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Facebook as a Platform for Learning English in Higher Education

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Abstract: Technology has become an essential part of education today, and learning environment has changed from that of many years ago; students need to use technology as an alternative effective learning tool for learning English language as a foreign language (EFL). Most of current studies in the educational use of social media seem to pay more attention to the students' use of Facebook in learning. This research explores 14 university learners use of Facebook group and it mainly focuses on lecturers' role in Facebook group. This qualitative study involved observation and some interview questions. Current findings highlight that there are potential benefits to using Facebook for learning with reference that these students still need a guideline and support from their lecturers to learn English via Facebook. This paper suggests that considerable students' content knowledge of educational technology as Facebook is required to improve their learning. This study hopes to add and expand current body of knowledge about learning English in relation to Facebook used in English foreign language context.

Keywords: integrating Facebook use, Students' attitude towards Facebook use.

1. Introduction

In recent decades technology provides unprecedented affordances and opportunities for learning foreign language by offering theoretical and practical framework online. Social media has played an important part in education nowadays and becomes increasingly embedded in everyday life. "It supports the classroom teaching through creating opportunities for learners to complete assignments on the computer rather than the normal pencil and paper" (Hennessy, Ruthven and Brindley, 2005:155). The learners live in a digital world where their life style and a way of learning are changed. Education technology tools in English classes help teachers realize a better and more effective learning (Gomleksiz, 2004).

Facebook is a social networking service launched in February 2004, owned and operated by Facebook. This application is one of the most common applications used in everyday life with reference to learning. Kolpashnikova and Bartolic (2019) argue that technology enables learners to access applications that help to learn English. Facebook is used to connect friends and family to learn and share information about the world (Bosch, 2009).

In Libya context, Facebook is the most popular network tool used by university students for social life and educational purposes. The learners can create their personal profile page for interesting activities to share with others. Zou (2006) confirms that a new technology can create a more flexible learning process. In this way, Facebook provides authentic environment to increase learners' learning performance such as messenger where learners interact and share ideas to learn. Blattner and Fiori (2009) indicate that Facebook can be used for authentic language interaction and to increase motivation and improve the performance of English language learners. Educational technology can offer extensive variety of multimedia content and other channels of communication between learners and with native speakers which reflect on their learning. For example, Richard and Renandya(2002) suggest that learners should engage in written communication through the internet to improve their writing skills, because it creates optimal conditions for learning to write.

2. Integrating Facebook use in learning English

This application of technology has considerably changed English learning techniques because of making learning interesting and more productive. For instructors who see teaching as establishing a relationship with learners, Facebook may be an effective way to connect (Roblyer et al., 2010).

Facebook has several educational sides such as developing learners' social knowledge about local and global societies. For example, learners may post some information about their life by sharing questions, insights and experience. McLoughlin and Lee (2008) confirm that Facebook has several functions of communications, sharing and collaborative. Facebook can be seen as a self-study because it provides a great learning English information platform independently. It provides strategy and knowledge for self-regulated learning and support learners to become centred learning to work independently (Trasierra, 2018: Zou, 2006).

Furthermore, Facebook may increase the level of motivation when learners work on computers and modern devices than working with textbooks, and they become more active by increasing their autonomy so they can decide their own learning objectives (Trasierra, 2018). Facebook can make it easier for learners and authentic language interaction, and can be used to increase motivation and improve the performance of English language learners (Blattner and Fiori, 2009). Therefore, integrating Facebook as a learning tool can lead learners to increase their academic performance and be more successful in their future study.

Facebook also has disadvantages like, many people use Facebook day and night without thinking how much time they have wasted on it and that they could have done more important work during that time such using other ways even traditional ways to learn instead of wasting time. Jones (2015) also states that some learners use some types of social media technologies only for leisure. Gholaminia (2014) adds that deficient training, the fear of computers, lack of technical learning, and lack of solid pedagogical programs are some of the impediments of using technology in EFL also emphasizes the lack of lecturer training and deficient technological devices.

