**USING FACEBOOK FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE DIFFERENCES AMONG GENDER AND ETHNICITY**

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*Interactions Journal of Nusantara Studies* 2017, Vol 2(1) 177-193

ISSN 0127-9386 (Online)179 (Dennen, 2008),

**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates university students’ perceptions of using Facebook for English language learning (ELL) based on gender and ethnicities. A survey was used for data collection, in which all 622 participants reported to having at least one Facebook account which they frequently accessed multiple times a day. The findings show that the students possessed positive attitudes, motivation, and self-confidence in using Facebook to learn English language. They reported to have acquired new English words and sentence structures from their engagement with Facebook. In terms of gender and ethnicities, it is the female students, and the Indian respondents who illustrated highly positive perceptions of English language acquisition, motivation, attitudes, and self-confidence, when engaging with Facebook. The awareness of these differences and strengths between gender and among ethnicities, may assist the creation of more suitable learning strategies especially with the integration of Facebook and other social media.

Keywords: Facebook, English language learning, gender, ethnicity, attitudes, motivation, self-confidence, acquisition

1. INTRODUCTION
2. The integration of social networking sites (SNS) into academia transforms the way people connect and communicate with each other, and creates a new paradigm of learningor new literacy(The New London Group, 1996). In Malaysia, Facebook is the most popular SNS, used by internet users from all walks of life including students and professionals. Many studies have identified its potential for English language learning (ELL), particularly in search of new strategies to overcome the deterioration in students’ achievement (Idris & Ghani, 2012; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Mahadi & Ubaidullah, 2010). There is, however, an absence in the link between students’ classroom and informal learning (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016); and in some cases, a total marginalisation of non-school activities in homes and schools (Azman, 2000). The informal activities outside of school hours are keys to the development of formal skills (Manca & Ranieri, 2013; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008), but not many see its connection to learning (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Students’ religious use of SNS for social and educational purposes may bring about new learning opportunities that could address the issues. While many studies have argued the advantages of Facebook to language learning, not much empirical research have been conducted (Milosevic, Zivkovic, Arsic, & Manasijevic, 2015). This study thus examines students’ perceptions of Facebook and its effectiveness for ELL. As a progression of an earlier study by Kabilan et al. (2010), the students are categorised based on gender and ethnicity to explore the different ways that Facebook is experienced as a literacy tool. The research questions are:

1.How do university students view the use of Facebook for ELL?

1.1What are the differences between female and male students in their view of Facebook for ELL?

1.2What are the differences between students of different ethnicities in their view of Facebook for ELL?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 SNS and second language learning (L2) A number of studies have examined the relationship between SNS and L2 in the following areas: using Facebook for reading, writing practices and critical literacy, the opportunities and benefits of Facebook as an online platform for ELL, the construction of knowledge on Facebook, blended learning experience, the use of microblogging for communicative and cultural competence, and SNS for community constructions and identity development. SNS expose students to an extensive range of discourse functions and online writing, that enhances critical literacy and language skills, and launches creative deployment of language play (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). For instance, Twitter links both traditional and new literacies, i.e. Twitteracy, as well as formal and informal learning (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). SNS thus allow language teachers to extend learning beyond the classrooms, trigger reflective thinking, construct knowledge, and promote ELL, while simultaneously strengthen relationships with students (Idris & Ghani, 2012; Mahadi & Ubaidullah, 2010). A lifelong learning process happens when the developed literacy is transferred from one platform to another (Lee, 2010). The social interaction practice on SNS allows students to be placed in a process of meaning-making with authentic content and people. The personalisation of SNS according to individuals’ needs, facilitates students’ participation in online discussions that could add to their language skills and knowledge. A group of Taiwanese EFL students who have experienced a peer-assessed writing activity on Facebook, improved their organisation, structures, and vocabulary skills, developed a stronger relationship with their peers through the use of emoticons, and felt more motivated to write when given likes on Facebook (Shih, 2011). Similarly, in their study of an existing Facebook group for French language, Blattner and Fiori (2009)identified Facebook’s potential to develop socio-pragmatic competence and build community. Essentially, the integration of SNS is to create new pedagogical strategies for language learning, rather than to replicate traditional classroom activities (e.g. exercises and drills) in online environment. Thus, educators are advised to develop new learning approaches rather than over-emphasise interactions and autonomy, as well as over-rely on the novelty of Web 2.0. In some instances, students who have had exposure to social media learning, demanded for more formal avenues of academic discourse on Facebook with teachers’ guidance (Kabilan et al., 2010), showed higher interests in task completion than social and relied on Web 1.0 technology that provides tutorials for reading and writing skills (Stevenson & Liu, 2010). It is thus undeniable that traditional face-to-face learning forms the backbone of education, but the attractive technology of SNS may supplement these formal activities. As SNS will only continue to develop and flourish, it is only right that higher education keeps abreast with the technology, and uses it constructively in learning (Goodband & Samuels, 2010).

