



Functions and role of social media networks in learning a foreign language: A case study



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the use of social media networks (SMN) by learners in teaching and learning a foreign language. To this end, we conducted a survey of a population of 176 learners. The collected data were analyzed via the SPSS for windows 26.0 program and an analysis of variance was applied to the data. At the coming of our research, first results have allowed us to identify the most popular social media network among student's educational department of French at Gazi University in Turkey. The WhatsApp application due to its simplicity and rapidity of spreading of the information it offers is the social media network most used by learners. In addition to the spreading of information, the ability to share content is also one of the elements of the success of this application. Our analysis suggests that the presence and interaction of learners with teachers of the SMN course is also an important factor in the popularity of these SMN. Sharing educational content and support on SMN such as WhatsApp would have a positive impact on the academic results of community members. The presence and opportunity to interact directly with the teacher on the SMN platform encourages learners to practice and therefore to develop their production skills written in foreign languages.

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1. Introduction

The integration of social media networks in learning a foreign language is important because in Turkey the integration and adoption of distance education via new technologies and social media networks have existed for several years. Many works (Cook and Cook, 1993; Brown, 1994; Gass and Selinker, 1994; Ellis and Ellis, 1994; Lightbown and Spada, 2013; Rapeli, 2016; Qotb, 2008) describe different parameters, processes and contributions of new technologies in learning a second language. Traditional learning methodologies are influenced by ICT (information and communication technologies) (Lu and Churchill, 2014). The effective and efficient use of ICT offers new learning opportunities for learners (Hussein, 2016).

Social media networks are non-centralized media whose content (which will be transparent if it is distributed on a public platform and will be opaque

if the content is shared on a private platform) is created and controlled by the user (Aoun and Jerbi, 2017). With the help of social media networking so users can create public or private information.

A social media networks is therefore defined as an ICT (Interaction and Communication Technology) that allows communication between individuals through many channels (Suominen et al., 2013).

Many statistical institutes confirm the exponential popularity and growth of social media networks. The social media networks (blog, twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc. ...) are channels of communication and spreading of information among young people (especially for young people between 16 and 25 years) (Brice et al., 2015). Social media networks are channels of private sharing (files, messages, images) of building everyday knowledge and are considered - super - media of the interaction (Merilampi, 2014).

In the academic world, learners use social media networks mainly to retrieve information and files and not to create content (Depover and Orivel, 2013). The learner is an active player and the interaction between users and members of the network community. This interaction is the key to the success of social media networks. Social media networks that are created for the purpose of spreading and sharing of academic information. The

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use and access to ICTs in foreign language teaching is an opportunity to provide learners and teachers with authentic teaching tools and real situation. Social media networks are an integral part of these ICTs, hence the purpose of this article, which aims to understand and highlight the role of social media networks in learning a second language by students in the department of language didactics from Gazi University. This statistical research is based on the qualitative analysis of the results of our survey entitled "the place of social networks in learning French »In the Department of French didactics of Gazi University. The purpose of this article is to define and analyze the level of integration of social media networks in learning a foreign language, here French. The question is how social media networks allow, on the one hand, to contribute to the development of the methodology chosen by the teacher and, on the other hand, to be of benefit to learners in learning a second language. In other words, it is a question of examining the impact of the use of SMN by the learners on the improvement and the development of their linguistic skills. Suggest methodological solutions and approaches that can be used by universities and students to improve the use of SMN for educational purposes.

2. Methodology and data collection

The questionnaire consists of 17 Questions. The questionnaire was generated by the Google survey application and online URL link was send to participants. The methodology is based on a corpus collected through questionnaires. A combined qualitative analysis of variance analysis (ANOVA) and a t-test to one factor was applied in order to analyze the subcomponents, the significantly between subcomponents and consolidate our results. The size of the sample being limited it would be awkward to propose a generalization of our results, but our analysis shows a trend.

The investigation was sent to students by email and via the Facebook page of the Department in question. To test the viability, understanding and clarity of the questions a pilot sample of 5 volunteers (from the Department of Teaching the French Language of the Pedagogical Faculty of Gazi University) was realized. Our electronic survey is based on the use and impact of the following social media networks: WhatsApp, Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, SlideShare and Dropbox. To understand the degree of knowledge and mastery (control) of different social media networks used by the student, the respondents had to specify their frequency of use, their motivations, and their knowledge of the different possibilities offered by the social network in question.

The choice of this methodology is based on the work of several researchers (Williams, 2013) who emphasizes that the electronic survey by its rapidity and ease of use allows to reach a large number of participants in a short time.

Indeed, as shown in Table 1, the 176 learners answered our questionnaire in less than 96 hours. Of the 176 participants who responded to the survey, 8 questionnaires were excluded from our analysis because incomplete survey. That is 95% of the respondents who answered all the questions.

