Facebook Effect on Learners' Study

Abstract

Communicating through the virtual world becomes the print mark of the era of digital technologies. The internet is at the fingertips of any user: child, pupil, student, man, woman,…etc. The virtual world has changed how people interact with each other, how they use the language, and even how they learn. Among the online social networking, Facebook is the most used in the world. Facebook has different functions and many benefits. However, the majority of students are constantly interacting through facebook chatting for long periods of time. The question to be asked is "What are facebook effect on Algerian learners' study in general and on their written English in specific?" By the end of the first semester 2014- 2015, a questionnaire has been administered to first year students of English at Badji Mokhtar University- Annaba. The results revealed facebook negative effect on learners' study in general besides some negative effect on their academic writing in English in specific. Facebook affected learners' attention, concentration, and time management. They became more attracted to facebook as an entertaining tool. However, facebook can be used as an effective learning tool if learners consider certain key points. Hence, students should be aware of how to use technology and not to be used by technology.

Keywords: Social networking, Facebook, functions, Benefits, academic writing.

Introduction

In the age of technology, digital world has created a virtual world where new relations are established. Internet facilitated people's life as they can interact with each other anytime, anywhere, and with anyone. The mostly used tool in the social networking is the facebook. It is free, easy, quick and available whenever there is internet connexion. The Algerian culture has changed as the majority of the society members have developed the habit of using their computers or mobile phones to communicate with the outside world for either personal or professional reasons. However, in relation to learning, facebook has certain effects on learners' learning skills in general and on their written English in specific.

Facebook Definition (Fb)

According to Tarantino, McDonough,& Hua (2013), social media use has increased in recent years across all age levels. Besides, Crymble (2010) explains that "social media" or "social networking" refer to an increasing number of online services, almost all free (p.128). In recent years, social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and LinkedIn have become the most visited websites in the world (Tham & Niaz, 2011.p.1). Facebook is a prominent example of a social networking services (Amasha& Alkhalaf, 2014). Ghaleb-Ibrahim (2013, p5) defines it as follows:

> The name of the social networking site stems from the colloquial name for face and book. Face means what you first see of the body in front of you. It is also the clearest part of the body that gives you an indication of what is the person in front of you like which is related to social field. While the word book is related to the

academic field. So the word face has social roots and the word book has academic roots(p. 2).

Facebook was founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow computer science students Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes while he was a student at Harvard University (*Facebook : A beginner's guide. n.d).* Facebook is a website that allows users to interact and collaborate within a pre-defined virtual community (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow,& Leveritt, 2012, p. 1222). It is a virtual means of communication and social interaction. The average user spends more than 55 minutes per day on Facebook (op.cit). In 2006, Facebook became available to anyone aged 13 and over with a valid e-mail address. To date, there are more than 800 million active users on Faxcebook (Tham, & Niaz 2011.p.3). Students increasingly use it for friends' news feeds, personal updates, events and activities, notes, and messages (Idem, p. 1). Most Facebook users are learners and are familiar with effective use of Facebook. (Amasha & Alkhalaf, 2014, p. 3).

Facebook Functionning

One cannot connect with a Facebook user unless one has a Facebook account; facebook requires an email account for a participant to be admitted to the online social network. (Crymble, 2010, p. 130). He adds, when people sign up for a free Facebook account, they are invited to maintain a profile about themselves, as well as connect with others by adding *friends* who must reciprocate the friendship request before further exchanges can occur. They can add other users as friends, exchange public or private online messages, express common interests between users, build and maintain connections, and invite others to join a community. Kamnoetsin (2014, p. 25), clarifies that the primary feature of Facebook is a *wall* on which each user maintains a *profile*, it includes personal information and shows friends, photos, likes, subscriptions, and statuses. Users can upload pictures, posts links or vedios from other sits. In terms of privacy issues, users can control who can view their web page and how much information their friends can see by controlling their privacy settings (idem). Also, Facebook members can create and join in communication as groups, which can be formed on any topic; create invitations to events; or post online. Based on mutual agreement, users can become "friends," and this designation dictates how certain functions work (www.educause.edu/eli).