3. Learners' Attitude towards Facebook use

Learners' attitudes towards using Facebook vary from one to another, and the researcher has noticed that Libyan learners often have different attitudes about using it. The reason is that some learners are more interested and willing to integrate it in their learning than others.

Learners' attitude to using technology is important, if it is to help them be more successful in learning the English language; thus learners need to be encouraged to use Facebook for learning. As long as learners' awareness about technology has been raised, Facebook can be used to improve the performance of English language learners(Blattner and Fiori, 2009).

It can be noted that learners' attitude to the use of Facebook, both in their social life and their academic environment, is increasing. As Zou (2006) indicates that the new technology can create a more flexible learning process. A positive attitude towards Facebook leads learners to be more successful in learning English. Therefore, lecturers need to encourage their learners to use it with their peers to improve their learning knowledge. For instance, chatting via Facebook messenger can engage learners into an interactive dialogue with images that can be attractive and motivating for learning.

On the other hand, there are some learners who have negative attitudes to Facebook as learning platform; they feel frustrated by such innovation, feeling that it takes too much time to learn and use. Some Libyan students remain reluctant about using Facebook for their learning. Also, may be a big concern for novice lecturers who prefer the conventional way of teaching English as a result of their lack in technology use. For example, those who have a lack of using Facebook as a learning tool might find it boring and, in turn, negatively affects the learning process. From this learners' attitude towards using Facebook as learning tool is important especially who are expert and interested in using it. Blattner and Fiori(2009) agree that Facebook can be used to improve the performance of English language learners.

The above literature highlights that Facebook can play an important role in developing learners' learning English through sharing, discussing and learn from each other. Previous studies focus only on learners in using Facebook for learning; however, the current research would focus on lecturers' role in Facebook. Lantz-Andersson et al. (2017) argue that lectures discussions in professional online groups are still

unexplored. Ranieri, Manca, and Fini (2012:754) add that “to date little empirical research on professional use of social network sites has been conducted, particularly with reference to groups of teachers on Facebook”. This paper also hopes to add more significant information to the current literature about Facebook use. Therefore, the current study is important because it offers critical interpretations of using Facebook in developing learners' learning and the knowledge gained from it could be used to improve the practice.

4. Research Methodology

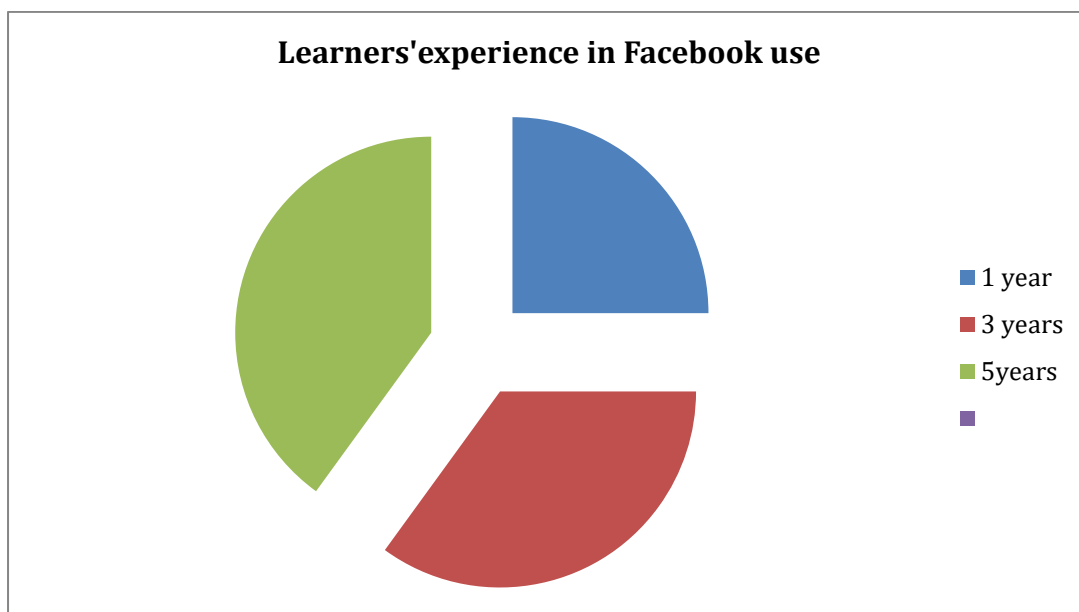
4.1 Data Collection procedure and participants

