

Students' English Language Usage of Facebook during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Social network sites such as Facebook are constantly experiencing enormous changes, arousing the attention of many researchers who wish to integrate technology into education and create innovative methods in English Language Teaching; several technological devices can facilitate teaching and serve learners' needs. Therefore, teachers started to use and adopt modern techniques in education, mainly because of the pandemic of covid-19 and, thus making the teaching process safe and effective. The current study aims to investigate students' perceptions of using Facebook to enhance their learning during an acute crisis. The main questions that established the research work are what are the students' perceptions of using Facebook to enhance their learning? What are the benefits of Facebook during the pandemic of covid-19? To answer these questions, the researcher conducted a case study of 2nd year English as Foreign Language students in the English Department at Tlemcen University, Algeria. The researcher used two research instruments to collect data; a questionnaire addressed to the students and a structured interview administered to the English teachers. Findings revealed that Facebook adoption has a significant positive relationship with usefulness and ease of use; there was also a considerable influence of Facebook adoption on educational usage. Additionally, both teachers and students stated that Facebook could improve students' academic performance, and recognized its importance during this crisis period in making teaching and learning more accessible and productive. Based on the findings, the researcher made some recommendations about using Facebook in education, and future research can deal with more communities.

Keywords: Covid-19, English language usage, Facebook, learning, teaching, technological devices

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Introduction

Social network sites such as Facebook are constantly experiencing enormous changes, arousing the attention of many researchers who wish to integrate technology into education and create innovative methods in English Language Teaching; numerous technological devices can facilitate teaching and serve learners' needs. Therefore, the teacher started to use and adopt modern techniques in education, mainly because of the pandemic of covid-19. The government closed all universities and teachers had to find out new solutions to continue preparing and finish the curriculum without any virus contamination, making the teaching process safe and effective.

This study investigates students' perceptions of using Facebook to enhance their learning during an acute crisis; that is why the researcher asks the following research questions:

- What are the students' perceptions of using Facebook to enhance their learning?
- What are the benefits of Facebook during the pandemic of covid-19?

The research questions stated above led to propose the following hypotheses:

- The students' perceptions of using Facebook to enhance their learning may be usefulness, ease of use, social influence, facilitating conditions, community identity, communication, collaboration, resource and material.
- Using Facebook during the pandemic of Covid-19 can help enhance the interaction between teachers and students and improve the teaching experience in different ways. Using Facebook allows seeing the student as an essential part of the teaching and learning process and can also help teachers to finish their classes safely. Facebook is easy and free and can aid the students to have lessons from any place and at any time. It allows the teachers to share additional information, like videos easily, and gives students a chance to ask any question about any lesson at any time.

This study first goes through a literature review to overview of e-learning and the use of social networking sites, especially Facebook, for educational purposes because of the spread of the pandemic.

Literature Review

The digital era, the e-generation, the need to be updated, and the different devices offered during the pandemic of covid-19, made the teacher forced to use technological tools and from them Facebook. An overview of e-learning and social media, especially Facebook, seems necessary to synthesize different views, studies, and approaches and identify the literary gap existing in the literature on the use of Facebook in education, especially during the pandemic.

E-Learning

E-learning, also called online learning or electronic learning, means acquiring knowledge through electronic technologies and media. To define e-learning and fix the critical elements for better and more operative use of this type of teaching and learning, it is essential to comprehend the nature of e-learning as an educational novelty sufficiently, and to develop contextually resulting frameworks for change that support organizational culture and practice (Rossiter, 2007); thus, to find a single and comprehensive definition of e-learning is not easy as Renold and Barter (2003) state a complete and broader report that covers a more comprehensive range of the concept and can cope with the complexity of its illustration/characteristics. All in all; e-learning refers to

using computer network technology to carry information and instructions to individuals (Wang et al., 2010). The role of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in learning is so essential.