Facebook not only allows members to upload photos and change personal profiles online but also allows them to leave messages for friends who are offline (Amasha& Alkhalaf, 2014, p. 2). Most of the features are in English, one has to understand English in order to participate in the activities and functions provided by FB (Kabilan, Norlida, Jafre & Abidin, 2010). Features available to subscribers include the ability to add and delete content from their profile, as well as determine their own visibility to other users (Nedal, Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh & Abu-Melhim, 2014, p. 29).

Facebook Advantages

Amasha & Alkhalaf (2014, p. 3) recognize many benefits of the facebok. First it is a free medium of communication. Second, facebook users establish relationships with anyone anywhere in the world. Hence, it provides opportunities to know other cultures, values, customs, and traditions. Third, it is the most appropriate tool for finding old friends. Fourth, it is a tool of sharing thoughts and feelings. Fourth, Facebook features (such as group chats,

notifications, file sharing, etc) help members of the group stay connected. Finally, facebook also provide job recruitment announcements.

Facebook is among the fastest-growing social networks that assist people in efficient communication with allies, relatives, workmates, and schoolmates (Amasha & Alkhalaf, 2014, p. 3). Facebook was not developed for learning purposes; however, more than 20 Facebook educational applications exist that involve distinct types of interactions (Warburton & Hatzipanagos 2013 cited in Amasha & Alkhalaf, 2014, p. 4).

Besides, Facebook could promote a collaborative and cooperative learning environment. Continued integration of *Facebook* into courses may see further benefits through enhanced 'student to student' and 'student to instructor' communication, which in turn may translate to greater learning outcomes (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow & Leveritt, 2012 p. 1229). Facebook allows students to interact and collaborate beyond their classrooms (Duncan *&* Barczyk, 2013,p.11).

Kamnoetsin (2014, p. 2) referred to nine studies that approved the positive effects of facebook in many aspects. First, Facebook is useful in learning new vocabulary among English language learners. Second, facebook is a platform for collaborative and cooperative learning which promotes interactions; it helps learners to express their thoughts, feelings and overcome their linguistic limitations. Third, it reduces stress because it is fun and flexible . Fourth, it creates motivation and builds confidence. Fifth, it helps students learn English organization, grammar and structure, content, vocabulary, spelling and improves students' writing skills by learning from each other through posting writings on Facebook.

It is also positively associated with students' self-esteem, senses of achievement and improvement, and increased student motivation. Kamnoetsin (2014) adds that besides the general advantages of Facebook in the English language learning settings, Facebook also has positive effects on English language learners' writing (idem, p. 33). First, educators and many students in the English language learning field believe that it helps improve students' writing by setting up a discussion group, students can use a greater level of grammatical complexity in their writing, and can reduce mistakes. Second, it helps English language learners to learn new vocabulary by reading peers' comments. Finally, research has shown that using Facebook also helps English language learners to reduce spelling errors through the use of the spell-check feature.

Facebook Disadvanteges

Kamnoetsin (2014, p. 30) refer to three disadvantages mentioned more than once in the earlier nine studies. First, it is not a suitable environment or it is inappropriate for formal teaching and learning activities. Second, it creates students' distractions. Finally, it creates students' habits of using short forms too much or informal writing, which leads to grammar mistakes. Besides, traditional students, who are accustomed to books or hard copy materials, might view Facebook as an unsuitable environment to learn English because broken English is often used on Facebook and that does not help them with their communication skills (Idem, p. 36).

Furthermore, considering learners' writings, facebook disadvantages is mainly seen in students' reliance on the online correction. Facebook has a harmful effect on learners

productivity and task performance. Long Hours spent on Facebook seem to decrease students' academic performance and thus their grades (Rouis, Limayem, &Salehi-Sangari, 2011, p.965). In addition, students are distracted from their main occupation, and their working memory load allocated to these tasks makes it difficult for them to be focused and prepare their home actively (Idem, p. 966).