In carrying out this research the main aim is to investigate Facebook as a platform for learning English in Higher Education. The data instrument was personal observation followed by some interview questions with 14 university learners who are doing a BA in English Language in Libya. Their ages were between 17 and 19 and this selection was based on the fact that the researcher had created a Facebook group for these learners as platform for learning. The researcher has roles in Facebook group as a tutor, a learning materials provider, and a facilitator. This Facebook group was observed by the researcher for three months to take notes. Some interview questions were asked to the current participants after the three months to support and provide in-depth information about using Facebook as a platform for learning English. They were all most cooperative and helpful to be part in this study.

5- Findings and discussion

This following charts show the findings and an in-depth discussion of obtained data. The central purpose of this section is to focus on some aspects that emerged from the data such as experience of Facebook, Language used, students' attitude towards Facebook use, learners centred learning and lecturers' role in Facebook. The results are discussed in line with those existing in the literature in relation to the framework.

Figure 1: Learner's experience in Facebook use

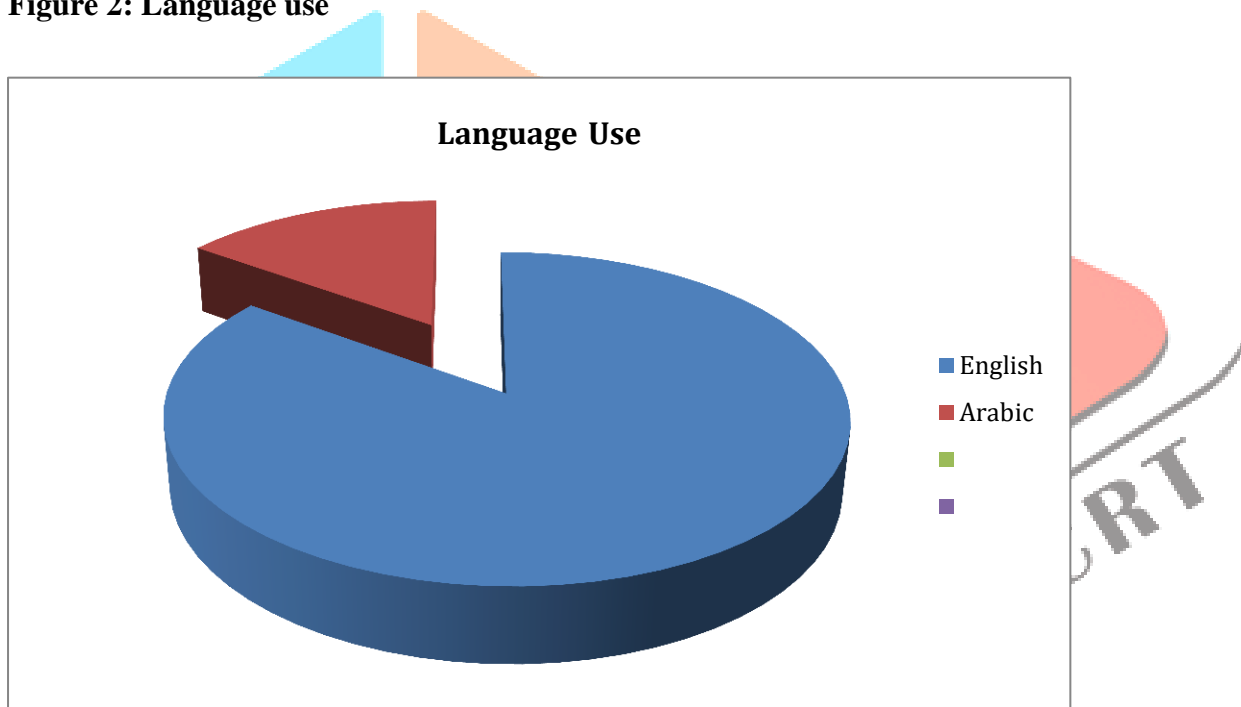


5.1 Learners' Facebook experience

Based on findings these learners have different years of experience of using Facebook from one year up to five years. The chart above shows that 25% of participants had one year Facebook experience while 35% of them had three years of experience and 40% had five years. Mainly experience for social purposes side to discuss and talk about their social life. Facebook is used to connect friends and family to learn and share information about the world (Bosch, 2009). This agreed with Jones (2015) who states that learners use some types of social media technologies only for leisure.

However, Facebook has educational side as some of these learners use it as a platform for learning. Therefore, lecturers need to make their students aware that Facebook would be a great educational platform and help them to change their thinking about the both sides of Facebook use.

Figure 2: Language use



5.2 Language used

This chart shows that 85% of English language is mainly used in Facebook group with 15 % of Arabic language when learners interact together. These participants tend to use Arabic when they are lack of English words. As Krapels (1990: 49) confirms that "the use of L1 is a fairly common strategy among L2 writers". It appears that these learners need to increase the use of English language with some Arabic language when it is necessary to improve their English proficiency.

5.3 Learners' attitude and centred learning

As shown in the findings, that all learners positively perceive the Facebook as informal learning platform. It can be noted that learners' attitude to the use of Facebook, both in their social life and their academic environment, is increasing. This finding agreed with the previous study by Zou (2006) that the new

