

STUDENTS ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract

The current study explores the value of social media in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes from the perspective of forty intermediate level students studying at Arrass College of Technology in Saudi Arabia, who had been exposed to this type of media. The study uses quantitative data derived from anonymous, semi-structured questionnaires distributed to students. It also uses qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews with the same research sample. The results of this study reveal some disadvantages and advantages that should be taken into account when adopting this type of media in EFL classes, the study also reveals that most students appear to hold an overwhelmingly positive attitude regarding the integration of social media in EFL classes with an awareness of some factors that may facilitate or obstruct learning via online learning environments

Keywords: Social Media, EFL, English, College of Technology.

1. Introduction

Social media has become one of the most important means of communication in recent times. However, social media allows people to communicate regardless of the distance, making it easy to people to share information, files, texts, pictures and videos, post blogs and make real-time dialogs. These systems are referred to as social, because they allow communication with friends and colleagues so easily and effectively. Al-Rahmi, and Othman, (2013).

Social media is a fairly new concept since almost nobody heard or use social media 10-15 years ago. Nevertheless, nowadays websites and applications such as Facebook, Google+, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn have millions of users and accounts for almost 25 percent of Internet use (Sim, & Pop, 2014). Social media could be defined as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2018). In other words, they are web-based or personal device-based applications that connect users with online resources or with each other (Evans, 2014).

There are many different forms of social media including forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, and rating. In 2010, Kaplan and Haenlein created a classification for different social media types by applying a set of theories in the field of media research -social presence, media richness and social processes -self-presentation, self-disclosure. According to them, there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects, blogs and micro blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual communities. (Sim, & Pop, 2014). Social media have undergone an exponential growth over the last 5 years or so. At the time of this study, Facebook had over 2.23 billion monthly active users, Instagram over 800 million users, Snapchat 158 million people are using it every day, and Twitter over 336 million monthly active users worldwide.

According to (Evans 2014), such social media have resulted in the current generation of students (termed the “Net Generation” or “Generation Y”) being constantly connected. Tweets or Instagram posts, for example, can be accessed over the Web on computers, through receiving messages on mobile phones and by using software applications on the growing range of smart phones.

This use of social media among students has motivated researchers to explore its effect on the teaching and learning processes. Lots of articles and studies have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of its uses in such contexts; The majority of such reports has confirmed its usefulness mentioning a great deal of advantages; for example, it has been reported that social media functions as a tool for students to access, use and share information. It also helps them to develop satisfying relationships with colleagues (Yu et al., 2010), collaborate to achieve common goals and improves collaboration and communication with peers and teachers (Faiziet al., 2013). It also gives students more chances to freely express (Anankulladetch, 2017). Furthermore, social media according to (Junco et al., 2011) has the potential to increase student engagement, involvement satisfaction, and grades as well as to prepare them for employment. It can also be a good way to engage learners in experiential learning.

While researchers could suggest the pros of employing social media in the teaching and learning contexts, however, there are some views that argue about this matter. (Slonje, et al., 2013), for example, state that spending a lot of time on social media could lead to addiction, reduced motivation to participate in other activities, and may cause physical problems. Additionally, students need to maintain their social pro-files constantly when using this type of media, which may lead to severe stress. Other disadvantages may increase cyber-bullying that can cause negative psychological effects to the users. Moreover, there are also worriers that students who spend a lot of time on social media devote less time to active learning, and led to negatively affect their learning. There also concerns that students might get distracted and preoccupied with social media use (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010) and (Hew, 2011).

The current study considers whether this type of connectivity can be used to improve the process of learning and teaching to get a better learning outcome. It also aims to identify the advantages and disadvantages of integrating this type of media in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes.

2. The Original Framework

Social media provides students with opportunities to be engaged in the online classroom, as well as to support development of their skills and competencies (Blaschke, 2014). Therefore, researchers and educators have examined the use of social media and its technologies in various disciplines.

One of the areas that has been thoroughly researched is social media and student engagement. In this context, social media has been found to be a tool to facilitate interactions and support active participation (Junco, et al., 2011). Several studies have found a relationship between technology use and engagement; Junco, et al,(2011) for instance revealed that Twitter can be used as an educational tool to support active participation and collaboration. Their experiments also revealed that Twitter can extend communication among students as it helps them increase a sense of connection. It also promoted active learning and it could be used to give students instant feedback. Furthermore, Chen, et al, (2010) who investigated the impact of Web-based learning technology on student engagement and learning outcomes; found that there is a positive relationship between the use of Web-based learning technology and student engagement. Students in their study also reported to have higher achievement in general education.