According to Kamnoetsin (2014, p.8), facebook may affect students' learning outcomes and physical and mental health; it may result in dishonest and unreliable friendships because individuals can present only a positive self-image, and it can result in miscommunication because the writing can be lacking in the opportunities for expression, explanation, and clarification that are found in face-to-face interactions .

Kabilan, Norlida, Jafre, & Abidin (2010) point to the fact that when computer technologies are used for educational purposes, teachers should be aware of the unintended learning outcomes that may have positive or negative impacts, or both, on students.

Features of Facebook Written Language

Kamnoetsin (2014, p. 37) mentioned the common features of informal writing considered inappropriate in a writing class that have been widely used on online chats or social network sites. They are as follows:

1. Phonetic spelling use for transcription of standard pronunciations are such as "nite" for "night", "guyz" for "guys", "luv" for "love", "wanna" for want to(Danet & Herring, 2007, p.97).
2. Emoticons or smileys use for conveying a feeling are such as facing a hard situation -_-!, being happy :) or :-) , being sad : (or :- (.
3. Multiple punctuation marks or letters use for a prosodic affect are such as no more!!!!!, Yes!!!!!!,aaaaahhhhh, soooo. (Crystal, 2001, pp. 34-35)
4. Capitalization use: all capitals for 'shouting' such as "I SAID NO," asterisks for emphasis such as "the *real* answer" (Crystal, 2001, p. 35).
5. Special abbreviations or acronyms used for saving time and making it convenient, such as b4/B4 (before), lol/LOL (laughing out loud), oic/OIC (Oh I see).
6. Common shortenings used for easy use and convenience are 'u' (you), 'i' (I), 'r' (are), 'thx' (thanks), 'pls' (please), 'tmr' (tomorrow).

Facebook Implication to learning and Teaching

In her study, Ghaleb-Ibrahim (2013, p.54),examines the effect of using facebook in improving the students' writing skills in a private school. The result showed positive effects especially mechanics of writing (capitalization, punctuation and spelling) in addition to usage (word order, subject-verb agreement). She adds,

> The findings suggest that Facebook can be very useful as an educational tool. Students" attitudes towards such an activity are mostly positive. Students welcomed using social networking site as a supplementary to the curriculum. Most students showed that they love spending time on Facebook and exercises,

videos and other sharing in group are useful for improving their language skills
(Idem, p. 292).

She clarifies that for an effective implementation of the facebook as a learning tool, learning goals must be defined clearly in addition to students' roles, and the native language should be avoided. Amasha & Alkhalaf (2014, p.2) view that Facebook can be used as a communication method(to post class announcements for parents or provide schedule reminders for students) an instructional resource (teachers can post tips, explanations, or samples to help students learn), a collaborative tool (facebook assignments), and a showcase for student projects. Besides, critical thinking and writing skills improves through Facebook assignments (Idem, p.5).

Nedal , Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh & Abu-Melhim (2014) implemented a study in which students were added to a Facebook group called 'Write Out Clear'. Then, informants were instructed to brainstorm and conduct summary writing. After that, they were asked to give one another feedback. The aim was to develop an environment that would illustrate how, by using such groups, students can better develop their writing skills in the Jordanian EFL setting.
The instructions included the following:
1) Go to www.facebook.com, using the assigned user name and password, access the designated group.
2) Write on the assigned topic.
3) Discuss, correct, omit and send drafts to your peers and instructor.
They further affirm that the majority of the 42 students who took part in the study felt that utilizing a Facebook group in language instruction does indeed assist in language acquisition and helps to better develop writing skills, particularly in the pre-writing phase, as well as helps students to better develop their vocabulary and lessen spelling mistakes.

