Using web 2.0 technologies as a potential to support Foreign Language Teaching

prepared by:

Dr. Islam Elsayed Hussein Ali
E-learning unit- Fayoum University
Egypt
Islam.tourism@gmail.com

Dr. Nahed Sherif Moustafa
National Center of E-learning
Ministry of Higher Education Egypt
modyroka19@yahoo.de
Abstract

The emergence of web 2.0 tools with their interactivity, user centered design, interoperability, and collaboration opportunities has brought in a new breath to the potential of information and communication technologies for educational purposes. As an increasingly popular web 2.0 tool Facebook, a social networking site which was initially designed to connect college and university students and has evolved to involve a variety of applications and tools open to the whole world, is an appealing medium to be exploited for educational purposes. Therefore, this study explores the potential of Facebook as an online support system during foreign language learning process.

Forty Five university students at an English language preparation class at a Fayoum university in Egypt involved in the study. In this action –oriented case study, interviews were conducted with participants individually to understand their feelings and views as to use of Facebook as
an educational tool to support their foreign language learning experiences. Data reduction and content analysis was carried out on the data gathered from these interviews so that themes can be identified in order to reach a conclusion relating to the purposes of the study.

**Keywords**: web 2.0, social Networking, Facebook, Foreign language Teaching

---

**Introduction**

Boulos, Maramba and Wheeler (2006) stated that increasingly ubiquitous access, ease to use, functionality, and flexibility of emerging web 2.0 technologies have made them much more appealing as instructional tools. As an increasingly popular web 2.0 tools, social networks, consisting mostly young people as users, are highly informal environments which play an important role in continuing the interaction outside the classroom. While it is expected that social networks will increase interaction related to formal educational purposes, young people also use these applications to continue their informal education such as by following and commenting on academic and social issues, dilemmas and disappointments faced while pursuing college education (Selwyn, 2008). Thus, using social networks in an academic context is attractive for these young users, they will be given a chance to acquire new knowledge through subliminal, effective and smooth learning processes while taking part in enjoyable interactive situations mediated through interesting and motivating tools and content (Ghillet, Salzmann, 2009). Ease of use, allowing for rapid updating, analyzing and sharing continuously increasing information stemming from our daily life, establishing spontaneous relationships, supporting informal learning practices by means of interaction and communication, and facilitating delivery of education are explained as the reasons why social networks such as Facebook, Myspace, Youtube, Friendster and Flickr are adopted and accepted rapidly although they had originally emerged for sharing photos, personal information, videos, profiles and content (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008).

Being one of the most popular social networking sites, currently Facebook has 800 million active users and these users spend over 600 billion minutes per month on Facebook (www.facebook.com). In a descriptive study concentrating on how much, why, and how college students used social networking sites, Calcert, Yermolayeva and Yevdokia (2009) reported that no matter how busy they were the students spent 30 minutes on Facebook each day. Therefore, Facebook could be exploited as an educational tool because of its useful features such as enabling peer –feedback through social interaction, creating new content or reacting to already existing content in an interactive way,
sharing ideas in group discussions and making use of varied applications which are designed by the users for various purposes.

Bearing in mind that Facebook connects people throughout the world, it could be an ideal environment where foreign language learners can actively make their learning meaningful and engage in purposeful real communication activities in an authentic environment by interacting with authentic people. Thus, this study focuses on the potential of Facebook to support foreign language teaching and explores user’s perceptions and ideas about the experiences they have had using this particular social networking site to interact and learn from their friends and content in the target language.

Social networking sites as a web 2.0 Tool and foreign language teaching

The educational role of the worldwide web has been cast in a new light by the emergence of so-called web 2.0 technologies and, in particular, social software where users are connected to and collaborate with each other in a variety of group interactions (Shirky, 2003). Social networking sites (SNS) are the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a public or private profile to interact with people in their networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SNS can be defined as: ....Web–based services that allow individuals to: (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Studies have shown that integrated reading / writing/ speaking/ listening web 2.0 activities provide adult students the opportunity to experience real-world communication and authentic interactions, to expand language learning use and exposure and to enhance correctness and involvement while promoting student centered autonomous learning (DAAAM International, 2009). In addition, a study carried out by Yang and Chen (2006) showed that technology-enhanced language learning fostered an active learning style, interactivity, self-control, motivation, immediate feedback and the ability to learn diverse and practical knowledge.

