

## The Perspectives of EFL Students towards Social Networking and its Use in ELT

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**Abstract:** *One of the necessities of a successful instruction is the interaction and communication between the teacher and the students. Among all the means of communication, social networking is regarded as a useful tool that assists communication. As the communication gets easier through the social networking, the present study tries to discuss the application of the social networking in an EFL setting from students' perspectives. Thus the study deals with the qualitative research design in which a questionnaire was used. The sample of the study was randomly selected from university students majoring in English at Gonbad University. The participants were first administered the Oxford Placement Test. Then they joined a social networking group to share their ideas and to interact with the teacher and other students. Next, they were administered a survey questionnaire in which they were asked to answer seven questions based on Likert scale and an open ended question about the advantages of communication through social networks and face-to-face communication. The data were analyzed qualitatively and according to the results obtained, the students shared positive ideas toward the application of the social networking in their usual class activities.*

**Keywords:** *Social networking, FaceBook, Twitter, Yahoo, Google+*

### Introduction

Social networking plays an important role in the world. Social networking sites are now one of the most current ways to search for every day necessities and work opportunities. It is changing the way people communicate. People around the world are using social network for many purposes. Entertainment, marketing, business and connecting with customers are the main purposes that engage people in social networking. In educational settings, it is becoming one of vital requirements for both teachers and students.

Social networking is becoming an essential part of daily life. Scholars not only investigated the role of social networking in general but also they discussed the ways the social networking affect the educational areas.

According to Baran (2013), numerous social networking sites were integrated with education. As the students engage with the social networking sites, they carry the conversation outside of the formal teaching environments.

Students are making a huge revolution to join the social networking websites in order to communicate with others. As the students communicate through social networking, they make progress in many abilities. Also, the social networking in the near future might become the main channel to communicate for most of people in all over the world. Education and training through the Internet is becoming more obvious and common in the world. In many developing countries as well as in Iran, colleges are being interested in online training. They attempt to absorb pupils to use the Internet to perform their training process. The ministry of higher education needs to develop appropriate policies and strategies on how the students and instructors benefit from the social networking websites.

Additionally, different institutions even nowadays are developing groups on several websites (Mehmood & Teswir, 2013). The improved usage of websites has become a worldwide phenomenon for quite some time. What began out as being a hobby for several computer literate people has converted to a social norm and existence-style for individuals from around the globe (Boyd & Ellison 2007). Teens and teenagers have especially recognized these internet sites as a means to be able to contact their peers, share information, reinvent their personas, and showcase their social lives (Boyd & Ellison 2007). While using technology as a helpful device for getting together with others along with the recognition on the Internet, Internet sites are now being an activity mainly on the web, with websites.

Recently there have been radical developments in the use of new technology for using language learning materials. In a broad sense, these have been welcomed but a number of scholars in this field have pointed out the dangers of too much dependence on online materials. Social networking services (SNS) have developed so that it is being a virtually unavoidable media for social interaction in recent years and this phenomenon has attracted extensive attention in the field of communication. Scholars demonstrate a great interest in the effect of SNS on the ways in which relationships and networks are established, mediated and maintained, and consequently the change they bring to our culture (Zhang and Leung, 2014).

Furthermore, Khan (2009) claim that Facebook users often experience poor performance academically. Similarly, some claim that social media is negatively associated with academic performance of students and is a lot more momentous than its advantages. Internet addiction consequently gave rise in the Internet usage within the last couple of decades. Nalwa and Anand (2003) recommended that addicted users seem to prefer using social networking sites in a way that ultimately leads to poor academic performance. According to Kirschner and Karpinski (2009), social networking websites users devote few hours to their studies in comparison to

nonusers did and subsequently had lower GPAs. They also mentioned that among various unique interruptions of every group, social networks remain the major hobby of the current generation.

Barsky and Purdon (2006) stated that social networking websites collect information about the users. These websites also share users' information. These websites are free and help users easily make groups engaged with the interest in the form of multimedia. Moreover, Din and Haron (2012) stated that the social networking sites allows fast communication among people. They commented that the online communication makes it possible to make an environment in which people communicate with one another. It is obvious that online social networking as an educational tool affects communication and interaction between students and teachers. As a result the degree of the effect and the area in which it may engage are the issues that are almost unknown for us.