In an equally important and related area researches have been done to find out about social media and student learning achievements. Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013) for example, conducted a research regarding the impact of social media on academic performance. The results revealed that social media integration facilitates students’ academic experience and

improves academic performance. They also reveal that social media integration was found to increase the interaction between students and their teacher, which increase students' participation collaboration. Furthermore, a study by Olaleke, et al, (2015) revealed that social media can be used to enhance students' learning abilities through interactions among learners and teachers. It also helps improves learning motivation and increases a chance of student learning outside their classrooms.

Social media and EFL students has always been an area that studied by researchers from different angles. Sim, & Pop, (2014) for instance investigated the impact of social media in improving students' vocabulary acquisition(focused on Facebook) with 127 intermediate and upper intermediate first and second year ELT students. In their research they attempted to answer the question: 'Can social media affect students' development and progress in the foreign language?' To discover the answer to this question of the study, a project based on Face book for the experimental group was conceived. It was assumed that significant differences were to be found between the groups using social media for learning purposes and those who did not in developing vocabulary knowledge. The development in each group was measured and it clearly demonstrated a more significant improvement in vocabulary knowledge of the group exposed to the Facebook group. The results of the study did not support the assumption that the experimental group would outperform the control group, as the differences between the two groups were not that significant. However, there was an improvement in both groups from pre-test to post-test scores. Three years later, Xodabande, (2017) examined the effectiveness of using social media network TelegramR in teaching English language pronunciation to Iranian EFL learners. Participants of this study included 30 Iranian EFL learners who received different treatments over the four weeks. The results of pre-test and post-test revealed that the pronunciation of participants in experimental group improved significantly compared to control group, but the researcher found no significant improvement in pronunciation of participants in experimental group from post-test to delayed test. The results also revealed that using social media networks in teaching language features can be very effective and promising.

Learners attitudes towards using social media in the teaching and learning processes has also been studied in some researches. One of the interesting studies was carried by Eren, (2012) who Investigated students' attitudes towards use of social networking sites, Facebook in particular, in language classroom. This study was carried out at a university in Gaziantep, Turkey with 48 undergraduate students who were enrolled in one year compulsory English preparatory class. It was found out that students have a very positive attitude towards the use of Facebook activity as a supplement to language classroom. Students welcomed using social networking site as a supplementary to the curriculum. Most students showed that they love spending time on Facebook and exercises, and they it was also found that videos and other sharing in group are useful for improving their language skills. Kitchakarn, (2016), in his study investigated how students perceived Facebook in terms of ease of use, usefulness, and attitude toward the use of Facebook for doing the activities and examined whether these factors were correlated. The participants were 86 first-year students who took an English course in the first semester of 2015 academic year. The results reveal that overall mean scores of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness were at a high level, and students had a positive attitude toward the use of Facebook for doing the activities. It was also found student learning performance was positively correlated with perceived usefulness of Facebook and attitude toward doing the activities in Facebook. The perceived ease of use had positive relationships with perceived usefulness of Facebook and attitude toward doing the activities in Facebook. Moreover, attitude was related to perceived usefulness while no relationship was found between perceived ease of use and learning performance. Chatterjee et al, (2016) focused on the attitude of using social media for education purposes. The study conducted with the 300 higher level students in Purulia district, West Bengal with the help of a self-made questionnaire. Result revealed that no significant difference exists in attitude towards using social media with regards to sex, residence and level of study. However,

significant relationship exists between attitude of using social media and time spent for the use of social media.

Before moving to the next part of this paper; it should be noted that although the penetration of rate of social media in Saudi Arabia is considerably high, research on social media use in English as a foreign language classes in Saudi Arabia is still quite low compared to other countries. Therefore, this study aims to fill in the gap by conducting a study focusing on the Saudi Students' attitudes of the integration of social media in their English classes.

3. Research Questions

- 1) How do EFL students perceive the effect of social media on their language?
- 2) What are EFL students' perceptions regarding the advantages of using social media in language classes?
- 3) What are EFL students' perceptions regarding the disadvantages of using social media in language classes?

4. Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were 40 full-time students registered in the university year 2018. The participants were enrolled in their first year of a two-year program offered by Arrass college of technology, Saudi Arabia (a yearly intake of approximately 1000 students). Their age ranged from 19 to 22 years. The mean length of time they studied English was 9 years. All of the participants have smart mobile phones with five different social media applications (Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram) All of them are already active users of these application, and use them on daily basis. None of them have used any of these applications for learning or teaching purposes.

Arrass College of Technology

Arrass College of Technology is a technical college in Saudi Arabia. It was established in 2002 as the second college of technology in Alqassim region. Its first objectives and priorities to graduate the qualified technical cadres scientifically and practically to work in technical areas those contribute directly in building the national economy. Additionally, due to the importance of English language in the technical sciences programs, and because of the increased English language courses in diploma programs, the college has established a general studies department to supervise the English language-training curricula and other curricula.

5. Instruments and Procedures

The Questionnaire

The first research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire which consisted of eight Likert-type statements and focused on language components and skills that students improved by social media. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the inter-rater approach was followed. five professors who teach English language at five technical colleges departments rated the questionnaire and provided feedback. The questionnaire was then modified. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. For this questionnaire, the calculated Alpha, was 0.79, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale used with this sample. In addition, the questionnaire was administered to a group of 40 students during the second semester of 2018 as a pilot study, which led to some improvements and ensured the instrument's validity and reliability.

The Interviews

The second instrument used in this research was a semi structured interview. The first part of the interview aimed to find out about the advantages that social media could offer to

English classes from the prospective EFL students. The second part of the interview aimed to discover the disadvantages that could arise when integrating social media in English language classes. To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview questions, the inter-rater approach was followed. Five professors who teach English language at five technical colleges rated the interview questions and provided feedback. The questions were then modified accordingly.

Procedures

Students were asked to use social media to help them finish their weekly homework. They were asked to try a different application every week and if it does not help them they are free to try another application. They were asked to do their best and try not to use every recourse that social media offers. If they could not find an answer to the questions they have they are allowed to use other resources.

Before handing students the questionnaires, the researcher explained to them the importance of the study they were participating in and they were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and their responses would not affect their grades. The questionnaire papers, which had been translated into Arabic (the participants' mother tongue) to avoid any misunderstanding or lack of clarity, were distributed to the students, who were given time to discuss any unclear points with the researcher. The students took the questionnaires home with them, and they were requested to complete them and bring them back the following day. The interviews took place that day after the students brought back their questionnaires. They took place at the college library, students have been give appointments that suit them and all interviews happen at a regular college day.

6. Results and Discussion

Language Skills And Components

According to Davies (1989), actual system use is influenced by the behavioral intentions of the users, which are guided by their perceptions of the ease of using this system and its usefulness. Therefore, investigating the integration of social media in EFL classes from the users' perspective (students in this case) can reveal significant insights into the effectiveness of the experience. To answer the first research question of this study, the statistics in this section present the results of the analysis of students' Perceptions of the effect of social media on the development of English language skills and components. For further explanation Table (1) below shows in order the language skills and areas in which the students believed social media helped enhance their learning.

Skill/Component	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA	M.	St.D
	%	%	%	%	%		
Listening	20.6	50	9.4	15.6	4.4	3.66 A	1.10
Speaking	23.1	44.4	12.5	11.9	8.1	3.62 A	1.19
Vocabulary	24.4	34.4	7.5	24.4	9.4	3.40 NS	1.33
Pronunciation	16.9	41.3	15	18.1	8.8	3.39 NS	1.21
Reading	15	40.6	10.6	25	8.8	3.28 NS	1.23
Spelling	11.9	40.6	15.6	23.8	8.1	3.24 NS	1.18
Writing	10	26.3	17.5	29.4	16.9	2.83 NS	1.26
Grammar	10	23.8	18.1	35	31.1	2.82 NS	1.22

Table 1

Listening skills rated the highest with a mean of (3.66) followed by speaking skills with a mean of (3.62). Both areas, according to students' perceptions, unequivocally benefit most from social media. Other skills and components, namely vocabulary building, pronunciation, reading, spelling, writing and grammar reveal some skepticism among the students. All these skills and components are observed to fall within the (Not Sure) response category by the students with variance in the degree of uncertainty (3.40- 2.82) in descending order as shown in table (1). Furthermore, as can be seen in table (2) -which can be considered as a point in favor of integrating social media in EFL classes- combining the positive responses (strongly agree and agree) and comparing them to the negative ones (disagree and strongly disagree) shows that most of the research sample believe that integrating social media in their classes is useful and could improve their listening, speaking, reading skills and it also has improved their vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling this result goes along with what has been mentioned in (Sim, & Pop, 2014) and, (Xodabande, 2017) which suggest that integrating this type of media is useful in English classes.

