

BELIEFS ON THE USE OF FACEBOOK AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate teachers' and students' beliefs regarding the use of Facebook as a communication tool in education in general and in L2 learning in particular. A group of 49 teachers (32 EFL teachers and 17 language professors) and 19 EFL students answered a questionnaire sent by email. Results of the study suggest that teachers are aware of how Facebook may be used as a communication tool with students although not many of them use it as such, and some use with reluctance and concern regarding the need to preserve their credibility and professionalism. Regarding students' perception of Facebook as a teacher-student communication tool, results of the study suggest that in general, they do not see a relation between teacher's self-disclosure on Facebook and teacher credibility and feel that Facebook may be a relevant tool to help them learn the L2.

Keywords: Facebook, beliefs, teacher-student communication, L2 learning

RESUMO

Este trabalho investiga crenças de professores e alunos sobre o uso do Facebook como ferramenta de comunicação na educação em geral e no aprendizado de L2. Quarenta e nove professores (32 de inglês e 17 de letras) e 19 alunos de inglês responderam um questionário enviado por email. Resultados do estudo sugerem que os professores estão cientes de como o Facebook pode ser usado como ferramenta de comunicação com alunos ainda que eles não o usem como tal e tenham certa preocupação com a necessidade de preservar sua credibilidade e profissionalismo. Em relação à percepção dos alunos sobre o uso de Facebook como ferramenta de comunicação entre alunos e professores, os resultados do estudo sugerem que em geral eles não vêem relação entre a auto-revelação de professores no Facebook e a credibilidade dos mesmos e pensam que o Facebook pode ser uma ferramenta relevante no aprendizado de L2.

Palavras-chave: Facebook, crenças, comunicação entre alunos e professores, aprendizado de L2

INTRODUCTION

We live in a globalized world where people transmit information through clicks and mostly in English. In this context, it is possible to suggest that both English as a lingua franca and digital literacy are forms of social mediation (FINARDI, PREBIANCA & MOMM, 2013). Given the importance of exchanging information in English and through the internet stressed in Finardi et al. (2013), it is possible to suggest that the use of social networks in the context of L2 education represents a relevant step towards the development of digital, linguistic and social literacies. Yet, little is known about how

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such social networks are (or not) being used in this context. The aim of this study is to fill in this gap by contributing with insights from the investigation of teachers' and students' beliefs on the use of Facebook as a communication tool in education in general and in the context of L2 education in particular.

The advent of the internet has changed the way we see the world and relate to what happens in it and in that sense we can say the internet changed the way we live. The development of the WEB 2.0 has caused a remarkable change in how we deal with information, relationships and, as an obvious consequence, how we teach and learn. The phenomenon of SNS was made possible by the development of WEB 2.0 which is defined by Muñoz and Towner (2011) as the Web to read and write and which has influenced the way people use the internet to the point that the once revolutionary e-mail communication is now being replaced by communication through SNS (MATTAR, 2012).

According to O'Reilly (2005) individuals are now able to contribute with content online with a new status, not as information gatherers only but also as information providers too. The possibility of reading, writing and creating online content in different medias has led to the development of Social Network Sites (hereafter SNS) such as Orkut, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace and of special interest to this study, Facebook.

Created in 2004, Facebook has taken the lead in popularity reaching 1.01 billion users in September 2012 (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 2012). Such a large number of users and the unimaginable array of interactions available through Facebook resources caught the attention of scholars who soon started to investigate how this powerful tool could be used in the realm of education.

Previous studies have pointed out that teachers who have Facebook profiles rich in personal information generate more motivation in their students (MAZER, MURPHY & SIMONDS, 2009). Sturgeon and Walker's (2009) study suggest that the relationship between teachers and students on Facebook fosters better communication leading to a richer learning environment with more involvement from students.

In spite of these benefits for the interaction through Facebook, scholars are careful to point out some hurdles such as privacy loss which is still an issue in the virtual world since the classification of information can be a challenge when dealing with Facebook in the academic realm (MATTAR, 2012). When it comes to the exchange of information between teachers and students, the boundaries between friendship and professional relationships may become even more blurred and fuzzy when we add the variable of social networks (MUÑOZ & TOWNER, 2011).

