality of the pictures. They had difficulty figuring out what were the pictures presenting and consequently slowed down their vocabulary and sentence acquisition.

The students made some suggestions for improvement of the free lessons (see Table 5). The suggestions included adding annotation of learners' native language in the translation explanation, correct translations, more photos and better picture quality. The students claimed that they needed good translation service as well as annotation in Chinese to learn English. Another suggestion made was that lessons could be integrated with video games to increase the attraction, and nine students said that correct answers should be given in the exercises to let them know what were actually wrong.

Table 5 *Students' Suggestions for Improvement of the Free Lessons*

Statements	Frequency (N = 40)
The content of the target language should be presented with annotation written in the learner's native language.	20
The translation service should be designed to give correct translations.	18
Photos are better than drawings.	17
The quality of pictures should be improved	15
Synchronous or asynchronous online video chatting can be added in the program.	10

In sum, although the students found some drawbacks of the free lessons, most of them had pleasant experiences using free lessons for English learning.

6.1.2 Chatting with Language Partners

(1) Positive Experiences

The program on Livemocha allowed users to chat with language partners by leaving messages in written forms. According to the participants, only 2 out of the 40 students had minor experience talking to foreigners before. All the 40 students were excited about the online chatting, and invited all the partners which the system recommended (native English speakers). Each had at least 5 language partners on Livemocha, and one student even had 25 language partners. Table 6 shows the students' comments on the chatting function in Livemocha.

For most participants, it was their first time to talk to native speakers. Their attitudes toward the experience were positive. Talking to language partners was not

only interesting, they also thought that online chatting was less anxious than face-to-face conversation. Half of the participants also claimed that chatting with language partners was their favorite activity on Livemocha.

Table 6 *Students' Reflections on Chatting with Language Partners*

Statements	Frequency (N = 40)
It was the first time I chatted with foreigners.	38
It is interesting to chat with foreigners via Livemocha.	31
Chatting with language partners is my favorite activity on Livemocha.	20
Online chatting causes less anxiety than face-to-face conversations.	17

(2) Drawbacks and Suggestions

Despite their excitement about the online chatting with partners, most of the students did not chat with the same partner more than three times. The conversations often ceased after brief introduction or polite greetings due to students' limited proficiency in English. In the focus group interviews, the students reported the reasons: "I did not know what to say next." "I did not know how to express myself in English." "I did not understand what he said." The conversation was limited by the students' English proficiency. Among all the participants, only one student, Mark found his way to break the limitation: He used Google Translate to translate the messages from his American language partner into Chinese, and translated his own messages from Chinese into English. As shown in Figure 5, Mark typed his message to his American partner in Mandarin: "午安~我來自台灣 我現在上英文 這是老師給我的課程 希望我們能成為好夥伴," and Google Translate provided the translation: "Good afternoon - I'm from Taiwan, I now this is the English teacher gave me lessons I hope we can become good partners." Although the translation was not all correct, it was generally comprehensible. Mark's creative thinking surprised his peers and the researcher. After his demonstration, his peers used the strategy in their chatting with their language partners, too.

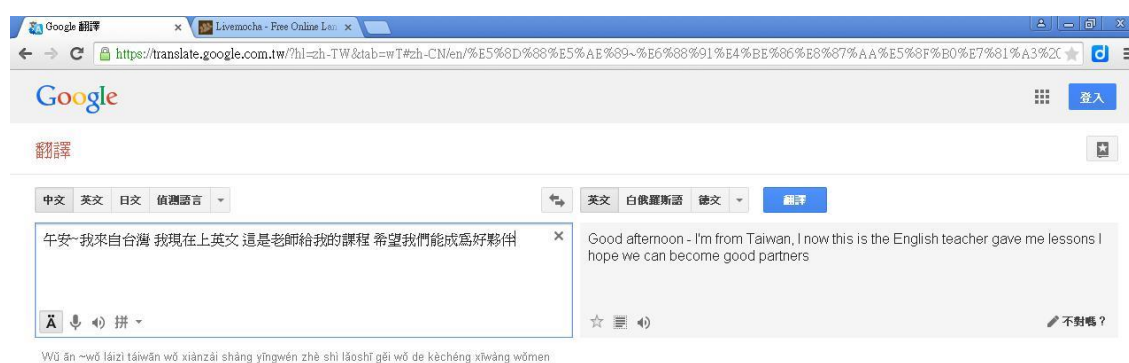


Figure 5 A Student's Action Record of Using Google Translate in Online Chatting

However, in the focus group interviews, 10 students suggested that Livemocha should provide synchronous or asynchronous online video chatting, which would allow language learners to practice their listening and speaking ability in authentic contexts.