Facebook as a social Networking site

A wide variety of organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, all around the world have acknowledge the popularity of Facebook and created their pages to better reach, advertise and/or inform people. U.S department of Defense (DoD), ABC TV Channel, Spanish Open University, and recently Egyptian universities are just a few examples that connect with people with their Facebook pages. Students are reported to use Facebook (1) mostly to keep up with friends they are already familiar with while few prefer to use it to make new friends or
contact family members, (2) to display their identities through posting or replying posts about favorite music, favorite movie, favorite books and publishing photos, which indicate that they choose to disclose themselves generally to trusted friends to get approval of their peers as they do in real life (Calvert, Yermolayeva & Yevdokia, 2009). They also highlight that college students create and publish materials in various forms which show that social networking applications could be exploited as a powerful academic cognitive tool if adapted for educational environments. They further make suggestions as to educational potential and use of Facebook such as having students interact on an academically-focused networking site and providing them with internship, jobs opportunities etc.

Kirschner & Karpinskys study on the relationship with Facebook and academic performance concluded that certain personalities who are socially active in their daily lives are more likely to spend time on Facebook than others, which shows that educational activities that exploit this characteristic of learners could be developed to support them in their studies and help achieve higher GPAs. Moreover, Kucuk, Genc Kumtepe and Tasc (2010) conclude that for schools and institutions, especially for higher education organizations, offering different educational settings (face to face, distance, online, etc) is no longer the main issue. They defined the most important initiative to be designing and implementing effective support services. Therefore, Facebook will be exploited to provide social support in foreign language teaching and the degree to which it is effective as a social support tool will be presented in this study.

Even though there is research concerning the use of web 2.0 tools in foreign language teaching and on potential of social networking sites in teaching and learning, the role of social networking sites on supporting foreign language needs to be explored. Thus, this particular study on the potential of Facebook to support foreign language learning aims to help fill this gap in literature so that organizations and people involved in foreign language teaching could benefit from the findings of this research.

**Method**

This study was conducted in a school of foreign Languages English language preparation class at Fayoum University in Egypt. A whole education year is dedicated for an intensive target language teaching in this institution. Students who fail English language proficiency Test before the beginning of the first semester are categorized into language levels according to the grade they received from this test: beginner and elementary. After the first semester, the classes are rearranged depending on their overall grades from the exams carried out throughout the first term. Therefore, classes are composed of students from various departments and they re-mix when classes are reorganized after the first term. The aim of this program is to graduate students with
intermediate level of English skills to enable them not only continue their education with required levels of English in their department but also to equip them with language skills they will make use of in real life situations outside school.

New Facebook accounts were created for each participant in order to avoid interference from their social friends on their previous accounts. Before the study began, all participants agreed that their new Facebook accounts should not include their social friends on grounds that this Facebook account had a special purpose and should be protected against abuse.

**Participants**

Data were collected from 45 university students at English as a foreign language preparation class from Fayoum University in Egypt. The sample consists of 20 male and 25 female students. The study was initiated at the beginning of the second semester indicating that most participants did not know each other and they came from different departments. The only students who knew each other were those who were in the same classroom previous semester and only two pairs of students knew each other. They all began the English prep class as beginner learners and at the start of the second semester they were pre-intermediate learners. These 45 participants were chosen because they were placed in the same classroom where the researcher was the language instructor. Therefore, the first type of sampling is convenience sampling in that this sample population has been selected because it is readily available and convenient (McMillan, 2004). Another sampling method in this study falls into purposeful random sampling method. The reason for this is that the participants share the same classroom environment, which indicates that they have been randomly placed in the same setting out of a larger population. Finally, this sample of participants have been preferred based on who the researcher thinks would be appropriate for the study. Purposeful sampling method has been used primarily because there are a limited number of people that will experience a phenomenon in the area being researched. Another key issue that needs to be taken into account is that the researcher is both an active participant and an observer in the process which means that there is high probability that the researcher might brings his/her own expertise, experiences and biases into the study.