With the increasing presence of technology in schools, new approaches to teaching L2 have been developed in order to provide teachers with the required skills to operate in this digital world where students are usually steps ahead of teachers when it comes to digital literacy skills and access to updated information. According to Blake (2008) technology will not replace teachers, though it seems natural to foresee that teachers who are able to use technology in their classes will replace the ones who are not.

In the realm of L2 teaching, studies are beginning to accumulate (for example FINARDI, 2012) that suggest that the best approach for L2 teaching is a mixture of computer assisted and online resources and traditional classes taught by teachers,

creating a blended learning environment which requires teachers and students to develop new literacies and skills to access and produce information and knowledge.

These new digital literacies encompass the ability to use digital media, SNS and communication across different cultures and languages. The advent of new technologies, globalised cultures and the shift towards trans-national economies, based on information, have set out new conditions for the re-conceptualization of institutions and practices of literacy education (LUKE & KAPITZKE, 2006).

The objective of this research endeavor is to provide an overall look at some issues permeating the use of Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students. More specifically, the aim of this study is to analyze teachers' and students' beliefs concerning possible advantages and disadvantages of using Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students in general and in the context of L2 learning in particular.

A secondary aim of the study is to suggest ways in which Facebook can be used in the context of English as a Foreign Language (hereafter EFL) teaching and learning based on the analysis made in this study to help teachers make informed decisions regarding the use of SNSs in education in general and in L2 education in particular. Given the objectives of the study, the analysis attempts to understand how teachers and students see the communication between teachers and students in Facebook in this context.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Finardi (2010), beliefs shape mental acts which in turn guide peoples' actions and decisions. Pajares (1992) claims that beliefs can be inferred both from what people say and from what people do. A number of studies has amassed evidence suggesting that teachers' actions are based on their beliefs which in turn impact on learning outcomes (for example BINNIE-SMITH, 1996; FINARDI, 2010; WOODS, 1993).

Given the importance of beliefs in peoples' practice on the one hand, and the presence of Facebook in people's contemporary lives on the other, this study sought to contribute with insights to the database of studies on people's beliefs by investigating how teachers and students see the use of Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students in the realm of education in general and in L2 education in particular.

Mattar (2012) represents an important step into providing an overview of how Facebook can be used in education suggesting the use of Facebook tools such as Groups, Slide Share and Questions as well as some possibilities related to the use of Facebook as a Virtual Learning Environment (hereafter VLE).

Sturgeon and Walker (2009) and Mazer et al. (2009) have pointed out benefits of the use of Facebook in classroom interaction such as providing better communication and a more motivating learning environment, better perception of teacher credibility and the development of digital literacy in a blended learning environment. Muñoz and Towner (2011) also point out the aforementioned benefits of using Facebook in education but add some hurdles of using SNS such as teachers' resistance and reluctance to use SNS in education due to fear of privacy loss.

Many educational institutions provide teachers with their own Learning Management System (LMS) yet, Chu and Meulemans (2008, cited in MATTAR, 2012) suggest that

students prefer to communicate via Facebook rather than via LMS, a fact that is corroborated by another study (SCHROEDER & GREENBOWE, 2009 cited in MATTAR, 2012) which has shown that Facebook reached 400 per cent more posts with more quality throughout the whole term when compared against the institution's discussion forum.

Among the benefits of Facebook mentioned by the authors (SCHROEDER & GREENBOWE, 2009 cited in MATTAR, 2012) is the fact that 58 per cent of students used this SNS to ask and talk about assignments and tests, 26.6 per cent of students welcomed the chance of interacting with faculty on Facebook, and last but not least, the fact that Facebook intrinsically lends itself to Community and Collaborative Learning.

BENEFITS OF FACEBOOK AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL IN EFL

Class communication is a core issue in pedagogy which must be addressed carefully and critically when it comes to using technology in the service of communication in general and communication in education in particular. When the content of the class is language, even more consideration should be given to the issue of class communication and the means used to achieve it.