**EFFECTS OF FACEBOOK TUTORING ON LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

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IADIS International Conference e-Learning 2013 135

ABSTRACT

Social media use has become increasingly embedded in everyday life. Among various social media, Facebook is a highly interactive virtual social communication tool and it has become increasingly popular on college campuses. Research results have indicated that Facebook could be an effective platform for informal learning. However, most of current studies in the educational use of social media seem to pay more attention on college students or adults. This study, however, explored the effects of Facebook tutoring on learning English as a second language for children. 60 elementary students from a supplementary English tutoring program were evenly divided into Facebook tutoring group and traditional classroom teaching group. Instructional strategies of communication, collaboration, and information sharing were given to both groups. The results indicated that children participated the Facebook tutoring generally exhibited a positive attitude toward this new type of learning experience. The learning achievement for the Facebook group was also significantly higher than the traditional classroom group. It is concluded that providing with proper strategies, both student’s learning attitude and learning achievement were positively affected by the Facebook tutoring

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Recently, people frequently use the Internet as a social medium to interact with each other and expand their social circles, share information and experiences, and organize communities and activities (Bourlard, Krishnamurthy, Sun, Zhao, & Liu, 2012). Social media provide multiple dimensions for developing creative learning strategies that allow students to connect formal and informal learning settings. Students can find like-minded people and organize informal knowledge exchange for educational purposes (Wodzicki, Schwämmlein & Moskaliuk, 2012). The use of social media applications in teaching and learning has garnered substantial interest among educators (Cain & Policastri, 2011). Web-based social networking platforms such as Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook offer users communication and interaction channels to link with friends, family, and community. Among them, Facebook has become increasingly popular on college campuses,.Any Facebook user can easily search and view any user’s Facebook page through the Facebook network (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007). Most current studies in educational use of social media seem to pay more attention on college students or adults. However, many younger children have begun to bring social networks into their daily life. They may be a substantial group with the potential to learn with social networks as children rely on interaction with others who share their interests in new experiences. Children are curious, active and creative while learning language (Lin, 2008). Blattner & Fiori(2009) indicated that various usages of Facebook can be integrated in foreign language courses. Children could experience authentic language interactions and develop socio-pragmatic awareness (e.g., language use in specific contexts, relationship building…), which are often absence in textbooks. In Taiwan, such notions are particular interest since learning a second language, especially English, is considered to be the most important supplementary work after the regular classes for many school children.