According to Kamnoetsin (2014, p. 28), "There are many studies related to Facebook and there are many studies about EFL writing; however, there are few studies that study both Facebook and EFL writing together". Though there are negative perceptions about the possible effects of social network services on students' academic performance, some studies showed that students found it quite appropriate for a teacher to use Facebook, and for teachers and students to socialize by this means (Baran, 2010, cited in Tham,, J. & Niaz , A. 2011.p.2) Students also believed that such tools could allow them to share knowledge in formal education contexts. However, Alvarez & Olivera-Smith (2013, p.317) highlight that social media are not explicit learning environments, but they could potentially become an important learning support.

The Study

Setting and participants

This study took place in the department of English, Faculty of Letters, Social and Human Sciences, University of Badji Mokhtar- Annaba- Algeria. In the module of study skills, 29 first year students were involved in answering a questionnaire about the facebook and its effect on their study. The participants aged from 19 to 23. The majority of the students had at least seven years of English study.

Instrument

A questionnaire was administered to the students under investigation. It includes questions about students' definition of facebook, their general habits of using it, Facebook and using English, its effects, and how the facebook can be used as an efficient tool in learning English. This questionnaire aims at developing learners' awareness of themselves in relation with their use of the facebook, involving them in reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of using the facebook and thinking of effective ways to use it for a better learning of English.

Questionnaire Results and analysis

Students provide the following definitions for Facebook:

- "Is one of the social network, the most useful".
- "Is a social network used for chat, search and comment".
- "A way to communicate with friends".
- "FB is a means of fun, means of talk".
- "FB is a social network that can help you meet with friends from all over the world, share your thoughts and ideas and publish photos and videos"

A student defines it as " a big problem of waste of time". However no student related the definition of the facebook to learning. 93.10% have FB account where as only 6. 90 do not. The majority of the students possess facebook account from 4 years. 59,25 % of the students under investigation visit daily their facebook account, 3,70% every six days, 7,40% every three days, 14,81% every two days and the same percentages one day a week.

The daily users of the facebook provide the following reasons:

- "I have wifi, I benefit from it".
- "To communicate with friends and know what happens because we do not meet everyday".
- "Because I feel free, I discuss with my friends, exchange ideas with other people".
- "To chat with friends, to not feel bored at home"
- "I feel fine when I use it and I can chat with my mother".
- "Chat with friends and check the news".
- "It is the only thing I do in my free time".
- "I adore it, I must talk to my friends every day, I should check if there is something" new"
- "No specific reason"
- "To get away from my real life, I saw how people live and think"

So, the majority, daily use the facebook because the internet connexion is available, to communicate with others, feel free, feel fine, avoid boredom, and get news. For others it becomes a matter of addiction, habit and escape from their real life.

Out of the sixteen students who daily use the facebook, 12,5 % use it for one hour a day, 6,25% for two hours a day, 6,25% for three hours a day, 6,25%for four hours a day, 75% more than four hours a day, and 50% "keep it open all the day", "from I enter home", "every now and then".

In ranking the reasons why they use facebook, to chat with friends was on the top of the list. Then equally: to see updates an posts from friends + to share photos and videos with friends. Next, to share information on your profile page. Then equally to play games and use application + to learn free. After that to invite friends to join groups and events and finally just to enjoy to see the page. A student added this comment: "Sometimes I just use the FB, I don't know why, t is a habit".

While using the facebook, (comment, chat, search, read, …etc), 51, 85% affirm that they use English, 25,92% do not. 7,40% use both Arabic and French, 11,11% sometimes use English, and 3,70% use most of the time English. 22,22% use formal English while chatting or commenting, however, the majority (59,25%) use informal English. 7,40% say that "it depends" while 11,11% sometimes use formal English. Students use different forms of language in this order of frequency of use:
1. Aabbreviation
2. emotional figure
3. Letters and numbers
4. You own way
5. acronyms
6. complete sentences

No student opted for isolated words. It is proved from this answer that formal English is the last opted option in chatting and commenting in the facebook. So, English does exist but formal English is somehow absent.