Skill/Component	Positive	Negative
	SA & A	DA & SDA
	%	%
Listening	70.6	20
Speaking	67.5	20
Vocabulary	58.8	33.8
Pronunciation	58.2	26.9
Reading	55.6	33.8
Spelling	52.5	31.9
Writing	36.3	46.3
Grammar	33.8	66.1

Table 2

In contrast, when it comes to writing and grammar skills most students (writing 46.3% & grammar 66.1%) as can be seen in the same table do not believe that integrating social media is useful to their writing and grammar

Advantages

The interview, as stated earlier, explored the students’ perceptions of the advantages of social media experience. As shown in figure (1), seven important advantages were reported. The highest rated advantage which was mentioned by the whole research sample was that it can facilitate learning followed by two advantages that have been reported by (90%) of students; the first one was that social media can encourage engagement this advantage goes along with what has been mentioned by (Junco et al., 2011), and the second one was it could improve communication skills which supports what mentioned by (Faiziet al., 2013). The students also appreciated the advantage of increase and assist communication and collaboration which was reported by (82.5) of them which goes along with what was mentioned by (Faiziet al., 2013). (75%) of them believe that social media helped them with sharing useful resources. The last two advantages reported by the students were that social media enhanced their self-confidence (60%) and it could enhance academic relationship among peers (10%).

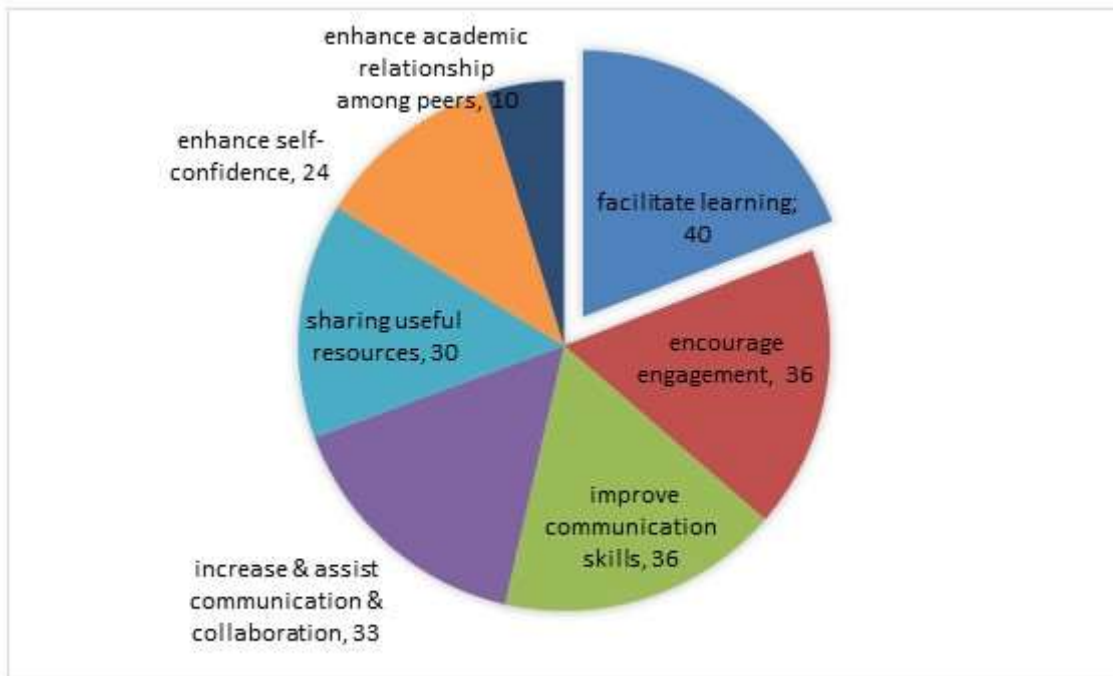


Figure 1

Disadvantages

Contrary to the advantages, only (87.5%) reported a disadvantage or more for integrating this type of media in English as a foreign language classes (figure 2). As in the advantages section there are seven disadvantages reported by the research sample; the salient disadvantage reported in this study is that using social media wastes a lot of students’ time, this disadvantage has been reported by (87.5%) of the students. (85%) of students believe that social media has been a distraction to them. (77.5) of students believed that integrating this type of media was exhausting and it was an extra workload.