Tradition shows that most teacher-student interactions take place in the classroom and via institutional e-mail or LMS but according to Bilton (2010) students may enjoy having other means to communicate with faculty beyond the traditional channels. Li and Pitts (LI & PITTS, 2009 cited in MUÑOZ & TOWNER, 2011) showed that students who had the chance to be assisted via Facebook Instant Messenger (FIM) were more satisfied with their experience than the students who only had face-to-face meetings.

Muñoz and Towner (2011) cite studies that show that SNS are now the primary communication tool among college students (GOLDER, 2008, cited in MUÑOZ & TOWNER, 2011) with as much as 66 per cent of student access on a daily basis (SMITH, 2009 cited in MUÑOZ & TOWNER, 2011).

Sturgeon and Walker (2009) state that anything that helps students feel more comfortable in the class will help them feel more connected to their instructors and more open to instruction. With that belief, Sturgeon and Walker (2009) conducted an experiment to test whether their approachability by students would be affected by the use of Facebook and concluded that 49 per cent of the faculty investigated reported that they felt that students would be more likely to approach them as a result of having a Facebook profile.

This more personal communication helps students feel more connected to teachers and therefore encourages participation in class (WON-DOOMINK, 1985 cited in STURGEON & WALKER, 2009) resulting in a better learning environment which in turn may result in better learning outcomes. Sturgeon and Walker (2009) conclude that student-teacher interaction has a notable impact on students' outcome in terms of intellectual and social relationships, and defend Facebook as a meaningful bridge between online and off-line communication.

Yet, how teachers' self-disclosure on Facebook may affect teacher credibility is an important issue which must be addressed and was approached to some extent by Mazer et al. (2009) who pointed out that teachers may expect better relationships from their interactions with students on Facebook, but also run the risk of being inconsistent in

their profile compared to the attitude in class, thus, creating violated expectations and consequently causing negative results on students.

Teacher Credibility

During classroom interaction, teachers often share personal information and beliefs during self-disclosure, defined by Wheelz and Grotz (1976, cited in MAZER et al., 2009) as any message about the self that is communicated to another. In the case of Facebook we understand self-disclosure to refer to the amount of personal information displayed on one's profile in that SNS.

Civikly (1986, cited in MAZER et al., 2009) points out that teachers who personalize their teaching through the use of humor, stories, enthusiasm, and self-disclosure are seen by their students as being effective in explaining course content, thus the relationship between self-disclosure and being regarded as an effective teacher is permeated by credibility. Teven and Hanson (2004, cited in MAZER et al., 2009) also point out that students tend to perceive the teacher with whom they relate well as a being a credible source.

Mazer et al. (2007, cited in MAZER et al., 2009) conducted a study on the perception of credibility of teachers who presented different levels of self-disclosure on their Facebook profiles and found that students who interacted with high self-disclosing teachers on Facebook reported higher levels of motivation, affective learning and better learning environments when compared to students who interacted with teachers who showed lower levels of self-disclosure on Facebook.

However important, interaction on Facebook should be carefully considered by teachers who are willing to take this extra step towards a more social communication with their students as pointed out by Mazer et al. (2009) who warn us that the way a teacher self-discloses on Facebook should be consistent with the way the teacher leads their classes so as to avoid violating students' expectations, resulting in negative effects on teacher credibility and student-teacher communication.

Finardi et al. (2013) claim that both English as a lingua franca and digital literacy are forms of social mediation and call the attention to the importance of developing linguistic skills (to use English as a lingua franca) and digital literacy (to access information available in the internet) as forms of social inclusion. Given the importance of developing linguistic (L2) and digital literacy skills, Finardi (2012) reviewed four studies that analyzed possibilities of using blended methodologies to teach L2 (English) and concluded that blended methodologies may be the best approach to L2 teaching.

