



## **SUDANESE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING FACEBOOK FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper aims to explore Sudanese students' perception of using Facebook for vocabulary learning at university level. Numerous studies have undertaken exploration on the use of innovative methodologies for foreign language learning. However, the role of Facebook in such context is underexplored, culminating in this particular work. 100 first and second year students pursuing their Bachelor degree with major in English at University of AL Imam AL Mahdi of the academic year 2016-2017 were selected to take part in this study. Quantitative research method was utilized to yield perspective understanding of their involvement with the particular platform. The findings reveal that the students have positive perceptions regarding the use of Facebook for vocabulary learning. The students have also expressed the assistance of Facebook in learning new things through the useful information available on the site. This paper concludes that Facebook is a potential platform for improvement of university students' vocabulary knowledge.*

**Keywords:** Facebook, language learning, social media, Sudan, vocabulary, tertiary education

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Achieving acceptable English vocabulary and becoming skilled in the second language has always been a challenge for foreign students. However, the evolving variety of Internet devices and Applications for instructive purposes is an alternative approach towards bolstering vocabulary learning efforts. Its potential towards improving vocabulary acquisition and language learning among students majoring in English is undeniable. In today's era of continuous digital revolution and information utilization, correspondence advances and virtual Internet usage are routine. As an indispensable aspect in daily life, social networking sites have been integrated into various parts of college students' lives including learning (Rashid & Rahman, 2014). In terms of social media, extraordinary enthusiasm is created from a virtual friend packaged as the instructor. Web 2.0 and social networking sites are subject to further expansion due to social connectedness and students' investment in terms of time invested for various Internet services.

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have recently displayed the booming accessibility and widespread use. Besides being used for teaching purposes, social media sites may serve as the primary means of communication alongside the additional benefits (Rashid & Yunus, 2016). Communication construction, distribution of knowledge, and user-based collaboration have also been encouraged. Additionally, Facebook is an informal communication site that

“permits people to connect with different users through conversation, profiles, photos, and videos exchanges” (Terantino & Graf, 2011, p. 44).

Several studies reveal that using Facebook has helped students in enhancing their language learning (e.g. Shih, 2011; Yunus & Salehi, 2012; Hasan et al., 2016). In fact, language instructors have carefully considered the use of technology in language education. This is done by employing online diaries method to concentrate on literacy practice and self-expression (Meechai, 2010), using blogs to motivate students to write (Boonmoh, 2010), using blogs to inspire students to write, and using Web Quests in English Foreign Language (EFL) reading class for critical thinking analysis (Puthikanon, 2009). Despite the potential it poses in the EFL setting in terms of maximizing learning capacity beyond classroom limits, Facebook has not been subjected to empirical investigations. Sudanese college students use Facebook and spend a lot of time online, but the extent to which social networks are being used for educational purposes is relatively unknown.

Manan, Alias, and Pandian (2012) recommend that social media may be used to build the low quality of English usage, yet has neglected to conclusively prove its impact on students' vocabulary learning. Furthermore, Dixon (2011) affirms that Facebook engagement has not been found to directly compensate precisely towards vocabulary learning for EFL learners or non-native speakers. The quantity of time spent on Facebook every day, the different ways of site involvement, and the identification of vocabulary learning success measures for EFL learners have been found to yield no significant relationship.

This study explores the Sudanese students' experiences of Facebook use and their perceptions towards the influence of Facebook use on English proficiency. By understanding student views, vocabulary learning can be made more interesting and meaningful, leading to successful outcomes. This study may be useful for English teachers and students as it may provide some insights into Facebook use especially in learning vocabulary. Some research has been conducted to highlight the prominent use of social media in learning English as a second language. However, studies which focus on the vocabulary learning in Arab nations are relatively less. Hence this study is carried out to fill in the gap in the literature.