Social Networking Sites

The main aspects that facilitate the usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in e-learning are collaboration, communication, resource sharing, social influence, usefulness, and ease of use; social network sites such as Myspace, Facebook, Cyworld, and Bebo have concerned millions of users; they have integrated these sites into their daily practices and education. Boyd, D.M, & Ellison, N.B (2007) define social network sites as web-based facilities that permit people to (1) build a public or semi-public profile in a limited system, (2) make effective a list of other users with whom people share a link, and (3) view their list of links and those made by others in the system. The nature and vocabulary of these links may vary from one site to another.

Facebook Social Networking Site

Facebook's origins, as a form of networking site, are now well established, as is its extraordinary rise since it is one of the most widely used online services globally; it has an initial connection to a university setting. Therefore, it seems suitable for educational uses, as seen by Roblyer et al. (2010), to summarize Facebook's history and development from an academic research perspective. A group from Harvard University; composed of Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes, created Facebook in 2004. The notion of Facebook started before that, and it was called Facemash, where students could talk to each other at University. Nowadays, Facebook has become the leading social networking site used by over a billion users. About half of that number is using Facebook every day since registration is free using an active email or a phone number. Recently, Facebook has become a job for some people, especially those who own pages with a significant number of friends in which they earn money by advertising products or places. Actually, the absolute "online ubiquity of Facebook is astounding" Wilson et al. (2012, p. 203).

In this line of thought, Demski (2009) looks at the possibility of using social networking in an academic setting; that is to say "A secured social networking site allows schools to incorporate the technology into academics while preparing students to the perils of online communities."(p.1) Demski adds that it is an "activity that has embedded itself into the way work gets done" (p. 2); Computer-mediated communication in an academic background could reinforce student-teacher relationships and thus lead to more positive student outcomes. There are various reasons to integrate Facebook into the classroom; it is a valuable teaching resource, the network is operational, and most students are already using it. Moreover, it is in the category of internet-based learning. It dynamically involves students, unlike a traditional lecture, since students are active and engaged in learning using web-based tools. Consequently, Towner et al. (2007, p. 7) state that "By increasing student involvement with the material, instructors can tailor courses to a variety of learning styles."(p. 7) and so, Towner et al. (2007) conclude the benefits of Facebook as follows:

The benefits of Facebook networking and social communication capabilities can significantly enhance the learning experience of both the teacher and the student by tapping into a more significant number of learning styles, providing recommended relief from the traditional lecture format, and building a community already well-known by the students (p. 13).

Impact of Integrating Facebook during the Pandemic of Covid-19

In the last three years, the world has witnessed a new pandemic that surprisingly dominated the world and still looming; this pandemic is called “covid-19”. It causes respiratory infections, including pneumonia, colds, sneezing, and coughing, while in animals, it causes diarrhea and upper respiratory diseases. The pandemic is transmitted from human to human or human to animal via airborne droplets and began in China on 21st December; 2019. Since then, Covid-19 has changed everything in the world. It also changed the educational system in Algeria, especially in higher education, and urged the teachers to find new methods to deliver their lessons safely without being in danger of being affected by the virus.

Among those methods is the integration of Facebook in education, which was an alternative means of communication serving as an e-Learning Platform. Since March 2020, governments from all over the world have locked all public places, especially schools and universities. For this reason, apart from using teams, Moodle, and other e-platforms used by Algerian universities, Facebook becomes a solution since it is easy and free. Facebook, also allowed teachers to create virtual classes or groups to explain and send their lessons. Moreover, students can do and deliver their exercises and assignments online. Furthermore, students can ask any question to teachers and clarify difficulties between students themselves at any time and from any place. Besides, Facebook helps teachers share information and additional resources, like videos, books, articles, or pictures, easily. Furthermore, Facebook allows students and teachers to become more familiar with ICT skills. Finally, it makes teachers and students aware of the updates and novelties, especially during the pandemic.