The students' motivation toward learning a material plays an important role in their learning. They become motivated or demotivated in different situations toward different educational tools. This study considers the EFL students' motivation toward developing their speaking ability along with the application of social networking during the instruction. Social networking is one of the new tools in EFL settings which requires much more attention and needs to be examined. Thus, the closer exploration of the social networking and its effects on language skills of EFL learners is essential.

### ***Research Questions***

Based on the above mentioned problem, I try to answer the following question:

1. Do the students share positive opinions toward social networking in an EFL setting?
2. What are the advantages or disadvantages of the social networking compared with face-to-face communication from students' perspectives?

### **Methodology**

#### ***Participants***

This study was conducted with participation of the students at the Gonbad Kavous State University, Iran. In both experimental and control groups there were 32 female and male students, ranged in age from 19 to 29. The sample of this study were chosen among 110 university students. Students in the study comprised native speakers of Turkmen, Turkish and Persian who were freshman university students. The institute was chosen because it is equipped with many facilities, such as language labs and internet access. It is one of the vital requirements for conducting the present study to providing most of the students with internet. Among whole population of the experiment, those who obtained one standard deviation below and above mean

were selected. 64 students had the criteria to participate in the study. Among 64 students randomly 32 students were selected to participate in this study.

### ***Instrumentation***

#### *Oxford Placement Test*

This test was administered to determine the language proficiency level of the participants and classify them into the sample. This test consisted of 60 items which was developed by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. OPT test was used to specify the sample of the experiment among 110 available students in the university of Gonbad.

#### *Questionnaire Survey*

The questionnaire includes seven questions based on Likert scale. The questionnaire was adopted from the questionnaire developed by Jahan and Zabed Ahmad (2012). Seven questions deal with the degree of efficiency of the application of the social networking in EFL settings.

An open ended question also attached to the end of the survey questionnaire. The questions asked students about the advantages or disadvantages of the communication through social networking compared with face-to-face communication. The participants wrote their ideas in at least one sentence. These questions attempted to seek answers for the second research question of the present study.

#### *Social Networking Engagement*

In order to apply the treatment on the experimental group, the students joined a social group in the one of the most operative websites. The website [WWW.YAHOO.COM](http://WWW.YAHOO.COM) and the group made by the author, [tefliran/groups.yahoo.com](http://tefliran/groups.yahoo.com), were selected.

### ***Treatment***

Students in the experimental group became a member of the social group “tefliran/groups.yahoo.com” exactly at the beginning of the study. For the duration of three months and 15 sessions at all and 45 minutes per a session, they were on the net to communicate with other members of the group. In every session on the net, the students took part in the discussion and shared their ideas through messaging and giving comments. In this social group, the participants were actively present in each session on the net.

### ***Procedure***

In order to determine the role of social hubs on the speaking ability of students, Oxford Placement Test was administered to 110 young learners out of whom those whose scores lie

between one SD below and above the mean were selected for the study. The participants were 32 EFL students. They were subjected to a treatment that dealt with the social networking on the net. After the period of the instruction ended, the sample was given the questionnaire. The students answered the questionnaire form. Finally the data were analyzed to get meaningful outcomes.

## Results

### *Result of the Oxford Placement Test*

In order to have homogenized participants in terms of their general English language proficiency, the Oxford Placement Test was administered. The descriptive statistics for the OPT test are displayed in following table 1.

Table 1: The Descriptive Statistics of the OPT Test

#### Statistics

For OPT test

N	Valid	110
	Missing	0
Mean		69.9182
Median		69.0000
Std. Deviation		12.70565
Variance		161.434
Minimum		38.00
Maximum		95.00

Out of 110 participants, 70 were considered as homogenous members based on one SD above and one SD below the mean.

### *Analysis of the First Research Question*

The seven questions were based on Likert scale. Table 2 represents the results obtained from the students' responses.

Table 2: Results of the Questionnaire Survey

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Question 1	32	3.0	5.0	4.000	.0000
Question 2	32	4.0	5.0	4.000	.0000
Question 3	32	3.0	5.0	4.000	.0000
Question 4	32	4.0	5.0	4.000	.0000
Question 5	32	3.0	5.0	4.000	.0000
Question 6	32	3.0	5.0	4.000	.0000
Question 7	32	1.0	2.0	1.031	.0000
Valid (listwise)	N 32				

Questions one to six are positive responses in which students agreed that the usage of the treatment in this study really helped them to increase their motivation toward learning speaking ability. Most of the students shared positive opinions as the average of the responses for the first part of the questionnaire including the six questions. The seventh question was a negatively oriented toward the application of social networking. The responses for this questionnaire were relatively low scores. The students commonly strongly disagreed in their responses. Thus, the responses revealed that the application of social networking as the treatment for this study motivated the students to develop their speaking ability. As it is clear, most of the students shared the same opinions about the effectiveness of social networking on their performance.