6.1.3 Giving and Receiving Feedbacks

(1) Positive Experiences

In the Livemocha community, native speakers help language learners by giving feedbacks on their writing and speaking works. By giving feedbacks, users can earn Mochapoints and spend them on their own language lessons. The Mochapoint design was to encourage helpful interaction between language learners and native speakers of target languages. During the lessons, students can send the writing exercises to their language partners (native speakers) and would receive feedback from them. The feedback given by language partners were generally very positive and high ratings were also given, therefore, the students were more willing to use Livemocha and continued learning the language. In the focus group interviews, 21 students claimed that native partners' positive feedback encouraged them to take more language lessons.

(2) Feedback to Mandarin Learners

Despite learning English on Livemocha, the students were interested in giving feedbacks to Mandarin learners. Students giving feedback were allowed to earn Mochapoints, so that they could use the points to attend more free lessons..

6.1.4 The Livemocha Language Learning System

In addition to the three main activities above, the students referred to the issues of sign-up design and the Internet latency. They suggested that Livemocha should provide a sign-up page written in Mandarin, and larger capacity of its Internet connection.

As regards of the Livemocha blog, the students seldom visited it because they did not have enough confidence to write long passages in English. Only 35 students visited the blog once, and three students never visited the blog. The two students who visited the blog more than once were with higher English proficiency than other students. They claimed that they tried to find words and sentences they learned from the free lessons in the blog, but found little relation between them.

6.2 Results for RQ2: What were the EFL elementary school students' attitudes toward using Livemocha for language learning?

Table 7 shows the results of the students' attitudes toward using Livemocha for language learning. The questionnaire items were designed based on the TAM model and used to examine the four aspects of the students' attitudes: (1) perceived

usefulness (PU), (2) perceived ease of use (PEU), (3) attitude (A), and (4) behavioral intention (BI). The results were described as followed.

Table 7 *Students' Attitudes toward Using Livemocha for Language Learning*

Item	Item content	1	2	3	4	5	N=40 M
Perceived Usefulness (PU)							
1	Using Livemocha enables me to achieve my English learning goal quickly.	0 0%	0 0%	9 23%	21 53%	10 25%	4.03
2	Using Livemocha improves my performance in English learning.	0 0%	0 0%	10 25%	16 40%	14 35%	4.10
3	Livemocha enhances my English ability.	0 0%	1 2%	6 15%	19 48%	14 35%	4.15
4	Livemocha enhances my effectiveness in learning English.	0 0%	3 7%	9 22%	19 48%	9 23%	3.85
5	Livemocha makes it easier to learn English.	0 0%	2 5%	9 22%	16 40%	13 33%	4.00
6	Livemocha is useful for English learning.	0 0%	1 2%	7 18%	12 30%	20 50%	4.28
Total mean of Perceived Usefulness							4.07
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)							
1	Learning to operate Livemocha is easy for me.	0 0%	3 7%	9 22%	13 33%	15 38%	4.00
2	It is easy to get Livemocha to do what I want it to do.	0 0%	3 7%	9 23%	18 45%	10 25%	3.88
3	My interaction with Livemocha is clear and understandable.	0 0%	2 5%	12 30%	14 35%	12 30%	3.90
4	Livemocha is flexible to interact with.	0 0%	2 5%	8 20%	21 52%	9 23%	3.93
5	It is easy for me to become skillful at using Livemocha.	0 0%	5 12%	7 17%	11 28%	17 43%	4.00
Item	Item content	1	2	3	4	5	N=40 M
6	Livemocha is easy to use.	0 0%	4 10%	7 17%	18 45%	11 28%	3.90
Total mean of Perceived Ease of Use							3.93