**Research design and data collection**

Forty five participants were interviewed individually to explore how they feel about the use of Facebook for educational purposes, especially to support their foreign language learning. Semi-structured open ended interview questions were used, which means the researcher prepared some certain questions to explore the participants views on Facebook as an educational tool while emerging questions were directed to participants during the interviews when the researcher encountered statements and themes that needed further clarification and exploration. Data reduction and content
analysis was carried out on data gathered from these interviews so that themes can be identified in order to reach a conclusion relating to the purpose of the study. Objectives analytic conclusions, interpretations, and meanings of the codes and themes were communicated in findings section of the study.

Considering the data collection and analysis methods described above aforementioned data collection and analysis processes indicate that qualitative research design was opted to explore the participants feeling and views about the use of Facebook to support their English language learning process. The researcher began the detailed data analysis process with coding process. Coding is the process of organizing the material into junks of segments of text before bringing meaning to information (Creswell, 2009). The generated codes were then used to create deeper and more detailed themes. These themes are major findings for this qualitative study displaying multiple perspectives from individuals and supported by quotations. Codes and themes were interrelated and later interpreted.

In order to make sure that there is not a drift in meanings/ definition of codes and themes the research checked the data from digitally recorded interviews and took further memos about the codes and themes. Moreover, two faculty whose expertise in English language Teaching were asked to cross-check the codes and themes created. Depending on what Creswell 2009 call intercoder agreement or cross checking, the necessary corrections and refinements were done on the codes and themes previously originated by the researcher. This intercoder agreement process is believed to contribute to the qualitative reliability of the present study. Data from interviews were compared with the content on concerned participants Facebook page and / or with activities on his/ her Facebook page to check the validity of the data provided. Furthermore, two member participants were required to check the meaning / definition of themes and codes to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings with a follow-up interview. This way the researcher aims to provide an opportunity for the participants to comment on the findings of the research concerning their beliefs and ideas. Four major codes related to the potential of Facebook to support foreign language teaching and participants perception on the subject were determined. Pedagogical potential, social potential, Administrative potential, and concerns. Individual; themes falling into each into each of these codes were given under related titles.

Findings and Discussion

Interview questions were structured to find out first if participants had previous experience as a Facebook user and if they were familiar with information communication Technology (ICT) to support their face to face formal educations. Later, the participants were interviewed to explore potential uses of Facebook to provide informal support for a face to face formal language teaching environment.
Previous Facebook Experiences and ICT Experiences to support a Face to Face Education Environment.

Participants were asked whether they had previous Facebook accounts prior to this study in order to check whether previous Facebook experience had an effect on their use of new Facebook accounts to support language learning. Five participants were found to have no previous Facebook accounts. On their inquiry why they did not open up Facebook accounts, they stated that the main reason was that they had no or limited Internet access.

Three of these Participants expressed some concerns about why they did not want to involve in Facebook. They indicated that they did not want to be bothered by other people with bad intentions. Besides, they added that they were not interested in spending time online. Also they said that their father did not like to see her pictures on the internet. The other two indicated that they live in a village and they cannot always access the Internet and they were staying at a dorm and they did not have the chance the internet very often. One Participant stated that she had other pastime activities to spend time other than suffering the Net. When asked whether she had concerns relating to being bothered or sharing of personal information. She replied that she was aware that she could prevent unwanted people from seeing her personal information or photos. Other Participants stated that they had previous Facebook accounts but they deactivated their accounts seeing that it took up too much of their time and some people abused Facebook. They indicated that they were using their Facebook accounts to contact friends, watch, share or comment on videos and pictures before they deactivated it.

It should be noted as an interesting find that some participants felt social pressure from their friends and had to reactivate their previous Facebook account because their social friends resented when they did not accept their friendship requests. Other participants were found to be all previous Facebook users and they were using it to contact friends, make new friends, find old friends, share or comment on photos, watch/share or comment on videos, express feelings, understand people better, and send wishes to friends, and play games. When Participants were asked whether they used a similar ICT to support a face-to-face education setting all 45 participants replied that this was the first experience they had throughout their education. However, only two participants stated that they used some of their previous teacher’s websites to get access to class resources. The content and the number of activities of participants with no previous Facebook accounts were analyzed to determine whether previous experiences of Facebook had an effect on their Facebook use for educational purposes. It was observed that these participants had fewer activities and the content of their activities were limited compared to those participants with previous Facebook accounts. Therefore, it could be alleged that the extent to which a participant will benefit from educational use of Facebook might depend on whether this certain participant has previous familiarity with Facebook.
use or not. This finding supports the findings that the relationship between a priori familiarity with computers and specific software applications, and student’s perceptions of satisfaction with on-line learning experiences embedded in a traditional classroom environment positively correlates with the students perceptions about the web-based instructional unit (Schmidt, 2004). Also, Christensen, Anakwe, and Kessler 2003 stated that technology familiarity was positively related to receptivity for on-line instruction.