## **2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Vocabulary Learning**

As the core of any language learning, vocabulary is probably the most challenging and time-consuming aspect of a foreign language (Rashid, 2011). It requires time and flows continuously once the fundamentals of language (i.e. pronunciation, orthography, and basic grammar) have been mastered. Throughout this process, learners become familiarized with the words they encounter, as new vocabulary acquisition is determined by the usage frequency and various forms and contextual encounters. Context is crucial when teaching vocabulary (Warschauer, 1995). In the study, 124 university language learners studying English as an additional subject found that acquiring vocabulary is difficult. Teachers often assume that their students can deal with vocabulary building on their own out of class, but learners are generally ill-equipped for the learning procedures and find it difficult to solve.

## **2.2 Previous studies**

Hew (2011) reveals three principle areas of educational research relating to Facebook that have been explored up until recently: (a) students' use of Facebook or extent of Facebook use (i.e. time spent on Facebook each day, learner's intention for using Facebook, or other aspects that measure these usage profiles), (b) the impact of Facebook use, and (c) dispositions toward Facebook. Eteokleous et al. (2012) specifically focus on literature gap regarding the impact of social networking sites towards promoting, enhancing and supporting teaching and learning processes. By examining the best practice policies for Facebook integration for educational purposes, they suggest that learners should show positive views towards social networking sites due to increased teacher-student and student-student interaction in a learning community. The findings indicated that learners have positive learning experiences with the use of Facebook as it increases collaborations. Facebook has been found to enhance effective learning, communication, collaboration, student motivation, and student opportunities for frequent interaction with their educators and classmates.

The standards of incidental learning have yielded guidelines stating that firstly, any unexpected or impromptu learning is an outcome of different activities, whether academic or non-academic in nature (Kerka, 2000). Numerous scientists have agreed that incidental learning is active when a computer and its applications are combined in the learning process (Almer, Holzinger, Maurer, & Pichler, 2001). Therefore, it has been suggested that, as opposed to deliberate learning, learning may be unexpected, necessitating educators to be aware of any learning results that may positively or negatively affect learners. Based on the reviews conducted, Facebook has shown particularly positive effect for EFL environment, indicating its values towards allowing new vocabulary learning for learners. The conclusions that have been made include: Facebook (a) allows the possibility of synergistic and agreeable realization of student-educator and learner-learner advanced communication, and (b) helps students to overcome any linguistic restrictions and assists the conveyance of opinions and thoughts (Shih, 2011).

Kaya (2006) explored the viability of versatile Facebook usage for vocabulary learning by examining the advantage of adopting the application to benefit second language vocabulary acquisition. Two types of learning-style based materials for English vocabulary learning have been developed for 145 Japanese college students who received computerized vocabulary teaching based on their learning preferences. The outcomes have demonstrated no remarkable contrasts on vocabulary accomplishment between the experimental group and control group.

Mehmood and Taswir (2013) conducted a study of the impact of social network participation on student linguistics, revealing that constant communication on social networks have yielded linguistic habit changes. The learners have also highlighted the use of slang language when communicating that adversely affects students' language skills in the classroom. Liu (2010) points out the prospect of Facebook as a valuable resource to sustain students' educational communication. As the most widespread social network platform for university students, Facebook is also the latest example of communication technologies that have been broadly accepted.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

In this study, a questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire contains 12 items. A total of 100 students aged between 20 and 22 years old

were asked to complete the questionnaire. However, only 85 respondents returned the completed questionnaire. The respondents were the first and second year students at the AL Imam AL Mahdi University in Sudan. They were chosen as per the inclusion criteria set: 1) relatively higher performance in their last exams by obtaining marks above 80%, because they did not show linguistics problem 2) in the second year of undergraduate program, indicating the learning for both receptive and productive English language skills, and 3) native speakers of Arabic language.

#### **4.0 DATA ANALYSIS**

Out of the total 85 participants, 84 per cent strongly agreed that participation in Facebook has inculcated positive impact attitude in learning English vocabulary. Nine per cent of the respondents agreed, while four per cent strongly disagreed with the statement. Only three participants disagreed with this statement.

A total of 67 per cent of participants strongly agreed that Facebook is an environment that enhances students' motivation to communicate in English to discover new words, while 18 per cent agreed to the statement. Meanwhile, eight per cent strongly disagreed, whereas seven participants disagreed with this statement.