Together with this suggestion to use blended methodologies (in the case of L2 teaching) comes the need to develop new literacies, a concept discussed by Kahn and Kellner (2005) who claim that literacy comprises the development of socially constructed forms of communication and representation (pg. 240). This idea is complemented by Luke and Kapitzke's (2006) who claim that the "technologization" of language in cyberspace and hypermedia is creating new notions of literacy which, as we will see in the next section, is also forcing us to think about the role of teachers in this cyberspace.

Teacher role in the digital era

Given the aforementioned claim that technology will not replace teachers, but teachers who are able to use technology may replace the ones who are not (BLAKE, 2008) and

the suggestion that the best approach to L2 teaching is to use a mixture of teacher-led and computer-assisted-language-learning (CALL) resources in a blended approach (FINARDI, 2012), it is possible to suggest that the role of teachers in this new classroom is undergoing a severe re-conceptualization (LUKE & KAPITZKE, 2006) where the book is replaced by the screen, the school by the media and the provision of information by the development of skills to find and analyze this information. In this context Zuenzer (2001) reminds us that there is no more space for content oriented strategies based on memorization but instead there is an urgent necessity to change the comprehension about how students learn in order to promote digital literacy and real learning.

Connected with the need to rethink teachers role in this new era of technology and new literacies is the assumption previously mentioned in this study that teachers' beliefs shape their action and impact on learning outcomes (for example FINARDI, 2010). So as to offer a glimpse of teachers' beliefs on the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) the present study aims at analyzing teachers' and students' view of Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students.

The motivation to analyze Facebook (and not other SNS) as a communication tool between teachers and students is two-fold: 1) Facebook is the most popular SNS in Brazil and the number of users is expanding by the minute and 2) the increasing number of people who use Facebook to communicate (and more recently learn) has called the attention of researchers who started to investigate the potential of this SNS for education and communication (for example Mazer et al., 2009, Sturgeon & Walker, 2009, Salaway, Caruso & Mark, 2008) As these authors have pointed out and we reviewed in this study, there are many benefits of using Facebook for educational purposes though these benefits are not without caveats. The next section will address some of these possible hurdles of using Facebook in this context.

HURDLES

Hewitt and Forte (2006, cited in STURGEON & WALKER, 2009) reported that students felt that Facebook was a place where they wanted privacy for their profiles and feared that the presence of faculty there might skew their academic outcome. This result sounds rather contradictory when contrasted with Sturgeon and Walker's (2009) suggestion that students would be more willing to communicate with the instructors they already knew from Facebook.

Privacy is still an issue to be carefully addressed by teachers willing to experiment SNS's in class as well as finding a way to prevent the academic relationship from becoming more personal than might be desired, since students and teachers have access to more personal information about each other.

As part of the virtual universe, Facebook users have to cope with menaces such as viruses, spam and the risk of having their lives perused by others. Despite having ways of controlling what information people may see, users are bound to face privacy issues such as cyber bullying and cyber stalking (GROSS & ACQUISTI, 2005, cited in MUÑOZ & TOWNER, 2011).

Muñoz and Towner (2011) point out that although students would like to encourage teachers to use SNS, teachers and instructors should practice restraint and keep in mind

the boundaries of public and private information so as to avoid ‘spying’ on their students (PETRONIO, 2002, cited in MAZER et al., 2009).

Once again it is necessary to recall Hewitt and Forte’s (2006) suggestion that students may feel that their Facebook profile is a place for privacy and thus do not want to be seen by faculty. The same study found that one third of the student population from Georgia Institute of Technology did not believe faculty should be on Facebook.

On the other hand, Sturgeon and Walker (2009) report that 75 per cent of faculty do not want to be viewed by students as equals, as the line that differentiates them from their students is apparently fading away while SNS becomes more popular in the college community. Muñoz and Towner (2011) claim that in the eyes of the teachers the word “friend” used to refer to connections or to the act of making a new “friend” does not evoke the most appropriate student-teacher relationship.

Another core issue concerning teacher-student interaction on Facebook regards what to post on each other’s walls, the tools “groups” and “friends list” provide a starting point for what to share with whom, though teachers must keep in mind that there are no tools available to help evaluate students or watch over content viewing. Muñoz and Towner (2011) reinforce that no personal and individual information about a student (such as grades) should be made public.