Table 1: Number of Students ' responses

Date of response of participants	Number of respondents
15/10/2018	36
16/10/2018	57
17/10/2018	69
18/10/2018	14
Total	176

3. Results and discussion

In the first place it is important to analyze the degree of awareness of students to SMN. Of the respondents, 97.6% of them report having a smartphone (Table 2). 88 % of participants say they use daily and fully master the WhatsApp application. In second position 7.1 % of participants declare to know and use for educational purposes Dropbox. The level of popularity and knowledge of other SMN declines thereafter 1.8 % for Facebook, 1.2 % for Youtube, 1.2 % for LinkedIn and finally only 0.7 % for SlideShare (Table 3). 83% of respondents reported creating a WhatsApp discussion group for each class. Group used primarily for the sharing and spreading of information related to the course (absence of the teacher, classroom, and question related to exams ...). However, it seems according to our results that the application WhatsApp is also used for the sharing of academic content but especially during exams period. These results are similar for file sharing during the review period for the Dropbox application. On the other hand, only 1% of them use the SlideShare site for the sharing of academic content.

Table 2: Frequency of possession of a smartphone

Question	Number of students	Percentage
Do you have a smartphone?	168	100
Yes	164	97.6
No	4	2.4

Table 3: Social networks most used by students for educational purposes

Question	Number of students	Percentage
Which social networks do you use most frequently for your classes?	168	100
WhatsApp	148	88
Facebook	3	1.8
Youtube	2	1.2
Dropbox	12	7.1
LinkedIn	2	1.2
Slideshare	1	0.7

3.1. Effort to obtain information

According to our cohort, 91% of the participants estimate spending between 2 to 6 hours a day on the SMN. The students agree that the SMN (especially the groups created on the WhatsApp application)

allows them to make a gain of concerning time searching for information.

Regarding the spreading of information, the WhatsApp application wins the first place on the podium. When participants are asked about the motives for choosing a SMN. A large majority (88%) of them respond that the interaction with the teacher and the presence of it in the newsgroup is the main reason for choosing the SMN. Rapidity and simplicity of use come in second place. Indeed, according to our sample, the integration and the participation of the teacher in the discussion groups create on the platform WhatsApp their guarantee the viability and the veracity of the information. In case of bad or false information broadcast on the group, the teacher of the course intervenes immediately and rectifies the content of the information. The need for communication between students and teachers is a real determining need in the academic success of learners (Gun, 2018). The success of social media networks and new technologies can be explained by the accessibility and rapidity of access to information (Rapeli, 2016). Social media networks facilitate communication between students and between students and teachers.

The majority of students use Youtube and WhatsApp (because they are quick and easy to use), especially for sharing information about classes (Aoun and Jerbi, 2017). These same students, on the other hand, are unaware of or not aware of the document sharing possibilities provided by the LinkedIn and SlideShare (Aoun and Jerdi, 2017). Some researchers (Qotb, 2008) develop a teaching tool for distance learning in second-language learning. They emphasize the benefits of new information technologies as inputs and opportunities in the development of teaching materials.

3. 2. Role of RS in learning a foreign language

According to the results of the investigation are the students use social media networks in their everyday private life but are little used in SMN the aim of developing their written production skills in French. Only 12% of respondents say they communicate in French about SMN. Although SMN is used for streaming and file sharing, the practice of foreign language directly on the application or social media network site is much less common.

Learners 58% report using the SMN in learning a second language (document sharing, sharing of educational support, help-entered, develop discussion groups on one of the themes of the course).

The presence of the teacher within the group to create in on the WhatsApp application encourages learners to practice the foreign language during the exchange of information. Indeed, 53% of learners say they use the French language during their interactions and exchange on the SMN in case of presence of the teacher on the said network. 77.2% of students reported that they would like all their

teachers use WhatsApp in the context of their courses. Presence and interaction with the teacher seems to be an important factor for students' academic success.

4. Conclusion

It is undeniable that we are only at the beginning of the development of the SMN. It is therefore important to understand the impact of these SMN on learning abilities and more generally on the training of students. Our results converge with those of other authors for whom WhatsApp is the most popular social network and the one most used by learners (Aoun and Jerbi, 2017).

Academic work has shown that using the SlideShare Social media Network increases the academic performance of students (Barhoumi, 2015). It would be appropriate to sensitize students and teachers to this social network. According to our results, online learning via the social media network Youtube or Facebook (and even less with the LinkedIn and SlideShare network) is very weak- only 8% declare using these social networks for academic and learning purposes.

It seems that the Youtube and Facebook platform is used by respondents at non-academic purposes, particularly for their entertainment and other leisure activities. 79% of respondents say the use of SMN for learning has had a beneficial effect. 81% of them say that the use of SMN to prepare their exams had a positive impact on their academic performance and their knowledge levels.

It would therefore be appropriate to suggest to higher establishment of endorser responsibility to train learners to the use of social and other ICT networks while respecting the intellectual property and instilling ethical values.

The presence and interaction with the teacher on SMN seem to be one of the key points of the impact of SMN on learning a foreign language. In order to leave a positive image and show its seriousness to the teacher, students practice French on SMN sites. It is therefore very important to encourage teachers to engage in these social groups of sharing and spreading of content and information.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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