Potential of Facebook to support English Language

Facebook has been reported to offer a plethora of opportunities for learners to connect on different levels (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Researchers have argued that belonging to virtual communities can amplify involvement within people’s face to face communities (Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2005), thus, providing empirical evidence of the positive social effects of virtual community participation and highlighting its practical importance in educational environment. Depending on review of research on Facebook and following the qualitative data reduction and content analysis of interviews conducted with 45 participants, the following codes, and themes falling under these codes and sub-themes were identified although themes stated below might overlap or interrelate with each other making it impossible to make a clear distinction between each theme.

Pedagogical Potential

In this study Facebook was found to have pedagogical potential to support foreign language learning and teaching with the help of various synchronous and asynchronous interactive activities. Kabilan, Ahmed &Abidin (2010) has stated that the technologies that support Facebook and Features that characterize Facebook are able to engage students in meaningful language-based activities, even though their initial intention of joining Facebook is to socialize. Therefore, as Kabilan, et.al (2010) mentioned above, pedagogical potential that Facebook poses was categorized into following themes and sub-themes.

a. Instructor Related Potential

Instructors and Students on face-to-face teaching environments are generally restricted to class/ office hours. On the other hand, Facebook could be exploited as a powerful tool for a language instructor to monitor, provide feedback, and determine further learner needs, strengths and weakness especially for those students who might tend to be less self-expressing during class hours.

I- Monitoring learning process, providing synchronous and asynchronous feedback, determining individual learner needs/ interests. Because Facebook is an authentic environment
that students interact in a social context, the instructor has the chance to monitor their communication in a natural environment on their Facebook pages such as status message postings, photo or video comments, chat or personal messaging etc. Therefore, the instructor could exploit these interactions to see whether pre-determined goals of face-to-face lessons have been achieved and provide both synchronous and asynchronous feedback at the same time. 35 participants reported to interact with the instructor by chat or personal messaging. 7 participants stated that they did not feel the need to communicate and 3 participants stated that they were not online long enough to initiate a conversation. Some participants stated that Facebook provided more sentences, more vocabulary learning and practicing chances and because the instructor replied almost everything, the instructor corrected their mistakes.

II- Providing friendly personal tone
According to Holmberg (1985) emotional involvement and feelings of personal relation between the teaching and learning parties are likely to contribute to learning pleasure (Simonson, et.al, 2009). In this study, the instructor shared some personal pictures, messages, videos; favorite films etc. 39 participants said that this disclosure helped them from a friendlier relationship with the instructor. 6 participants said it had no apparent change in their relationship. The findings of this study is compatible with Osullivan, Hunt& Lippert (2004) discovery that students who have access to teacher websites containing self-disclosed information reported high levels of motivation and demonstrated an increase in effective learning. Findings also suggest that higher teacher self-disclosure may lead students to higher levels of anticipated motivation and affective learning and lead to a more comfortable classroom climate (Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds, 2007).

b. Student Related Potential
Selwyn, N. (2007) has analyzed interaction that taken place in social networking sites and has identified sharing of ideas, providing of peer feedback, and engagement in critical thinking. In this study, one of these popular SNSs, Facebook, in addition to possessing instructor related potentials, was observed to create opportunities that students can benefit to supplement their language learning process supporting Selwyn’s (2009) conclusion that Facebook would appear to be an important and valuable element of the university experience for students. The following sub themes have been extracted depending on interviews carried out with the participants.