Table 7 (continued)

Attitude (A)						
1	Using Livemocha to learn English is enjoyable.	0	0	14	12	14
		0%	0%	35%	30%	35%
2	Using Livemocha to learn English is convenient.	0	0	10	17	13
		0%	0%	25%	42%	33%
3	Using Livemocha to learn English is interesting.	0	1	9	14	16
		0%	2%	23%	35%	40%
4	Using Livemocha to learn English is attractive.	1	2	16	13	8
		2%	5%	40%	33%	20%
5	Using Livemocha to learn English is satisfying.	0	1	16	13	10
		0%	2%	40%	33%	25%
Total mean of Attitude						3.92
Behavioral Intention (BI)						
1	I will add Livemocha to My Favorites Websites.	0	6	14	9	11
		0%	15%	35%	22%	28%
2	I will spend more time on Livemocha for English learning.	1	4	13	10	12
		2%	10%	33%	25%	30%
3	I intend to use Livemocha to learn English for the long-term.	1	7	16	10	6
		2%	18%	40%	25%	15%
4	I will try to use all the applications provided by Livemocha.	0	1	6	16	17
		0%	2%	15%	40%	43%
5	I will recommend Livemocha to others.	0	5	11	9	15
		0%	12%	27%	23%	38%
Total mean of Behavioral Intention						3.75

1*=Strongly Disagree; 2*=Disagree; 3*=No Opinion; 4*=Agree; 5*=Strongly Agree.

(1) Perceived Usefulness (PU)

On average, the participants responded positively to PU (the averages all exceeded 3 out of 5). 78% of them agreed that using Livemocha enabled them to achieve their English learning goals quickly. 75% of them confirmed that using Livemocha improved their performance in English learning. 83% of the participants considered that Livemocha enhanced their English ability, and 80% of them admitted that Livemocha was useful for English learning.

(2) Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)

The participants' responses indicated positive views on the ease of use (the total average was 3.93). 71% of the participants considered that learning to operate

Livemocha was easy. 73% of them agreed that Livemocha was easy to use. On the other hand, there were four participants suggested that Livemocha should develop web pages written in Traditional Chinese because they had difficult using the web pages written in English.

(3) Attitude (A)

The averages of the five items of Attitude all exceeded 3.0, and the total average was 3.92. As shown in item 2 in Attitude, 75% of the participants felt that using Livemocha to learn English was convenient. They asserted that Livemocha provided free language lessons for English learning without limitation of time or place. They could learn English on Livemocha whenever and wherever they wanted to. Also, 75% of them considered using Livemocha to learn English is interesting. The activities they had most interests were chatting with foreign language partners and taking the free lessons. Learning English through a social network site which provided opportunities to communicate with foreigners was new experience to them.

(4) Behavioral Intention (BI)

Comparing with the results of the other three aspects, the averages of the items of Behavioral Intention were lower, except for item 4. Nevertheless, the overall results indicated positive attitude in this aspect (the averages all exceeded 3.0), and 83% of the students confirmed that they will use the applications of Livemocha in the future. The students' main consideration to the questions were: "I do not have a computer at home" "I prefer playing video games to learning English" "I do not have time to use computer because I have to go to the cram school." Despite these facts, 31 of the students chose Livemocha instead of other ways (cram school, formal classes, books, TV programs). They admitted that learning English through Livemocha was efficient. The other nine students preferred learning English from English teachers because the teachers could answer their questions face-to-face.

In sum, the students' attitudes toward using Livemocha for language learning were generally positive. Most of the participants considered that using Livemocha to learn English was easy, useful, and interesting, and they were willing to use Livemocha for their future learning.

7. Discussion and conclusion

This study offers an overall understanding of EFL elementary students' experience on the social network site, Livemocha. The activities that the students participated on Livemocha were taking the free lessons, chatting with language partners, and giving and receiving feedbacks on speaking and writing work. Almost all the students considered that taking the free lessons of Livemocha to learn English

was useful and convenient. Every student made progress in the test exercises of the free lessons after lessons were taken. Nevertheless, the students suggested that the translation service should be redesigned to have explanations in the learners' native language to help them understand the meanings better.