Method

The current research work relies on a case study of 2nd year EFL students in the English Department; at Tlemcen University, Algeria, to identify the students' perceptions of using Facebook to enhance their learning and recognize the benefits of Facebook during the pandemic of covid-19. In this concern, Woodside (2010) states that a case study is an experimental inquiry that explores a current phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the limits between phenomenon and context are unclear. The researcher used two research instruments to collect data; a questionnaire addressed to the 2nd year students, and a structured interview administered to the English teachers.

Participants

Good research does not need method relevance and instrumentation only, but also a fair sampling strategy; the problem of choosing an appropriate sample falls in finding the most suitable setting which will provide reliable data. Therefore, sampling implies an acknowledgment that it is not possible to investigate absolutely everything of interest simultaneously, and consequently, we have to choose a “sample” (Johnsons, 1998, p. 275).

The target student population in this study was 2nd year EFL students in the Department of English, University of Tlemcen, Algeria. Students were 30. They were of the two genders, with different ages, and varying English proficiency levels. The second group of participants concerned English teachers who participated in a structured interview; they were eight with varied specialties, different qualifications, and teaching experience at the university.

Instruments

The researcher used two main instruments, a student's questionnaire, and a teacher's interview, to arrive at reliable data, test the hypotheses, and answer her research questions. The questionnaire comprised a section on the participants' profiles. Then, the first set of questions was close questions where the participants had to choose one or many answers depending on the question. The second set of questions is the close-ended ones where respondents had to express their opinions, attitudes, or feelings. To better understand the current situation, the researcher used the teacher's interview, which consists of nine questions divided between yes/no questions and close-ended ones.

Results

First, concerning the familiarity of students with e-learning, the majority of the students (68%) were familiar with e-learning, whereas the rest of the participants (32%) were not (Figure 1).

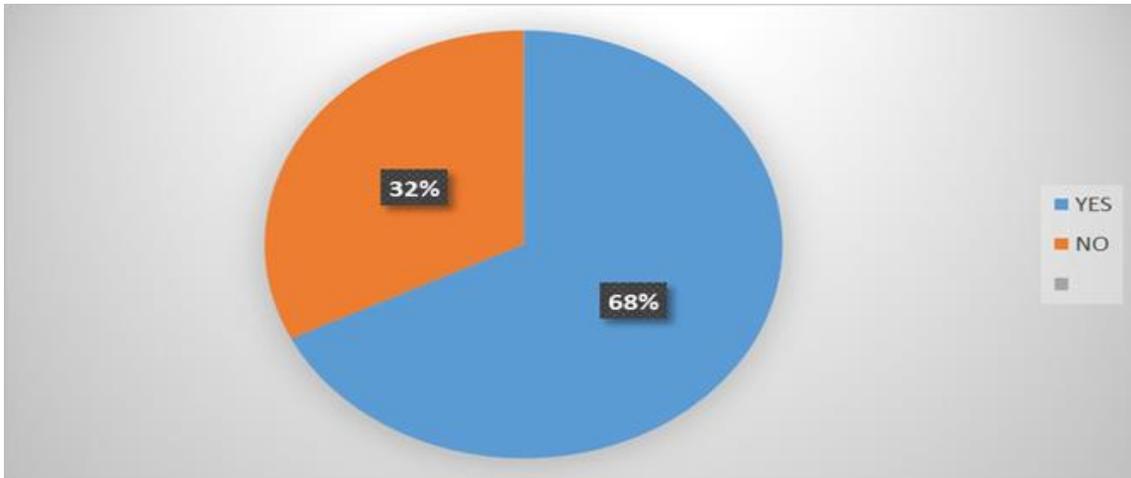


Figure 1. Familiarity with E-learning

Then, when dealing with the use of social media by students, the results obtained and shown in (Figure 2) below assured that all the participants (97%) who responded were using social media except 3% who did not respond to this question.