I- Careful analysis, critical thinking, reflection and planning
Considering the following statements by multiple participants, it could be argued that before the participants posted something new or replied to a comment / message on their or friends Facebook wall they engaged in deep cognitive activities.
“Before I posted my homework on Facebook, there was a preparation process, I did it more enthusiastically. I searched in English, found and wrote. I was always in search of what else to share”

“The most enjoyable activity for me was sharing a photo about my most exciting experience. I worked very hard on writing about my most exciting moment. I got help from friends, and when I supported my writing with new words, it was very enjoyable for “There was vocabulary that my friends knew and I did not. I looked them up”. In addition to interviews excerpts given above, P7 and P 13 stated that because other people were able to read what they wrote, they thought they had to prepare what to write carefully and P 5, P 8, P18 statements that they tried to understand videos, which their friends commented on, supports this view. These findings are supported by Garrison & Kanukas (2004) conclusion that a sense of community is necessary to sustain a dynamic and meaningful educational experience over time and is a valuable asset to promote higher level thinking and the construction of knowledge.

II- Increasing motivation, encouraging interest and enthusiasm

Facebook has been found to enhance student’s motivation to communicate in English (Kabilan, 2010). In this present study, 38 participants indicated that using Facebook affected their motivation in a positive way. 7 participants stated it did not affect their motivation at all.

“The more I spoke or when I saw words I did not know the meanings, my friends were using a lot of words, I looked up those words. I had my vocabulary notebook with me and whenever I was on Facebook I added 10-15 words on my vocabulary notebook. This was very helpful and it influenced my language learning motivation” (P1, P9) "While I chat on Facebook if there is something that I cannot translate into English, I feel insufficient and get more motivated to learn” (P22, P34 and P 44)

“It definitely increased my motivation. When I see my friends are writing to each other, I think that I should make more efforts. I see my friends learn more or they post comments on, for example a music video, and I try to understand that video more and I try to write a comment too” (P6, P12) Keller (2008) suggests that motivation to learn is promoted when a learner’s curiosity is aroused due to a perceived gap in current knowledge. P1, P9, P6, P12 statements above suggest that they felt an urge to know about their friend’s postings. Therefore, Facebook could be suggests to be an environment where a gap in current knowledge can be created. Besides having positive effect on learner motivation, using Facebook for educational purposes was found to contribute to learner pleasure. Most participants (33 participants) indicated that while they were working on Facebook, they were also having fun. Holmberg’s theory (1985) of distance learning holds the view that learning pleasure supports motivation and strong motivation facilitates learning (Simonson, et al, 2009).
“If you ask me, presenting homework both online and in class makes sense but putting homework on Facebook provides active participation and its more fun this way you have fun and learn at the same time” (P1, P 5, P11, P14, P15, P20, P23, P3, P 35, P43)

“To tell the truth, I was having fun doing homework on Facebook” (P7 and P 18)”It is more enjoyable when you learn new words to write comments” (P 17, P 24)

III- Increasing Self-esteem

When students are in a language classroom, they tend to be afraid of making mistakes so they might prefer to keep silent. However, it was discovered in this study that a majority of participants thought that online social environment, such as Facebook, can help them overcome fear and increase self-esteem. Thus, Facebook could be said to support Krashen’s suggestion that learners with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to be more successful (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). “After I expressed myself better on Facebook, speaking in class was easier because even if I made a mistake, I assumed it would be corrected like on Facebook. I mean, you have more self-confidence” (P1, P3, P45)

“While I was writing I was more comfortable. It was like there was somebody sitting opposite. I was not afraid of making mistakes, on the contrary I felt more confident this way.” (P2, P32).“Firstly, both you and your friend feel pleased to write and speak in English. Being able to do something that you thought you would not be able to at the beginning of the year is a great feeling.” (P16)”Although I did not share much, I felt happy when I realized I was able to understand the things that were shared in English.” (P17).When participants statements are analyzed, it could be seen that the activities they engaged on Facebook both to socialize and support their language learning have contributed to boosting their self-esteem. As Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe (2008) stated that the way in which Facebook might facilitate communication, especially in initial social interactions might help lower self-esteem students, who might face more difficult in approaching people in their classes or their dormitories, to engage with others outside of their close personal networks. They also conclude that social networking sites might be expected to have a larger effect for them than for higher self-esteem students.