One way to help teachers overcome their difficulties with privacy and professional boundaries is to have a dedicated professional Facebook profile to prevent unintended information from being shared. According to Muñoz and Towner (2011), this professional profile should provide students with some personal information about the instructor such as photos, links, quotes and preferences that may lead to positive teacher-student interactions while not crossing the boundary between friendship and professionalism.

As can be seen from the above, proper guidelines must be implemented if teachers are to use SNS in an academic setting in a profitable manner, resulting in better learning environments with better results and more engagement on the part of students. So as to help us think about these guidelines it is important to analyze people’s reluctance and resistance to the use of SNS in this context. That is the aim of the next section.

Reluctance and Resistance

In Muñoz and Towner’s (2011) study the authors point out that Web 2.0 tools and SNS have often been ignored by teachers and although there is a considerable amount of students willing to use Facebook for academic interactions with other groups of teachers and students, they are still reluctant to use this SNS for educational aims, as also reported by Mattar (2012).

Indeed studies (for example Salaway, Caruso & Mark, 2008) found that among faculty, 75 per cent did not use or had no plans to use SNS and only 8 per cent of students reported using SNS to communicate with instructors, while more recent studies reported that 46 per cent of students used Facebook to informally discuss academic work with other students, however 57 per cent of students believed Facebook should not be used for instructional purposes, with 53 per cent of students who think that Facebook has limited or nonexistent academic value.

Another issue to be addressed is the fact that some learners and most teachers often lack the digital literacy and technical knowledge skills required to make full use of online technologies in the service of education as pointed out by Luckin (2009, cited in MUÑOZ & TOWNER, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to reflect on some of the possibilities of using Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students in education in general and in L2 education in particular looking at its potential to improve relationships in class as well as students' outcome as a consequence of more engagement from students. A secondary aim of the study is to suggest ways in which Facebook can be used to promote more authentic communication between teachers and students of English as a foreign language outside the class thus maximizing the contact with the target language.

So as to pursue the first aim of this study, namely, to reflect on some of the possibilities of using Facebook in the realm of education in general and L2 education in particular, the study sought to understand teachers' and students' beliefs about the use of Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students. With that aim, a total cohort of 68 participants - 49 teachers (32 EFL teachers and 17 language teachers) and 19 English as a foreign language (EFL) students answered a questionnaire whose aim was to explore their beliefs about the use of Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students. The questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively to identify how many of the 68 interviewed participants use Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students and qualitatively to understand how this tool is used (or not). The questionnaire was composed of eight closed questions and one open question and was sent by email to participants.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Teachers Questionnaire

The first question of the questionnaire asked whether teachers had a Facebook profile and whether they had students as friends. Among the 49 respondent teachers 45% reported that they had students on Facebook with only 11 answers reporting that they felt uncomfortable with the presence of students as friends on their profiles. When asked whether having a Facebook profile affects their relationship with their students and if they felt more approachable by the students due to having a Facebook profile most teachers (36) answered affirmatively.

Regarding the question of whether teachers use their Facebook profiles for academic purposes and if they believed that Facebook may be used as a tool to support their classes, 31 out of 49 teachers reported that they used their Facebook in the academic realm though only 16 teachers said they believed Facebook could be used as a tool to support their classes.

Regarding the question of whether teachers were conscious of the information they posted on their profiles, again most teachers (39 out of 49) reported being conscious of the information they posted on their Facebook profiles. This was an expected result given the number of studies reviewed here that have already pointed out the reluctance of teachers in joining these SNS and self-disclosing for students (for example MAZER et al., 2009).

Student Questionnaire

When asked about their opinions on having teachers as friends on Facebook, all of the 19 EFL students reported having teachers as friends on Facebook and only 1 reported being uncomfortable with the presence of teachers as friends on their profiles. Again, looking at the studies reviewed here that suggest that students want to communicate with teachers in SNS (for example MUÑOZ AND TOWNER, 2011), this is an expected result. When asked whether their relationships with their teachers could be affected by their Facebook profiles, 15 (out of 19) students replied affirmatively and 10 agreed that it was easier to approach a teacher if he/she had a Facebook profile.