technology can create a more flexible learning process. However, the findings indicate that most of the participants gave their comments in the Facebook either to answer question or to give opinion on particular issue only when it was highlighted by a lecturer. There are several reasons being mentioned by them as their poor English proficiency made them shy and afraid to comment and post questions in the Facebook group. This highlights that learners may miss the opportunity to learn in flexible and adaptive environment that made them gain better achievement. Consequently, learners need encouragement and guideline from lecturers about technology to help them change lecturer-centered approach towards learners centered one (Trasierra, 2018).

5.4 Lecturer's role in Facebook group

As Bissessar (2014:121) observes at "the click of a mouse, lecturers are communicating and receiving ideas on curriculum issues to improve their instructional delivery". From the findings, lecturer's role is important because learners in Facebook group do not get involved in learning without their lecturer interference. This means that the role of lecturer may lead to encourage learners to respond and reflect in the discussion. Facebook groups are one way instructors can supplement the social aspects of learning management system discussion forums (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2018:349). As noted from the observation most of the participants do not tend to make mistakes or repeat the same answer and scared of making mistakes. This highlights that Facebook use in learning needs a lecturer as a guideline with support which increases the shared and exchanged, knowledge among learners. As Lantz-Andersson (2015) states the lecturer does not play the role of the traditional gatekeeper but encourages a playful use of the language.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Facebook has great advantages to impact on learners in different areas in learning English. The current study considered the benefits of using Facebook for educational purposes because it is free to any learner to connect with peers to exchange their knowledge. Lecturers may also take advantages of this resource and discover new ways to engage learners in authentic and interesting learning environment. All the way through preparing and training learners to use Facebook in the learning process would be better and faster than traditional method of learning. This study shows that learners value the use of Facebook in relation to learning English, but more use of Facebook is required with reference to the encouragement from lecturers. The findings can also have a potential impact on lecturers' thinking which may lead to change or shift their views about Facebook use. The findings highlight that lecturers need to reduce their control in Facebook groups because Facebook is informal learning platform where learners can learn independently.

The present study focused on Facebook as platform for learning; however, future research is needed to examine how different aspects of learning such as writing and grammar can be influenced by Facebook use. The conclusion can be drawn that lecturers understanding of Facebook have a potential effect on

learners' learning. However, these areas still have a lot of potentials to be researched as technologies develop very fast and operate differently according to the contexts.

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