IV- Real world anxiety decrease

Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis suggests language learners with low affective filter seek and receive more input, interact with confidence, and are more receptive to the input they receive. He also claims that anxious learners have a high affective filter which prevents learners from acquiring second language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The findings of this study seem to suggest that Facebook serves to lower learner’s affective filter thus facilitating better
acquisition opportunities.
“Before I started using Facebook, I was shy like everybody else. I had the enthusiasm to speak but I was afraid of making mistakes. However, with Facebook I had a more comfortable environment; I had the chance to share my ideas more freely.” (P18)“I was feeling anxious about handing in homework in class but on Facebook I could present my homework more comfortably.” (P22)“In the classroom it is difficult for people to speak among everybody, I am especially nervous, but on Facebook I can write taking time more comfortably” (P7).

IV. Synchronous and asynchronous peer feedback and ease of access to resources
27 participants reported that they used chatting and messaging features embedded on Facebook. When asked about the content of these messages, all 27 participants said that they talked about both lessons and daily life. P12 stated that when they saw each other’s mistakes they made in English they corrected these mistakes on synchronous chats."I saw my mistakes and friends mistakes and we did not feel disappointed because we all had mistakes. Seeing my friend’s mistakes, I thought it was natural to make mistakes. My friends and I talked about our mistakes on chats. We did not correct the mistakes on our wall. (P13)
“The instructor corrects our mistakes this is something and our friends corrections are something else. We can benefit from our friends corrections too.” (P11) In addition to instructor’s feedback, students seem to give each other feedbacks about their language mistakes. However, it was noticed that participants gave feedback on personal chat conversation in order not to upset their friends by posting the feedback on their walls.When asked whether they could make use of resources on Facebook which the instructor posted, 19 students replied that they downloaded these resources on their computer especially to prepare before an exam. 17 participants agreed that the number of these resources on Facebook need to be increased."I downloaded the resources that the instructor posted before the exam” (P17)."We got copies of worksheets from the instructor but sometimes the pages were mixed or missing but when these resources are online we can download them on our computer and print them.” (P7)“I accessed some resources online but it would be better if these resources were shared more often.” (P20).Analyzing p7 statements it could be argued that Facebook provides on the part of students an ease of access to lesson related resources and it important to note that even p17, who has one of the fewest activities on Facebook, has benefited from these resources.

c. Facebook Related Potential
Facebook is a powerful learning tool that is not only built off of the synchronous and asynchronous technologies that has transformed learning but has also extended the reach of those communicative tools (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Depending on this finding, and
participants view and activities on their Facebook walls the following Facebook related themes have been identified in terms of providing language learning opportunities.

I- Providing exposure to target language and real communication opportunities

When interviewed whether they used Facebook in English or Arabic, 32 participants said they were using it in English. Of these 32 participants, P6 stated she used it in Arabic for 5 weeks to understand what was happening on Facebook and then started using it in English and P4 said she was using Facebook in English and when she realized she could not understand she started using it in Arabic and was still using it in Arabic. Whether the participants used Facebook in target language or not, this study has shown that because activities, videos, comments and social or pedagogical sharing were generally in English, Facebook increases the amount of exposure to target language. Besides, 6 participants added that they contacted foreigners to practice their English. "Although I did not take part posting things but I read my friend’s postings and I had an idea what my friends were doing in terms of English. (P6)"

"At first I was writing very short sentences, however, by putting together what I saw on others pages I could write despite with errors."(P7, P17, P35). "I learned new words and my word treasure increased. I wanted to know what my friends were telling me on their comments they wrote about me. Primary, it had an effect on my vocabulary and I tried to understand grammar better." (P2). "Making friends with foreigners and communicating with them in English, the feeling you get when you can do it very important. I found the chance to express myself and understand other people" (P37). "When nothing is in Arabic, you feel you have to communicate in English and when you feel you have to, you see it is actually enjoyable and you want to communicate more." (P13)

"I was able to distinguish native speakers daily use of language, improved my writing skills and I believe I improved my English by engaging in chat activities with my friends using daily life English." (P16). "At first I used Facebook to present my homework but later it became an addiction because I did not have any other place to practice English. We could always chat on Facebook." (P31). "I met foreigner from England and Italy in Cairo. I am always in touch with them on Facebook and chat with them when they are online" (P 14, P24). "I did not think of Facebook as such an environment to communicate with foreigners at first. However, when I saw I can improve my English on Facebook I started to communicate with foreigners there too." (P2). McGrath & Johnson (2009) stated that because of the nature of language learning process exposure to and communication in target language is an imperative and technology is an indispensable tool in achieving this objective. Moreover, communicative language learning theory alleges that activities that involve real communication promote learning (Richards
Using web 2.0 technologies as a potential to support Foreign Language Teaching

& Rodgers, 2001). Thus, studying the excerpts above and activities on Participants Facebook walls, this study proves that social networking sites such as Facebook can be a tool to boost target language exposure and they are also a means to create real communication needs.

