The Effects of Using a Facebook Group in Teaching a Foreign Language

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Abstract
Nothing remains the same, nor does the foreign language teaching. In the past and now in most countries, where the foreign language is taught in an unnatural environment, teaching a language starts and ends in the class with applying different approaches, which were popular in different past years, and expect the students to learn the language well. However, people born after 1980 are called digital Natives who are characterized as having access to networked digital technologies and the skills to use those technologies. Major parts of Digital Natives’ lives and daily activities are mediated by digital technologies, so why don’t we support their learning with a social networking site like Facebook by establishing a group and sharing related materials to improve their learning and motivate them? This paper presents data collected from a questionnaire which was applied to 24 participants in 2014 fall term at Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages, and evaluates the participants’ perception, including views on the effectiveness of using this Facebook group.

Keywords: Facebook group, Effectiveness in language learning, students' perception, social networking
Introduction

“Teaching as you were taught” will no longer work.

Fawcett g. and Juliana M. (2002)
I don’t know how you were taught English, but I was taught it in a class with the teacher’s salutation -Good morning students, and the students’ response -Good morning teacher. Then went on with the instruction -Open your books page … and the lesson would start and end in the class with the teacher’s presentation, and some practice activities. All things we did were limited with the class and its four walls. Is it the way we need to follow? I guess the answer is no as the new generation is keen on technology and they have the ability to use the technology professionally. So, what can be done? I believe that we can benefit from the new generation being keen on technology. A recent research shows that college students are spending close to half of their waking hours on their smartphones. Therefore, many educators and researchers have a think about how to benefit from the technology to help students improve their learning.

Teenagers and young adults, constituting the majority of language learners, use social networking sites commonly and actively. Facebook, whose user number is over one billion, is listed as having potential applications for teaching and learning. Considering the large number of students on Facebook often actively participating in discussions and groups, we cannot ignore its potential as an educational tool. Therefore, as an instructor teaching over 18 years I wanted to take benefit from this potential by forming a Facebook group and using it outside the classroom for four main purposes: Sharing related materials about newly learned structure, phrases, vocabulary or reading materials to consolidate their learning; providing a chance for the students to interact with their classmates and teachers in case they ask a question or share something; informing them about all tasks they are supposed to do and motivating them to believe in themselves and feel secure.

This study has been designed to explore the perception of my students about using the Facebook group outside the classroom. The paper presents data collected from a survey which was applied in my 2014 fall term A2 according to CEFR level class students at Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages, and evaluates their perception, including views on the effectiveness of using the Facebook group.

Review of Literature

Integrating the technology and social networking sites, especially Facebook because of its huge number of users, into teaching&learning process is suggested as a result of some researches in the technology age. Some studies focusing on the usage of Facebook as an educational tool have shown its undeniable potential. Bosch (2009) states that Facebook is listed as having potential applications for teaching and learning. If one considers the large numbers of students on Facebook often actively participating in discussions and groups, it cannot be ignored as a potential educational tool. Matthews (2006) sees Facebook as an opportunity to directly reach over 75 percent of his target audience. Timonidou (2012) focuses on those who are willing to use Facebook for educational purposes, and he sees it as a valuable source of academic as well as social benefits. He believes that just like with any other tool,
Facebook or any other SNS, can be used for many different purposes, including education, that are only limited by our imagination. Duboff (2007) analyzes faculty members’ reflections stating their posts on Facebook indicated to students that they were part of the same academic community, and that it helped break down barriers between themselves and students. Of course the literature is not limited with them, but merely with these results we can easily arrive at a conclusion that Facebook can be used as a potential tool for education.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research aims to demonstrate whether forming a Facebook group and using it to benefit from its potential as an educational tool has efficacy in language learning. Another concern is to find out the participants’ perception of using the Facebook group we formed to be used outside the class for different purposes.

**Our Facebook Group**

![Facebook group interface](image)

The Facebook group we would be using in my classes was formed and the students were invited to be a member of it. It was a closed group what meant no one could
access it except my students, and accepted only the students I would be teaching English during the fall term 2014-2015. Completing the process of forming the group, I started to use it for the aims (sharing some extra activities to consolidate their learning, to inform them about their responsibilities, to create an atmosphere for interaction between the teacher and their classmates and to motivate them before the exams) I had planned.

**Shared Samples Via the Group**

**Materials to consolidate their learning**

**Interaction between the teacher and students**

**Information about their tasks**

**Messages to motivate**

**Methodology**

Through the end of 15 week teaching term eight online poll questions addressing the target of the group were designed on Survey Monkey. The address was shared on the group page and the participants were asked to answer the questions so that I could see their perception towards the use of this group. The data gathered from 24 students were evaluated and commented on according to data percentage.
Research Questions

Eight questions based on my experience and literature review were designed by myself and asked to the participants to find out what they thought about and how they perceived the group.