### ***Results of the Second Research Question***

Finally, the students in the experimental group were asked to write their comments about the advantages of social networking compared with face-to-face communication. The responses were gathered and came below:

1. *Social networking helps me keep in touch with people who live far away.*
2. *I can speak to people who are not accessible usually more regularly.*
3. *Social networking helps me locate old friends.*
4. *I can speak to more people at the same time when I use social networks.*
5. *I can speak to more people on the net than by phone or face-to-face communication.*
6. *Communicating with someone you don't know over the internet is extremely fool-hardy and dangerous.*
7. *Communication with an unknown person will gives me some experience.*
8. *We can have exchange of different ideas and thoughts on the net enjoying that nobody knows our identity.*
9. *Connecting to other people who have the same interest, I can learn and share information with others whom I may not have had the opportunity to interact with.*
10. *Through collaborating with other students and teachers through online social networking, children are able to build stronger school communities.*
11. *I can find people who have the same interest as me on the net.*
12. *The social networking is more rapid and then traditional ways of communication.*

As the students agreed above, the communication through social networking is regarded as an effective tool in this major. The students shared relatively positive opinions toward social networking in comparison to face-to-face communication.

### ***Discussion***

There are several studies that endorse the findings of the present study such as Turkle (1984) and Heim (1993). They claimed that social networking sites must change and become more interactive. Also, the social networks must be generalized to actual use. According to Tyson (2009), social networking websites and their operators must consider users' interest and they should encourage and support the users.

Regan and Seeves (2010) conducted a research and analyzed the way how the social networking websites empower students to make friendship through communication on the net. They stated that young people are the first to use social networking sites as they are interested in interactions and group relations.

The online survey was conducted by Stevenson and Liu (2010) to collect information about how users of language learning use social networking websites them for learning and social communication. Based on their findings, the use of language learning websites relatively changes the quality of interaction with the languages.

According to Ezekiel and Oweye (2013), the students' exposure to social media is to a very great extent. Their findings indicate that Facebook is the most popular social networking website among the existing websites. The students of Kogi State University prefer to use Facebook in order to communicate. Also, the paper concludes that students' interest to use social media by the students of Kogi negatively affect their academic performance. Finally, their paper comments that the students should pay least attention to social networking websites and concentrate more on their educational activities.

The findings of this paper also are in line with Mehmood and Taswir (2013). They discussed the effect of social networking sites on academic performance of students. Their research investigated the pedagogical impacts of social networking sites on undergraduate students at the college of applied sciences, Nizwa, Oman. They concluded that the social tools have an important role in information sharing and general consciousness of student communities. Further, according to Khan (2009), the social network users encounter low performance academically. His findings is in contrast with findings of the present study.

### **Conclusion**

According to the results, the students shared positive opinions toward social networking. Social networking in Iran is regarded as an entertaining device for the non-educational purposes. With the great influence that the internet and social networking had on people's life, no one can ignore the role of the new technology in education. The attitude toward practical usage of social networks should be one of the priorship of the policy makers. This paper wants to establish a movement to enhance the role of the social networking in EFL educational settings.

This study also demonstrated that the EFL students had a good perspective about the social networking as an educational tool. According to the students' ideas, the social networking is regarded as a useful device to develop students' speaking skill. As a result, this study illustrates that the attention to the social networking should increase especially in EFL classrooms. Students are interested in learning or developing their language skills using new technology as well as using social networks.

### ***Suggestions for Further Research***

In order to enhance and encourage the using of social networks in EFL classrooms, the following researches need to be performed:

1. A study is required to focus more on students' perspectives toward using social networking in their education.
2. Another study may concentrate on the teachers' perspectives about the social networking.
3. A study is needed to discuss the difficulty of the application of social networks from both of teachers and students' perspectives.
4. One may consider the effect of the social networks on grammar, spelling, writing, reading and other language skills of EFL learners in his/her study.
5. Further research is needed to find ways to apply the social networking process in the EFL classrooms.
6. Because of limitation of students' access to some social networking websites, it is recommended that one studies the effect of social networks in another context.
7. One can work on the effect of social networking on four main language skills in different situations.

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