33,33% affirm that facebook writing style has affected their academic writing for the following reasons:
- "Sometimes I use the abbreviation and the emotional figures but it affected my academic writing not only in English but also in French and Arabic".
- "Abbreviation affected my level in writing".
- "It is easier, no wasting of time".
- "Because I use facebook more than academic writing so it must be affected".
- "Because I get used to it".

However, 55,55% affirm the opposite, no effect of facebook writing style on their academic writing. They advance the following reasons for that:
- "I am not a daily FB use. So, it did not affect my academic writing".
- "Because I prefer to use FB style when I chat with my friends".
- "Because I do not use the face B writing much".

In addition 7,40% find that facebook writing style sometimes affects their academic writing; 3,70% provide no answer. 62,96% connect with other learners through joining groups and pages, whereas 37,04 % do not.

Concerning their study (revising, doing a homework, reading, writing,... etc) the majority (51,85%) keep an eye on their FB account page; while 48,14% do not. For those who keep their facebook page open while studying advance the following reasons:

- "I do it because I am a **curious** person".
- "I talk too much with my friends".
- "When I revised more I get bored so I keep up on the FB"
- "To ignore the stress of study to take a brake"
- "To not get bored and to feel good in my study".
- "To see **what are** the new posts and comments".
- "To see **who is chatting**, especially my mom because I live with my father".
- "To see **up dates**".
- "I do not know I never asked myself".
- "I just do it"
- "It is unconscious"

Then, the highly rated reason is learners' curiosity to see who is chatting and to read the comments. In addition, some students became addicted to the point they do not know why they keep an eye on their facebook page while studying. 78,58% affirm that they could not concentrate on their study while keeping an eye on their facebook page. A students adds this comment:" Not really , I am not very concentrated when I use it, because my mind is thinking about facebook ". 7,14% answer by" yes somehow", while 7, 14% affirms "yes", and 7,14% did not answer.

66,66% see that the facebook has effected positively their life as students, 11,11% affirm its negative effect; "I can't control myself, waste of time, it has no benefits, just keep relationships, it took all my time". For 7, 40%, it has both effects- negative and positive; " I learned to write full sentences, but it distracts me". However, 14, 81% confirm that facebook has no effect on them as students.

Here are the reasons that students provide for facebook positive effects:

- "Somehow, because I use English", "I use English when I chat with friends, I learn more", I use Facebook in English to stay in the English spirit
- "I have developed my skills".
- "Learn from other people new things".
- "I have a lot of friends who speak good English".
- "I learn always new words in addition to lessons in all my modules"
- "Some pages give me words I did not know before", "It helps me learn new words and rules of English"

Students advance the following benefits of using the facebook:

- "Connect with my friends to know how they are, have fun, say my opinion, acquire different information".

- "Meeting new people, be informed about what is happening around the world, get in touch with my friends and family".
- "Lean new words".
- "I join pages and groups to learn English, my lessons and exercises".
- "Know all the news about your friends".
- "Learn English make relations".
- "Share information and learn free".

However, they provide a long list for the disadvantages of using the facebook as follows:

- "**Decreases real social** life, all people speak with others over the screen".
- "**Distracts** me when I am revising, waste a lot of time ".
- "It can affect negatively your whole life, even your **career** and your **personality**".
- "**Waste my time**, **distract**s me. Finish my study quickly just to use FB".
- "Takes your time, makes you **distract**ed from your study. It is like drugs want to study because it is boring".
- "Once you are in it, it is **hard to quit** it"
- "**Waste time** and be **away from my real life** and my family".
- "Staying on line for **long hours**"
- "Make us **live in the fiction** and meet **bad** people".
- "It takes **long time** without feeling that"
- "Not good for our **health**, no good **sleeping".**
- "Facebook has only a **disadvanteges list**".
- "I **cannot study** for a long time or **stay with my family**"
- "**Sleep very late** at night, **waste time**".