1. Is it a good idea to be in contact with your classmates and teacher via a group?
   a. Yes    b. No
2. Do you find our Facebook group useful?
   a. Yes    b. No
3. How often do you log into our group?
   a. Once a day    b. More than once a day
   c. Once in 2-3 days    d. Once a week
4. Why do you log into the group?
   a. To see what is posted
   b. To ask a question
   c. To interact with classmates
5. How much time do you spend in our group?
   a. Around one hour    b. More than one hour
6. Do you think that the things posted on the group are helpful?
   a. Yes    b. No
7. What is the most effective purpose of the group?
   a. To be in touch with my classmates and teacher
   b. To study with different materials
   c. To be informed about everything
   d. Teacher’s motivation
8. Do you think that the group has a positive impact on your learning?
   a. Yes    b. No

Participants

The participants of this study were the students I taught English at Anadolu University, School of Foreign Languages in the Fall term 2014-2015 academic year. Their level is A2 according to CEFR. They are degree students aged between 18-25 and they study English obligatorily or optionally at least for a year before they start to study at their faculties.

Results and Discussions

The data gathered from 24 students, were evaluated and commented on according to data percentage
Results

Question 1. Is it a good idea to be in contact with your classmates and teacher via a group?

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<th>Yarıt Seçenekleri</th>
<th>Yaritlar</th>
<th>Toplam Sayı</th>
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All of the students respond to the question saying yes, which means that they all think that having a group is a good idea to be in contact with their classmates and teacher.

Question 2. Do you find our Facebook group useful?

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Again all of the students respond to the question saying yes, which means that they find the group useful.
Question 3. How often do you log into our group?

- a. Once in a day 33.33%
- b. More than once a day 33.33%
- c. Once in 2-3 days 16.67%
- d. Once a week 16.67%

Four different percentages show that 66.66% of the participants log into the group once or more than once a day, which shows that the majority of them follow the group’s posting daily; 16.67% says once in 2-3 days, and 16.67% answer the question stating once a week, which means all the students have a look at the group at least once a week.

Question 4. Why do you log into the group?

- a. To see what is posted 86.96%
- b. To ask a question 26.09%
- c. To interact with classmates 21.74%

For the question searching for the reason why the students log into the group the participants have the chance to choose more than one choice. The results show that 86.96% to see what is posted, 26.09% to ask a question and 21.74 to interact with classmates. Nearly all of the students wonder what is posted as well as half of them benefit from the group to ask a question or to interact with classmates.
Question 5. How much time do you spend in our group?

- Nearly one hour 95.45%
- More than one hour 4.55%

The result of the question searching for the time the students spend in the group shows that nearly all of the students spend nearly one hour in the group, which proves that the students check and do the posting as well as they interact or ask questions.

Question 6. Do you think that the things posted on the group are helpful?

- Yes 100%
- No 0%

This result can be interpreted that the students benefit from whatever is done via the group as 100% finds the things helpful.
Question 7. What is the most effective purpose of the group?

a. To be in touch with my classmates and teacher 52.17%

b. To study with different materials 47.83%

c. To be informed about everything 56.52%

d. Teacher’s motivation 17.39%

Similar to question 4, for the question searching for what the most effective purpose of the group is the participants have the chance to choose more than one choice. The results show that 100% of them think that the most effective purpose of the group is to be in touch with their classmates and teacher, and to study with different materials, which can be interpreted as learning continues outside the class. 56.52% log into to be informed about everything, and 17.39% appreciate the teacher’s motivation.

Question 8. Do you think that the group has a positive impact on your learning?

a. Yes 95.24%  
b. No 4.76%

The result of the question looking for whether the group has a positive impact on the students’ learning shows that close to 100% (95.24%) think that it has, while 4.76% think it doesn’t.
Conclusion

It can be concluded that forming a Facebook group to share related materials to supplement the newly learned topics, to give a chance to interact with their classmates and teacher, to inform them about all tasks they are supposed to do and to post some messages to motivate them is an effective and preferred way in learning a language. The findings demonstrate that being in contact every time is a good idea and forming a Facebook group to be used outside the classroom for different purposes is useful. The participants think that the sharings are helpful and effective. What is more, they are curious about what is shared and they follow the group’s sharings daily spending at least one hour to check and do extra activities. It seems that the group has a positive impact on their learning.

To put in a nutshell, from the results of the survey it can be concluded that forming a group and using it outside the classroom is effective in many ways. Most of the students are pleased to use the group which has a positive impact on their learning.

Implications

As Davis (2006) states the Internet has become a conduit where people can learn, share, and collaborate in ways not possible years before. We are in a technological era and we need to use it not to become old fashioned. In other words, we cannot teach as we were taught years before.

For sure, technology will not replace a teacher, but if a teacher doesn’t use technology, they will be replaced by a teacher who does.
References

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Fawcett g. and Juliana M. 2002 Teaching in the Digital Age: "Teaching as You Were Taught" Won't Work


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