II- Collaborative learning opportunities
37 participants stated that they communicated with their friends on Facebook in English. When Facebook activities of the participants were examined it was seen that only one participant (P25) did not make comments or responded to any kind of postings.

“If we did the photo sharing activity in class there would not be many friends commenting but on a virtual environment everybody can post their comments more comfortable and freely.” (P1)

“We can communicate friends alive and synchronously. When I have my friends and my instructor on Facebook, I can write without making mistakes and they help me when I do not know how to say something.” (P6)

“Facebook is better because on Facebook your friends can see your comments and reply to you and you can also write comments” (P12). As can be observed from the excerpts above, both participants and instructor are engaged in activities that benefit learners to learn from each other. Also, it was seen that collaborative story writing activity was among the most commented activities on Facebook. This finding is supported by Ozsevik's (2010) statement that language learners are supposed to participate in activities that are based on a collaborative approach to learning.

III- Gap reduction between knowledge and practice
Majority of the participants (42 participants) indicated that educational use of Facebook to support foreign language learning provided them opportunities where they were able to use the knowledge they gained in the classroom.”By describing some places, communicating with friends and posting things that we learnt in class on Facebook in English we developed our language skills” (P1) “Sharing what I learned in class with foreigners was very beneficial for me” (P 3, P 11)”I felt that I could really express myself and it was a good opportunity to use on Facebook what I had learned in class. I could say I can talk about myself in English” (P14)”I certainly had the chance to put what I learned into practice. For example, especially when I chatted foreigners, some of them were understanding and they were correcting our mistakes.”(P20). According to Task Based language learning approach learners learn language by interacting communicatively and purposefully while engaged in actives and tasks. These tasks and activities can be those that learners may need to achieve in real life (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As a result of the interviews with participants it could be concluded that instructors could exploit Facebook to provide meaningful tasks and activities for learners to carry out or participants own activities of contacting various people from different parts of the
world is in itself a meaningful task.

**Social Potential**

Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, Witty (2010) conducted a research on faculty and students uses and perceptions of social networking sites. They found out that there was a significant difference between the perceived role of this tool as social, rather than educational. However, students seem much more open to the idea of using Facebook instructionally than do faculty. In this present study the following social potential related themes were discovered.

I- Increasing interaction between students and the instructor

When asked whether, the use of Facebook as a whole class influenced their interaction with the instructor and friends, 23 Participants stated that this application had a positive effect both with the instructor and friends. However, two participants (P15, P17) said they did not notice such an effect at all.

“The instructor was writing comments, my friends were writing comments and I was curious about what they might have written so I usually wanted to be online “(P20). “Facebook affected my relationship with the instructor in a positive way. In classroom I was shy but virtual environment was more enjoyable. We had the chance to get to know him closer”(P7).

“What I like most about Facebook is that it helped us to get to know each other better. It enabled us to get closer with the help of homework.”(P10). “At first I did not know my friends very well at the beginning and I am not very good at remembering names but on Facebook I saw that people who I initially thought were asocial in the classroom were actually very social people. I believe I formed very nice friendship with them and with the instructor. “(P16). We had chances to talk about social matters. I used chatting feature both to create a social environment speaking English and to develop my language skills. (P2).

During school time we talked about lessons and schools, but during summer break it turned into a more social activity like asking what my friends were doing and where they were etc. (P20)

SNSs are historically unique in the amount and detail of personal information that users regularly provide the explicit articulation of relational data as a central part of these sites functioning, and the staggering rate of their adoption (Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, Wimmer & Christakis, 2008). The data on Facebook walls of participants and data gathered from interviews and show that Facebook might contribute to interaction both among students and with the instructor.