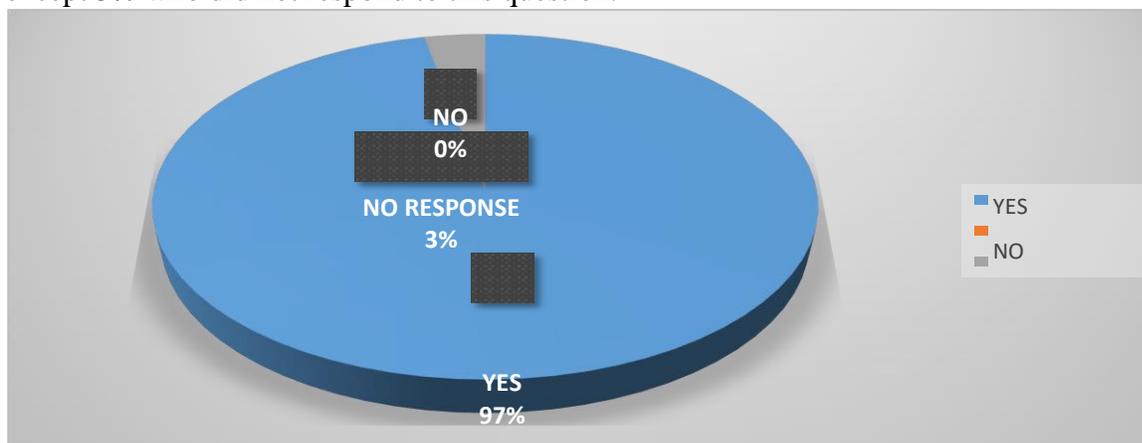


Figure 2. The Use of Social Media

Regarding the most social media site used by students, the findings showed that most of the participants stated that they used Facebook, 35% of them declared preferring Instagram, and the last part of students representing a minor percentage, said using Twitter or Snapchat (Figure 3).

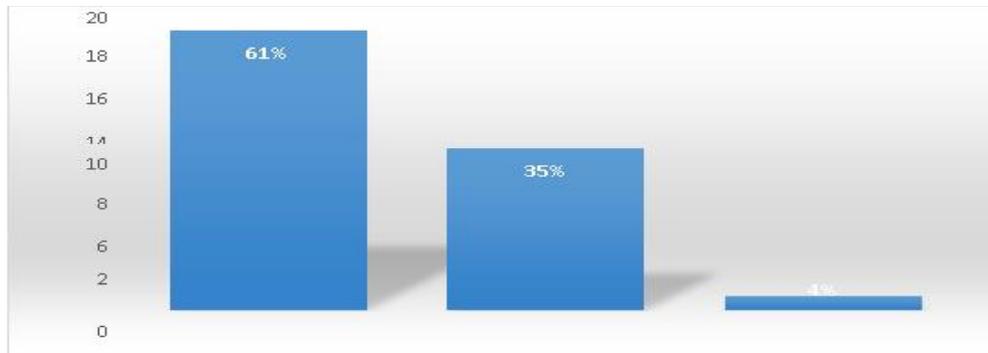


Figure 3. Different Social Media Sites

When using social media for their studies, 32% of students responded using social media accounts in their studies, in contrast with the rest of the sample (68%), sometimes used their social media platform for studying (Figure 4).