Despite this list of disadvantages, 62, 96% think that the facebook can be an efficient tool in learning and using English, while 14,81 % affirm the opposite. 7,40% see that " Not always just sometimes", and 14,81% did not answer. The first category of students provide the following options:

- "Check English sites", English groups"
- "Meet people who study or speak English".
- "Contact English students".
- "By talking with native speakers, we pick up new words and grammars"
- "I read some expressions from famous books".

Suggestions for effective Facebook use

According to Junco (2011, p. 169), the amount of student learning and development associated with an educational program is directly related to the quality and quantity of student engagement in that program. Alvarez & Olivera-Smith (2013) see that social network services can be part of the educational setting by creating a facebook page on which the teacher carefully considers the student's needs, the nature of the topic they want to impart and the specific learning activity they want to develop. They add that teachers have crucial roles to play in agreeing on rules and deadlines and promoting student centred environment. The teacher should too provide a constructive and encouraging communication with their students.

Considering the literature review on Facebook impact on learning and the presented study, we should emphasize teachers' and learners' responsibility as follows:

Teachers' responsibility

The teacher has a crucial role in raising learners' awareness of how they spend their time and how attentive they are while studying. These aims can be attained by:

- Reflection session: Right by the beginning of the first year, the teacher should involve students in discussing or answering a questionnaire on their time management: what you do, when you do it and why?
- Tally sheet use: raising learners' awareness of the importance of attention and concentration for their learning. The tally sheet at home helps the students to recognize how frequently they let their study to check their facebook page.
- Time management sheet: helps learners to find objectives and timing for everything they do. This will help them to formulate short term(learn new vocabulary, new structure, new expressions…etc) and long term objectives (to be a good speaker, reader, writer and listener of English).
- Exercises, topics to discuss on the facebook should be carefully selected by the teacher.
- Effective engagement from the students: the teacher should insist on learners' active engagement in facebook activities posted by the teacher.
- Teacher as facilitator: teacher is no more the provider of knowledge but the one who prompts learners to find it through both cooperative and individual work.

Learners' responsibility

Effective use of the bacebook is a decision taken by the students after an awareness raising session by their teacher. Facebook use can be an efficient learning tool by following these tips:

- Study time: a special exact time for studying before face booking. Here learners should have knowledge about time management.
- Limit time of facebook use: Learners should be aware of the time they will take for facebooking, do not leave it open without limit.
- Divide facebook time: learners should divide facebook time between socialization where they are visible to their friends, family and group members, and facebook learning time where they use the option of "invisible" to concentrate on searching their lessons and exercises.
- Clear Objectives of Facebook use: Students should be aware and conscious of why they use the facebook: entertainment, learning or just to waste time.
- Facebook and English language Learning: as students of English as a Foreign language, they can be in contact with native speakers of English especially through chatting in full sentences which will help their written English.
- Facebook Complete English Sentences: for 10 to 15mnt, as daily exercise, learners write complete sentences to a native speaker, a friend or a classmate. This will develop learners' formal use of English and develop the habit of thinking in English.

- Self correction and peer correction: Learners should self correct whenever they feel the word is wrong through the correction applications in the computer. They can also train on writing short paragraphs to each other to be corrected by the peer. A condition for this is that students should choose a peer who is better than them in English.

However, both teachers' and learners' should keep in mind that the literature review on facebook insisted on its use as an assisting tool but not as a formal learning tool.

Conclusion

Foreign language learning is not easy to achieve without constant interaction with the language. Computer-based learning has some advantages and certain disadvantages. To get the best of its benefits, learners and teachers alike should be aware of how, why and when to use it. Having a clear objective in mind will guide learners of English to effectively use the facebook in promoting their writing in English. In fact, if our learners are conscious of their use of the facebook, they will never waste their time in nonsense chatting for long hours.

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