80 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook can help to increase motivation and enhance student achievement by affecting student attitude and helping them feel more independent to learn vocabulary. 12 per cent of the respondents agreed, six per cent strongly disagreed, while only two participants disagreed with this statement.

58 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook encourages students to spend more time learning English vocabulary, while 12 per cent of the respondents agreed to this statement. In contrast, 13 per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed and 17 participants disagreed with this statement.

34 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that the use of Facebook develops a form of communication that affects student linguistic habits in learning vocabularies. 55 per cent of the respondents agreed, while five per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed with this statement. The final six participants disagreed with this statement.

92 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that despite assistances that come from student participation on Facebook, its misuse can affect students' academic life. Seven per cent of the respondents agreed, while one per cent strongly disagreed. No one disagreed with this statement.

With regards to the statement whether Facebook encourages learning vocabulary outside the classroom, 12 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. 71 per cent of the respondents agreed, while 14 per cent strongly disagreed with the statement. Three participants expressed their disagreement with this statement.

48 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook helps in visualizing the aim of English vocabulary learning more clearly. 29 per cent of the respondents agreed to this statement, while 20 per cent strongly disagreed with the statement. Three participants disagreed with this statement.

48 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that using an online instant messaging program on Facebook with a native speaker has helped in improving vocabulary. 29 per cent of the respondents agreed, whereas 20 per cent strongly disagreed with this statement. Three participants disagreed with this statement.

With regards to the statement whether Facebook offers enough opportunities to students to promote themselves and their activities in learning vocabulary, 14 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. 61 per cent of the respondents agreed, whereas 14 per cent strongly disagreed with this statement. Six participants disagreed with the statement.

22 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook improves interpersonal communication between students in terms of learning vocabulary. 51 per cent of the respondents agreed to this statement, while 19 per cent strongly disagreed with this statement. Eight participants disagreed with this statement.

For the statement: Facebook influences the students, who learn English as a foreign language, to use words and expressions that are not grammatically correct, 12 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. 23 per cent of the respondents agreed, while 58 per cent strongly disagreed with this statement. Seven participants disagreed with the statement.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study suggest that the students have a positive attitude towards the use of Facebook in the process of learning foreign languages. Moreover, the data have reflected the usefulness of Facebook to facilitate vocabulary learning by employing visual, textual and audible materials online, enhancing focus on targeted words quickly. Furthermore, language learning on Facebook has a potential to be used as a supplementary technique for classroom teaching by allocating the students with active roles of content creation.

The findings have also exposed the fact that these activities are a fun way of learning rather than being burdensome, as the students indicated that they completed the learning tasks in a less stressful and more enjoyable way. Such activities are a representation of student accountability and awareness for their learning, producing self-autonomous learners. Another salient point to be highlighted is the activities on Facebook that the students engage in are spontaneous and pleasant as they create contents and share with fellow peers. However, there are some negative remarks on the use of Facebook for vocabulary learning. Some students do not prefer to spend time on Facebook, which parallels to the earlier findings by Horst, Cobb, and Nicolae (2005).

This study has confirmed that the use of Facebook may lead to positive learning results, such as improving students' vocabulary learning skills, as suggested by Hiew (2012) and Shih (2011). The respondents in this study have expressed the benefits they attain from Facebook use, especially the access to useful information and additional educational materials posted by their friends. As a result, the web application has served as an efficient means of simplifying learning processes by providing important English knowledge. Furthermore, the findings have also shown that the students feel very motivated to use Facebook for learning purposes, with most of them accessing any information posted in the relevant Facebook groups. Therefore, Facebook and other social networks can be used as optional learning tools for students to practice and review contents studied in classroom.

However, instructors should bear in mind that Facebook is an addition, not a replacement to classroom teaching.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the student perception of using Facebook for vocabulary learning at the university level in Sudan. The findings point towards the potential of social media as an instructional tool for vocabulary learning and the benefits that may be gained by the learners who use the site for educational purposes. The findings of this study support the earlier findings by Shih (2011) and Hasan et al. (2016) that Facebook should be used as an educational tool to engage English language learners in an online community which is useful for the development of English language proficiency.

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