Twelve of the respondent students reported using Facebook for academic purposes and 13 students believe Facebook may be used as a tool to help them in their learning process. Regarding the issue of privacy, 13 students reported that they were conscious of what they posted on their profiles.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Recall that the aim of this study was to reflect about how Facebook could be used as a tool to promote communication between teachers and students and support L2 classes.

A secondary aim of the study is to suggest ways in which Facebook can be used in the context of EFL teaching and learning based on the analysis made in this study to help teachers make informed decisions regarding the use of SNSs in education in general and in L2 education in particular.

Mattar (2012) represents an important step into providing an overview of how Facebook can be used in education suggesting the use of Facebook tools such as Groups, Slide Share and Questions as well as some possibilities related to the use of Facebook as a VLE.

Facebook wall is a space for news stream where users get information from friends and the pages they “like” and follow. It shows updates from varied sources, thus, it may be a good place for meaningful interaction using the target language between students and teachers. Teachers may post material and tag students so that they will be notified of the post and may be willing to respond to that.

Facebook groups may be a space for sharing specific content to specific students and giving them a bit more privacy to interact using the target language without being exposed to people who are not involved in their learning process, they are also useful as a place to post homework, extra activities, reminders and specific updates.

In L2 learning the interactivity provided by Facebook may be an important support tool as it allows for authentic communication between students attempting to use their knowledge on L2 and their peers, as well as, teachers. This interactive environment maximizes the students’ contact with L2 outside the classroom and in a pleasant and relaxed environment which allows students to talk and see what they prefer, when they prefer, making L2 learning a more pleasant and meaningful experience.

Given the objectives of the study, the analysis attempts to understand how teachers and students see the communication between teachers and students in Facebook in this

context. With that aim, the questionnaire answered by 49 teachers and 19 students will be analyzed qualitatively in what follows.

Teacher Questionnaire

Teachers were asked about their opinion regarding the professionalism and credibility of their counterparts who have Facebook and the answers were similar to Muñoz and Towner's (2011) results in that teachers should be aware of what they post on their profiles in order keep their professional boundaries clear and credibility in their classes. These opinions can be seen in the excerpt below.

"I strongly believe that professionalism is closely related to ethic and commitment to your job. If you are a reliable professional and use your Facebook to interact with your students, it's expected that you keep a professional attitude, watching out everything you post online! On the other hand, some people may not be successful by doing so once they can't separate their personal and professional life! It will probably be hard to learn it. Then, I'd say Facebook does not interfere in the credibility I've built of my job as a teacher, it just comes to confirm it."

Many of the teachers reported that, if used wisely, Facebook does not harm ones' credibility but whenever a teacher accepts a student as a friend on Facebook, this teacher must carefully consider what will be posted on his or her wall. An example of this can be seen in the excerpts below:

"I do believe Facebook is a useful tool, however teachers sometimes share in their profiles some private information of which students shouldn't be aware and it might interfere in their credibility."

"I try not to expose my private life although this is the aim of the tool after all. I try to use it more professionally using it as a communication tool, since it allows the exchange of multimedia files."

There seems to be a general consensus between teachers that:

- Facebook does not interfere on teacher credibility, if used wisely;
- Teachers may have students as friends but they have to consider very carefully what is posted on their walls;
- Ethics recommend that there should not be any posts about students information on a teacher's profile;

In general, teachers have positive remarks about the use of Facebook and this may reflect on the way their students relate with them on Facebook and in class.

Student Questionnaire

When asked about their opinion regarding the professionalism and credibility of the teachers who have Facebook profiles, students' answers ranged from indifference to total support, none of the answers presented negative beliefs about the issue as can be seen in the excerpt below:

"I think it is fantastic because the accessibility is higher and the relationship teacher-student becomes closer in a way that it makes the content taught become more attractive."