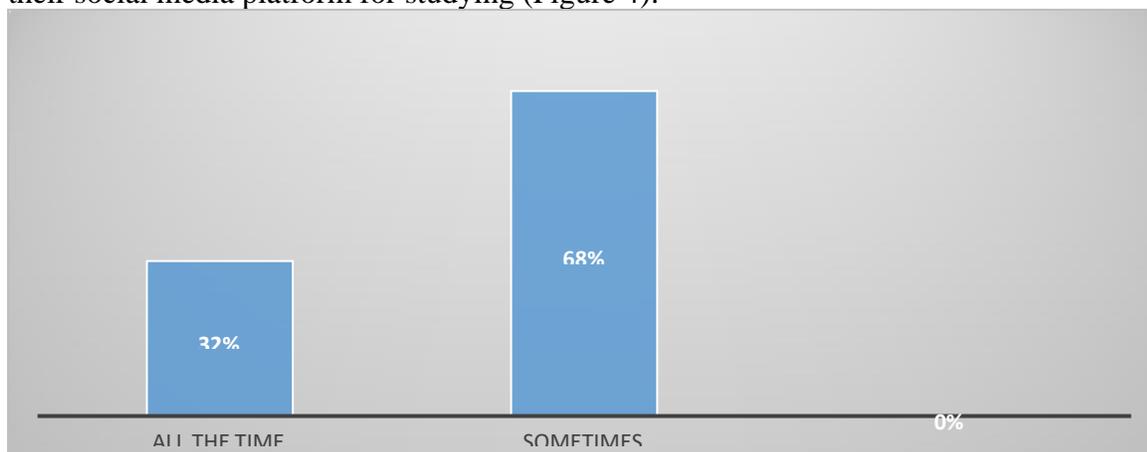


Figure 4. Using Social Media for Studies

Concerning the results of the teachers' interview, the data revealed that (63%) of the participants said that they found the social media platforms somehow helpful, and (14%) stated finding them very helpful, as seen in Figure 5.

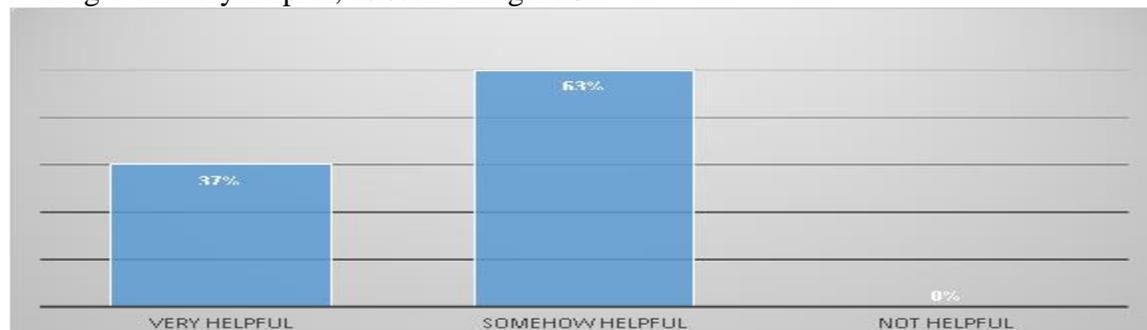


Figure 5. Social Media in Education

Concerning the significance of using Facebook during the pandemic of Covid-19, the results revealed that (60%) of the participants did not find it beneficial, while (40%) said the contrary, as shown in Figure 6.