As regards the chatting with language partners, the students showed great interest and were willing to chat with foreign partners. For further improvement, the students reported a demand for online video chatting.

The students' overall attitudes toward Livemocha were positive, including the results of the four aspects: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude and behavioral intention. Over 80% of the participants considered that Livemocha enhanced their English ability and was useful for English learning. 73% of them agreed that Livemocha was easy to use, and 75% of them considered using Livemocha to learn English is interesting. 83% of the students confirmed that they will use the applications of Livemocha in the future.

When the Livemocha website was introduced to the students, the students got excited about the new way of learning English. Most students were interested in the free lessons because they wanted to learn the target language and they could have a more enjoyable conversation with their language partners if their English was better. This is concordant with Stevenson and Liu (2010) who found that users wanted to use learning content to enhance their language abilities before interacting with other users. Nevertheless, chatting with native speakers enhances students' motivation in English learning. Most students took the lessons on Livemocha in order to talk more fluently with their language partners. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Liaw, 2011; Lloyd, 2012; Stevenson & Liu, 2010) that chatting with native speakers is an important feature that interests Livemocha users.

As regards the drawbacks and suggestions for improvement, most students reported a need for a better translation tool. They needed good translation service which could help them better understand the lesson content. In the study of Stevenson and Liu (2010), the same opinion was reported by the users too.

The results of this study indicated that most of the students had positive experiences in using Livemocha for language learning. Designed as a social network site for language learning, Livemocha provides the opportunity for language learners to interact with native speakers through chatting and receiving and giving feedbacks. Students showed great interest in these activities. Thus, several pedagogical implications can be drawn according to the findings in this study.

First, language instructors (teachers and parents) can adopt Livemocha as a language teaching tool and integrate it into their teaching to develop students'

interests and design useful classroom activities. By taking the free lessons of Livemocha or chat with native speakers of the target language, students can learn languages through authentic materials. Language learning can be more interesting to students in the activities of Livemocha. The activities integrate with Livemocha can be motivate and enhance students' language learning.

Second, language instructors can introduce Livemocha to their students for self-learning. Students can get access to the Livemocha website whenever and wherever they want and learn languages at their own paces. In this way, students with different proficiency levels can all benefit from learning via Livemocha. They can learn what they want to learn and what they need to learn after school, without the limitation of classroom hours. Thus, Livemocha can be an alternative to solve the two major problems in English learning in Taiwan—few chances to practice English, and the wide proficiency gap in the school English class.

Third, Livemocha provides the opportunity to chat with native speakers of the target language. Students can learn to use languages in authentic contexts and develop their communicative competence. They can receive feedbacks from language partners and make progress in their writing and speaking. Also, they can help partners who are learning Mandarin by giving feedbacks on their writing and speaking work. This reciprocal learning creates a positive atmosphere and motivates students' language learning.

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Exploring EFL Elementary Students' Language Learning Experience on Livemocha

Yu-Chang Shen¹ Hui-Chin Yeh²

Abstract

The advent of social network sites which were designed for language learning launched a new trend of language learning—reciprocal learning between learners and native speakers of the target language. However, little is known about young learners' experiences as well as their attitudes toward using social network sites for language learning. This study aims to explore EFL elementary students' learning experiences and attitudes toward the largest social network site (SNS) designed for language learning, Livemocha. Participants of this study were 40 EFL sixth-grade students recruited from an elementary school in central Taiwan. The data included the students' action records, a questionnaire, and transcripts of the focus group interviews. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that the students had positive experiences and attitudes toward using Livemocha for language learning, while some designs in the system needed improving. The findings have implications for language instructors and learners.

Keywords: Computer-assisted language learning, social network site, Livemocha

1 English teacher, Qiaotou Elementary School, Mailiao, Yunlin

2 Distinguished Professor & Chair, Graduate school of applied foreign languages, National Yunlin University of Science & Technology

Corresponding Author: Hui-Chin Yeh, E-mail: hyeh@yuntech.edu.tw