Also,

“In my opinion Facebook does not interfere in the professionalism, or the credibility of a teacher.”

Most students mostly mentioned the same aspects related to the question, the most common being:

- Facebook does not affect professionalism or credibility of the teacher;
- Facebook promotes better communication between teachers and students;
- Facebook promotes better relationship between students and teachers;

These answers are aligned with Sturgeon and Walker’s (2009) study which claimed that 90 per cent of the students mentioned Facebook as providing an open line of communication, thus, improving their outcome in the academic and social realm.

POSSIBILITIES AND CAVEATS OF FACEBOOK FOR L2

Another possibility for Facebook is increasing the time students spend in contact with and interacting in L2; jokes, images, music, videos are only some of the possible ways to include English as part of students’ daily virtual life in a meaningful and interesting way.

However, Facebook does not provide a way to search for specific content and it is hard to keep track of past topics, making it difficult to evaluate the progress and development of the students in the SNS, consequently, Facebook cannot be used as the only tool if a teacher wants to evaluate students’ writing, for example.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

Recall that the aim of this study was to analyze teachers’ and students’ beliefs about the use of Facebook as a communication tool between teachers and students and suggest ways in which this SNS could be used to support L2 learning. With that aim a questionnaire was administered to 49 language teachers and 19 students.

The analysis of the data suggests that fewer students believe Facebook affect their relationship with teachers, only 38 per cent of the respondents reported that they believed their teacher-student relationship would be affected by having teachers as friends on their profiles whereas 78 per cent of the teachers reported that they believed their teacher-student relationship would be affected by having students as friends on their profile.

More students also believe Facebook may be a tool to support their learning process, 88 percent as opposed to only 62 per cent of the teachers who share the same belief, this data shows that students may be better prepared to deal with technology in blended learning environments with more students, 66 per cent, using their Facebook profiles for academic purposes whereas only 55 per cent of teachers use their profiles with that aim.

According to Mattar (2012) limitations imposed by technical issues such as privacy, difficulty to follow up students’ posts, administrative issues and even an incomplete adoption of the use of SNS by students’ should not be seen as caveat to the use of Facebook by educators or students.

The analysis of the data in this study suggests that regardless of the benefits of using SNS in education, teachers are still reluctant to use this tool as a support to

communicate with students. Seventy-eight per cent of the teachers believed that their Facebook profiles affect their relationship with students whereas only 4 out of 49 reported their profiles do not affect their credibility, if used appropriately. In contrast, none of the students reported seeing a relationship between teacher credibility and teachers with Facebook profile and only 38 per cent of students believe their Facebook affects their relationship with their teachers.

These contrasting data may be interpreted in two ways: one is that teachers, being more mature, are more aware of what is involved in a SNS profile believe that because they are professionals they are above their students' judgments. Another interpretation is that students, being most of the time, more adapted to the virtual space, find it easier to separate real life from virtual life, as if their Facebook profiles were an avatar where they, and their teachers, have a pass to be someone different from who they are in the off-line world.

Another interesting finding is that 55 per cent of the teachers use Facebook for academic purposes and 60 per cent believe Facebook may be a tool to support their classes while 66 per cent of students use their profiles with academic reasons and a considerably high 88 per cent believe Facebook may be used as a tool to support their learning process.

At a glimpse, one might assume that students consider Facebook as a support because they tend to be more willing to be online than their teachers. However, data collected in this study aligned with teacher-researcher practice leads us to disagree. The group of students analyzed in this study is used to downloading content posted by teachers in the school's LMS and sharing it with their classmates on Facebook, also they usually ask their teachers (personal communication) questions concerning the subjects posted and voice their doubts about the content, reinforcing the possibility of developing digital literacy and community learning fostered by this tool.

In the realm of the L2 classroom it is possible to point out more benefits of Facebook, since it is pleasurable for students to be in contact with each other on Facebook, it would be a chance to increase the time they spend in contact with the target language, having meaningful interaction with online resources and their peers and consequently improving their results in and out of class in terms of development of digital and L2 literacy.

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