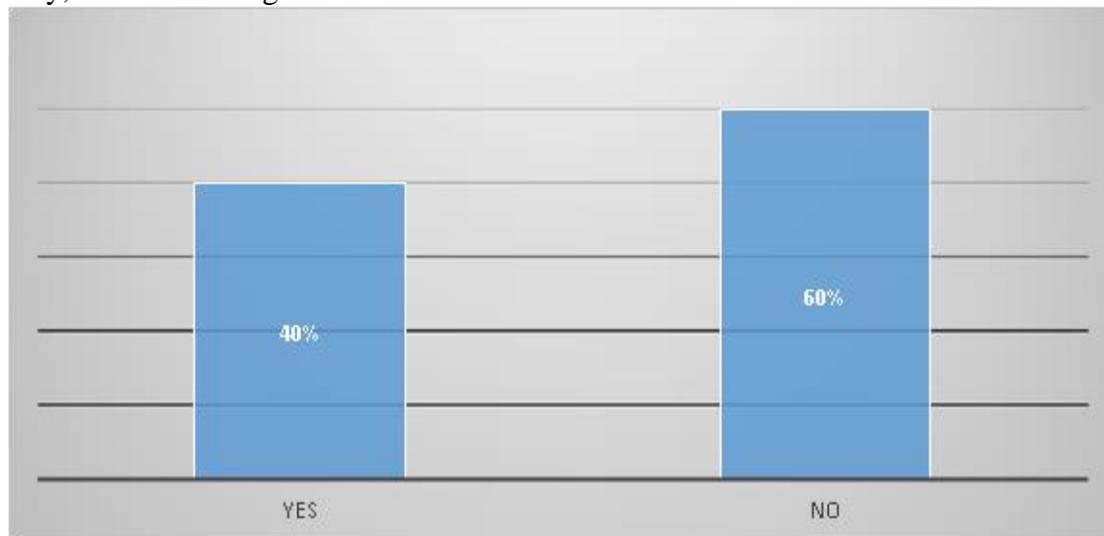


Figure 6. Facebook during Covid-19

As a whole and after gathering data from the sample, using the two research instruments, findings revealed that adopting Facebook in teaching has a positive relationship with effectiveness and accessibility. In addition, both teachers and students supported the idea that Facebook could help to improve students' academic performance; they recognized the importance of Facebook during this period of the Covid-19 pandemic in making the teaching and learning process more accessible, fruitful, and even more possible.

Discussion

The discussion and interpretation of the main results were in two parts:

Students' Perspectives

- Facebook allows students to communicate with their teacher outside the classroom, which may help establish a closer bond between teachers and students since the students feel that the teacher is available for them anytime they need them.
- It allows students to actively engage in the learning process, contrary to being negative recipients of material presented orally in the classroom.
- It gives students a sense of reliability and accountability.
- It gives students who are shy to participate and speak aloud in the classroom the opportunity to express their thoughts through writing.
- It helps students to improve their writing skills since they will practice expressing their thoughts and reflections on specific course topics.
- It allows students to develop their problem-solving skills through collaboration with a wide range of contacts having different backgrounds and capabilities.
- Students choose the most suitable time to log in and engage in discussions and can reflect on topics and comments and decide the appropriate time to reply.

Teachers' Perspectives

- Facebook can enhance the interaction between teachers and their students and improve the teaching experience in many ways.
- To view the student as a partner in the teaching/ learning process.
- It can help teachers in finishing lectures in a very safe way.
- It aids the teacher in sharing additional information, like videos, easily.
- It encourages a student-centered approach.
- To enhance social interactions among students and improve the quality of engagement between them and their teacher, which can help create a more effective learning environment.
- To feel closer to students by breaking the traditional formal barriers of classroom student/ teacher relationships.
- They learn more about the students simply by viewing their profiles or reading their comments on Facebook.
- To provide helpful educational input in various ways and at different times other than the limited lecture time.
- To analyze and compare the achievement of students and the knowledge they acquire in different ways.
- To practice different pedagogical approaches depending on the needs of the students.
- To practice different social and psychological interaction skills that help establish a closer relationship between the teachers and students.

Conclusion

The current study investigated students' perceptions of using Facebook to enhance their learning during Covid-19. The researcher took the Department of English at Tlemcen University, Algeria, as a case study. The current study was limited to a small sample of EFL students at Tlemcen University. Still, future research can deal with more communities. Social networking sites have become an essential part of many individuals' lives, especially the new generations; it has changed people interaction and has had a significant effect on their personal, social, and political lives. The popularity of SNSs, especially Facebook, among the youth has encouraged some educators to exploit these sites to enhance teaching and learning. Although using SNSs for educational purposes still seems to be at an early stage, such networks have great potential in the academic field.

About the Author

Wassila BOUKLIKHA is an associate professor at the University of Tlemcen, Algeria. She has taught grammar for more than 25 years in Secondary Schools, and at the University; she has also taught ESP and research methods in education; she is interested in different approaches to teaching ESP, mainly the use of new technologies, and web-based materials.

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