**2. EDUCATIONAL USE OF FACEBOOK**

In recent years, social networks have been widely accepted as efficient platforms for academic communications, especially on university campuses. According to Blattner & Fiori (2009), Facebook is the largest social network that boasts more than 100 million members, and it is one of the fastest-growing and best-known sites on the Internet. As McLoughlin and Lee (2008) pointed out, Facebook has multiple functions of communications, information sharing, and collaborative construction and modification. Although early in the Facebook appeared, the main reason for students using Facebook was keeping contact with friends (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007), Wodzicki, Schwammlein and Moskaluik (2012) later discovered that students would be in favor of exchanging informal experiences if a collaborative and sharing environment is embedded in the Facebook. Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) found that in compare with traditional face-to-face interaction, students prefer to communicate with teachers via Facebook. This may reduce an immediate embarrassment. Cain and Policastri (2011) claimed that Facebook provides an informal learning environment for presenting contemporary topics and the thoughts of guest experts not affiliated with a college or school, thereby exposing students to relevant “real world” issues. Mazman and Usluel (2010) recognize Facebook has three types of educational functions: communication, collaboration and resource/material sharing. Communication consist of activities such as enabling communication among students and their instructors, facilitating class discussions, delivery of homework and assignments by teachers, informing about resources and links related to courses; consist of activities such as people's joining to academic groups related to their schools, departments or classes and carrying on group works by sharing homework, projects, and ideas; collaboration consists of activities such as exchanging multimedia resources, videos, audio materials, animated videos, resources and documents.

**3. SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Harrison and Thomas (2009) recognized that web 2.0 technologies have been advanced as potentially transformative in the area of foreign language learning. They believed that web 2.0 technologies are presenting new opportunities for developing diverse online learning environments and enhancing interactivity, participation and feedback between students, their peer groups and teachers. They further argued that language learning is not only how learners develop their language skills, but also how the learning process impacts on their overall personal development in terms of cultural values and beliefs, something that has been generally overlooked in computer-assisted language learning research to date. Blattner and Fiori (2009) indicated that Facebook could be an effective platform for language interactions. Godwin-Jones (2008) also believed that Facebook could benefit interpersonal communications. They believed that unique functions of Facebook provide a constructive learning environment while maintaining a certain degree of privacy and safety. Some evidences have been established for the fact that Facebook helped language learning. Ajjan & Hartshorne (2008) recognized that active users could improve their communication and writing skills through virtual social interactions with Facebook. Mill (2009) discovered that language learning with Facebook was effective as virtual social activities help students develop better verbal communication competences in the real world. Moreover, Shin (2011) used Facebook as the platform to perform peer evaluation. The result indicated that peer evaluations at Facebook significantly improved student’s learning interest and learning motivation. These positive results all supported that social interactions via Facebook affect the outcomes of language learning

**Impact of Using Facebook on Improving English Communication**

**Skills - The Case of Implementing the English Language Course as a**

**model at Al-Quds Open University**

**أثر استخدام الفيسبوك في تحسين مھارات التواصل باللغة االنجليزية - مقرر "استخدام اللغة"**

**في جامعة القدس المفتوحة أنموذجا**

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**Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate the effect of using Facebook on improving the communication skills in English through a blended teaching approach. The subjects were 50 second-year students majoring in Methods of Teaching English at Al-Quds Open University (QOU) in Palestine who were studying a course titled "Language Use" in the first semester of the academic year 2013-2014. The students were divided randomly into a control group and an experimental group. The control group studied the course through the traditional face-to-face instruction while the experimental group used both face-to-face lectures in addition to using Facebook through a Facebook group entitled "Language Use QOU Palestine". Both of the two groups sat for a pre- test at the beginning of the experiment and a post-test at the end of the experiment. The results revealed statistically significant differences in the achievement of the experimental group due to using Facebook in addition to significant differences in the achievement of the experimental group before using Facebook and after using it.

**Keywords**: Communication skills, Facebook, English Language, AlQuds Open University

**Introduction**

Technology is seen vital to offer the potential for providing more learning opportunities and better means for learners to interact with each other and learn effectively. In this regard, while Chang et al. (2008) maintain that knowledge constructed by the learners cannot be efficiently shared by the learners in the traditional classroom settings, Fernàndez and Gil-Rodríguez (2011) point out that social networks are an important space for sharing learning resources and an opportunity for the collective construction of knowledge. In this sense, web-based, technology enhanced learning seems to be able to stimulate and support the learning process and enhance learning outcomes (Lee & Woods, 2010). Wang (2009) also reports that web-based learning has been supported by learning theories that emphasize the creation of an environment where learners can access and share knowledge and resources with one another.