II- Psychological support and expression of personal ideas, options and emotions

Various wall message show that participants have been sharing messages with psychological
content as can be observed from a wall conversation. Students were also seen to send wishes about birthday and other special occasions. In addition to this conversation, the following excerpts show that participants have been expressing their personal ideas, options and emotions on their Facebook walls. “Facebook influenced my communication with my instructor positively. Other teachers had used the internet but not this way they were only focused on lessons. We could be more like friends, we could talk more. The instructor could understand our problems both about English and real life. It certainly helped us to be closer and more comfortable” (P6).

“I generally sent personal messages. However, before the exams we often sent messages related to lesson” (P12) “Pictures were posted, comments were made and options were written. These activities were very useful and my English improved this way” (P20). Aforementioned data show that Facebook could be an environment where participants engage in sharing and commenting on personal feelings and emotions.

III- Building interpersonal skills

Another social potential related finding of this study was that Facebook also contributed to personal growth of participants in terms of building interpersonal skills.

“I am not very good at expressing myself but I guess Facebook helped me to express myself better. At least while doing my homework saying I could or could not do this part even helped me. “ (P10). “Facebook helped me to become more social and it brought me and my friends closer. “ (P12). “I understand that it was not only limited to homework so, I started using it mostly to contact people socially and now I am using it in every way possible. “.

Administrative Potential

Considering that majority of participants were previously active Facebook users, it is considered that they will benefit from administrative announcements about classes, office hours, grades or extra-curricular activities on Facebook. The following excerpts also seem to prove this assumption.”I remember checking Facebook to see if there were any announcements about tomorrow’s lesson. I had brought the book the instructor requested when I saw the announcement on Facebook” (P13).

“When resources announcements are posted on Facebook, I both do not lose contact with my friends and get support about the lessons. “(P33).

Concerns

Even though in this study Facebook has been found to contribute to educational, social development of students and could be used to announce administrative affairs, some concerns were observed from data gathered from interviews with participants.
Intrusion to private life
Some participants indicated that they did not like disclosing personal information on Facebook. They were also seen to have concerns about sharing of photos on Facebook.

Abuse of use
Seven participants were also found to be uncomfortable that some people abused Facebook by harassing other users.

Limited internet access
When inquired if they would spend more time on Facebook if they had a comfortable internet access, most of them answered yes. Easy access to internet seems to be one of the most important factors affecting participants time spent on Facebook. It would be possible for participants to engage in activities more if a comfortable environment were created for students to use the internet considering to two participants statements that they only went online to post their homework and engaged in other Facebook activities in the meantime.
Conclusion

Open, evolving SNSs represent remarkable new research opportunities (Lewis et al, 2010). Among them is exploration of Facebook to provide users with language learning and teaching opportunities as a social networking site which promotes the development of online communities through posting of personal information, journals, photos, videos, likes and dislikes, and provide communication channels for persons with similar interests to meet virtually (Simonson, 2009). In this particular study, the use of Facebook for educational purposes of supporting foreign language teaching was explored. Considering primarily data gathered from interviews with 45 participants and data from their Facebook walls, Facebook was found to have (a) teacher related, (b) student related, (c) Facebook related pedagogical potentials.

In addition, Facebook was discovered to provide social potentials such as (a) psychological support and expression of personal ideas, opinions and emotions, (b) increasing interaction between students and the instructors, and (c) building interpersonal skills. It was also found that Facebook can be an ideal environment to provide administrative announcements such as announcements about classes, grades, exams etc. Finally, interviews with participants also provide some concerns about Facebook use such as limited internet access, abuse of use, intrusion to private life in addition to some initial negative feelings. This research also proves Sims (2008) conclusion that technology has developed into a vast social networking where informal and formal learning are potential outcomes of the encounters and interactions between participants. In addition, the findings in this study is compatible with Kabilan and et al (2010) conclusion that if planned appropriately as part of an educational project, the same technologies and features of Facebook would be able to facilitate and produce effectual and meaningful learning of English within an online community of English language learners. However, as Aydemir (2009) suggests training of both students and instructors about web platforms to be used in instruction might mitigate negative attitudes and views on an environment of which they either know little or nothing. In other words, students and instructors could be informed as to the potential of SNSs such as Facebook to help ward off initial negative thoughts and concerns. Future research could focus on exploration of content analysis of participant’s interactions on Facebook accounts to further investigate English language use of participants.
References


Using web 2.0 technologies as a potential to support Foreign Language Teaching