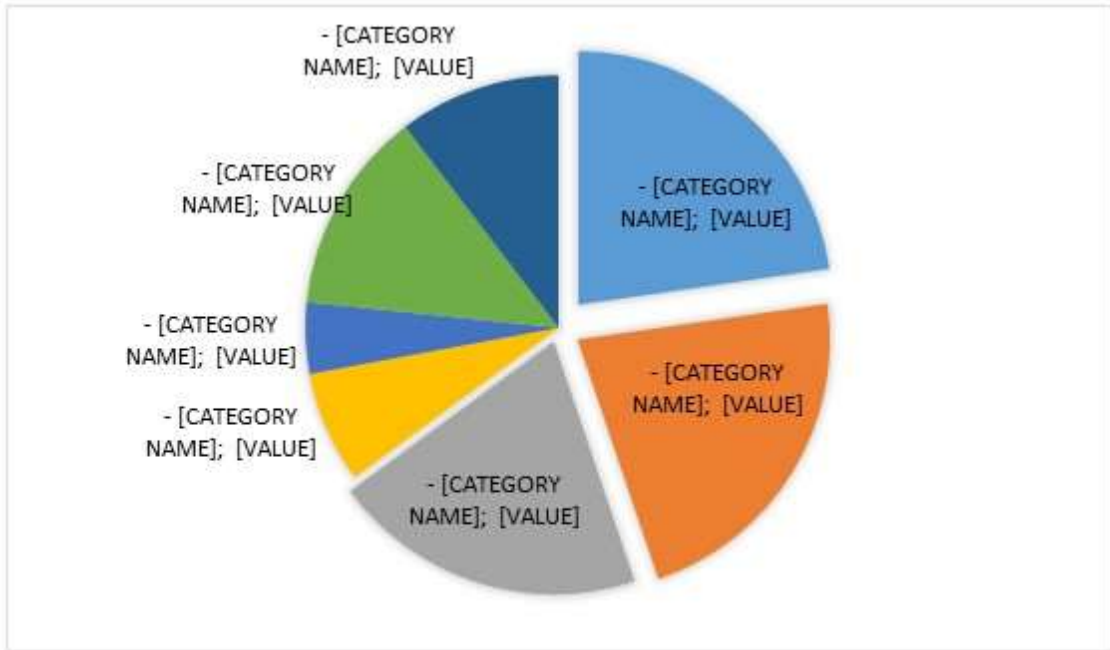


Figure 2



These three disadvantages support what has been mentioned by (Slonje, et al., 2013), (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010) and (Hew, 2011). They also suggest that the time spent or to be spent by students for using social media for EFL purposes should be one of the most important factors that should be considered when planning to integrate social media in such classes. Teachers, researchers, or educators in general should remember that this issue could affect the employment of this type of media and they should make some guidelines or instructions to help students overcome this issue.

The fourth disadvantage that has been mentioned by half the research sample was that they do not trust in peer feedback; this issue which was reported by (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010) and (Hew, 2011) could be related to the teaching methods or strategies used by teachers inside their classrooms. The students who mentioned this disadvantage during the interview confirmed that they never received feedback from their colleagues in their usual classes. Training students to give/ receive different types of feedbacks may result in a better integration for this type of media in the future. (40%) of the participating students reported another disadvantage that could be overcome by training and preparing students; which was that they found difficulty in adapting publicly available tools. The last two disadvantages have been reported by fewer students; the first one reported was that social media has a negative effect on the students' academic performance (27.5%), and the last disadvantage which reported by (17.5%) of them was that they found it difficult to protect the anonymity of them. Those disadvantages and the previous ones have been mentioned by researchers such as (Slonje, et al., 2013), (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010) and (Hew, 2011) training and preparing students to use this type of media for their learning could result in a better and more productive employment and integration.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the attitudes of EFL students towards integrating social media in EFL classes. The findings suggest that social media can be very useful as an educational tool. Students' attitudes towards such an integration are mostly positive. Most students believed that social media is useful for improving their language skills. Finally, this type of integration as any pedagogical practice takes patience and application from both students and teachers. Adopting some of the findings of this study students' abilities are likely to get better. Seeing the improvement and benefit from employing this tool, will certainly result in a more advantages and a positive enhancement of their belief in the efficacy of this technique.

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