Taking into account the various benefits of social media, Hutchens and Timothy (2014) argue that Facebook communication can blur the personal and professional boundaries that students and professors are accustomed to while Walsh (2012) maintains that Facebook group is a great way to distribute content and create a central place for communication for a course or class. Both learners and tutors can share their experiences and can record their conversations or produce their own oral essays and file them or share them with others.

Li and Chen(2009); however, point out that online asynchronous discussion forums enable students to collaborate, share knowledge without the need to meet physically in person, or to work simultaneously. Shih (2013), meanwhile, argue that the advent and growth of Web 2.0 technology (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, blog, and Facebook) enable knowledge exchange in ways such as online meeting and discussion that were not possible before. Through these applications, users are able to exchange, interact, collaborate, and socialize with others in virtual communities (VCs). Instant Messaging learning environment, for example, provides students with more relaxed and comfortable learning environment. It avoids the tension and boredom of the classroom and increases students’ motivation (Hanif, & Rozilawati. 2006). One of the new trends in education nowadays is using Facebook not only for social networking but also for educational purposes in general and for teaching English as a foreign/ second language in particular. Such trend might be due to the fact that Facebook is equipped with a number of features and applications that make it educationally attractive and appealing such as bulletin boards, Timeline, instant messaging, emailing, posting photos and videos, attaching files, downloadable applications and the like.

These can supplement the educational functions of Facebook and help instructors everywhere to connect with learners anytime and anywhere. Shih (2013) adds more advantages of Facebook which can help users and learners interact and collaborate with each other actively in a virtual community. This trend led the learning process to be transformed from in-class teaching into learning outside the classroom. Therefore, students will be able to sustain the inter-relationship among the group members through effective group communications and discussions in such a cooperative learning environment (Yang and Chen, 2008).

Wong et al. (2011) argue that students at all levels are heavily immersed in social network sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Furthermore, introducing social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook can help students increase their own language learning in a fun and motivating way. Facebook on the other hand can help keep topics grouped together in one place, which is easier for students to read and they have more control over the length of their posts. They can attach links, share photos and videos, send private messages, add notes or easily chat online synchronously (Promnitz-Hayashi, 2011).

Phillips (2010) point out that Facebook can provide students with the opportunity to effectively present their ideas, lead online discussions, and collaborate. It can facilitate student-to-student collaboration and provide innovative ways for the teacher to involve students in his or her subject matter. Lenhart and Madden(2007) mention another advantage for using Facebook in teaching which is that some students who have speaking difficulty because of disabilities or who care a lot about making mistakes in writing, online social networking can be an immense help for them. Such shift, thus, is hoped to help the new generations acquire the 21st century skills which requires the necessity to empower student –centered approaches at the expense of teacher-centered approaches. Shraim (2014) maintain that the proliferation of Facebook use among students and teachers has created a new learning culture by providing innovative ways for teachers to enable learners to engage actively in different activities. In this regard, according to (http://expandedramblings.com/), Facebook is the largest social network in the world with over a billion and a half monthly active users. Hence, and as a result of the current trend of using Facebook in education, recent empirical studies called for exploring the effect of using Facebook on students' achievement and their attitudes toward Facebook and its potentials (Shih, 2013; Ghalib, 2014;Shih, 2011; McCarthy, 2010; Yang and Bradford, 2013; Lampe et al. 2011; Cvijikj and Florian,2011).

In response to these calls and recommendations, the current study aimed to investigate the effect of using Facebook on improving the communicative skills in English through a blended teaching approach.