

# **AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN EDUCATION: HIGHLIGHTING THE ROLE OF ONLINE FEEDBACK**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This review study aims to evaluate the integration of social networks in education and its impact on teaching and learning. While traditional learning management systems lack the advantages of social networks, such as peer interaction, social networks have the potential to positively influence the learning process, with feedback being a key component. The study suggests that social networks can increase feedback efficiency and improve university students' learning outcomes. However, the effectiveness of social networks may be influenced by individual learning styles and personalities. The study highlights the potential benefits of integrating social networks in education.

## **KEYWORDS**

Education, Feedback, Social Networks, CMS/LMS, and Learning Language

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Today, online social networks are among the most important communication tools, connecting millions of people with shared interests and ideas all over the world (Zaidieh, 2012; Akbari, 2016). Results of various studies indicated that over three billion users are engaged in social networks and the rate of social networks usage by young and university students is over 1 hour daily (Rogers, 2009, Akbari, Naderi, Yazdi, Simons & Pilot, Akbari, 2019).

Today, there are more than 350 online social networks (Wikipedia, 2020). The most famous online social networks in the world include Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and WeChat. In Iran, Instagram stands in the first place and is the most favorite, followed by WhatsApp and Twitter, respectively

### **1.1 Importance of Online Social Networks in Education**

Due to the rapid growth in the social networks research over the past decade, the empirical and conceptual advances in education have been transformed. New educational possibilities can be created due to the flexible environment and various capabilities of these networks. According to Selwyn (2007), online social networking applications contain good educational technologies. However, there are some challenges. New educational standards need to be compiled and the existing studies need to be more comprehensive for implementing an optimal use of these networks for educational purposes

This study aims at highlighting the use of social networks in higher education. Furthermore, by reviewing the related studies, we try to investigate social networks in terms of (a) the learning processes (support, educational processes, communication and collaboration enhancement, academic performance) on the part of students and educators; (b) the users' personality type and style of learning; (c) online learning platforms (LMS—learning management system); and (d) their application in higher education. The investigation shows enhancement in all of the above-mentioned items. Therefore, a wider use of online social networks (OSNs) in higher education is quite likely in the future. Nevertheless, online social networks (OSN) are not employed by teachers and higher education institutions in their activities. Smart Education Research encompasses a wide range of topics, including advanced methods of learner profiling, dynamic and self-paced learning environments created with the help of technology, and the use of educational applications through mobile

devices (Visvizi, Lytras, & Daniela, 2018; Lytras, Visvizi, & Naeve, 2015). Another important aspect of Smart Education Research is the development of methodologies for social learning and community-based learning in Higher Education, which is influenced by social networks. Learning analytics is a significant area of research in Smart Education, as it allows for the identification of hidden patterns in big data related to learners and educational institutions, including patterns related to motivation (Laaser & Concha, 2018). Student-centered learning analytics research also has focus on enhancing motivation and engagement. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have emerged as a popular option for open learning, and the provision of learning software has created new challenges for policy makers, learning administrators, and faculty.

Due to the fact that the youth are eagerly interested in social media, researchers investigate their application in education (Beemt, Thurlings, and Willems, 2020). Educational institutes integrate social media in the classroom to enable critical thinking, collaboration, and self-learning (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016). A literature review revealed that social development is the most essential element in social networks (Akbari, Pilot & Simons, 2015; Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016). This fact increased the number of social networks, especially those related to education (Demirbilek, 2015). Moreover, various research findings (Akbari and Simon, 2018) indicated that social networks foster collaborative learning. Therefore, learners will learn beyond the classroom (Macià & García, 2016). According to Selwyn (2007), online social networking applications share many qualities of good educational technologies. Yet, realizing these features will require compiling new educational standards compatible with these networks. However, although relevant, existing studies need to be more comprehensive for implementing an optimal use of these networks for educational purposes. There are crucial advantages of social media in promoting student performance in education. They include:

- Communication and collaboration. Connection is possible via smartphone, tablet, or laptop with anyone at any time (Putnik, et al., 2016).
- Parental involvement. Through social media, parents can stay involved in their children's learning (Akbari, 2022).
- Distance learning opportunities. Online social media such as Skype or Webinar Jam can make students involved in distance learning which is an important element in recent education.
- Feedback. Interaction via online social networks results in feedback (Akbari, 2021).

According to Al-Said, Al Said, and Hattab (2020), the use of social networks for instructional purposes will have a positive effect on student achievements; yet, higher education institutions resort to traditional platforms such as Course and Learning Management Systems (CMS/LMS) that do not include the pros of social networking, such as the ability to keep in touch with peers. Yet, during the Covid19 era, it is found that they are used more frequently and are more effective than LMSs. (Akbari, 2021).

In general, there are four different areas that indicate the positive impact of social networks: (a) the learning processes (support, enhancement of educational processes, communication and collaboration, educational performance) from the students' and instructors' perspectives; (b) the user's personality and learning style (techniques or approaches of attaining knowledge, academic culture, efficiency); (c) the social networks including online learning platforms like learning management system (LMS); and (d) their application in institutions (administrational and educational uses of OSNs by faculty). The following paragraphs elaborate on these four areas in more detail.

## **1.2 Importance of Online Social Networks in Language Learning**

Social networking sites not only profoundly impacted our social structure and intra-social interaction but also affected education in general and learning English language in particular. The easy access to information and people can, in particular be helpful in language education, e.g. online social networks allow foreign-language learners to get access to native speakers. In addition, these networks provide for authentic interactions. Researchers have recognized the various opportunities that social media provides for language learners and teachers. Many articles appear on the educational use of online social networks and researchers (Akbari, 2016, 2021; Muftah, 2022; Al Jahromi, 2020) argued that online social networks have a good potential for language learning. Moreover, I agree with Blattner and Fiori (2009) that Facebook can be used as a venue for authentic language interaction and that it can increase students' motivation. I concur with Kabilan, Norlida, & Mohd Jafre (2010) that Facebook can be used as an environment to facilitate the learning of English. However, research to develop and evaluate different ways of using online social networks is needed. The current research aims to investigate the potential of online social networks in language learning and teaching. That is, there are

increased advantages of social networks with regard to educational outcomes, facilitating communication, the realization of a sense of identity, and belonging, and the direct interactions that happen in discussion groups, conversations, and videos. Within the extensive environment of worldwide interaction, not only are linguistic skills improved but also an international culture is created (Pikhart and Botezat, 2021).

Overall, mixed-method research designs are used in the studies investigated. Moreover, they all use university students as participants and report the positive influences of social media in language teaching and learning. Most of these studies are carried out in Far Eastern countries (mainly China), and the majority of English speakers are originally from Taiwan and China. The research is predominantly conducted in an EFL context. Yet, a number of studies are carried out in the context of Chinese and Spanish spoken as second languages.

To sum up, the studies reviewed in the present research indicate the significance of social media in language teaching and learning. This study will hopefully contribute to the integration of social media in education in general and in language instruction in particular through reviewing different studies conducted in recent years.

### **1.3 Using Social Networks in English Language Teaching**

With the advent of Web 2s in 2005, potentially new developments in foreign language education were formed. Yet one of the most important types of web 2s is social networks. Move of teachers and students toward these networks caused their methods and experiences to develop and yet change (Planas, 2010). Applying these networks by language teachers indicates how learning happens in this new era of digital literacy and due to the resulting changes, the classic system of education has to coordinate with it (Lockard & Pegrum 2007). Some research efforts related to using these networks in English language learning follow:

### **1.4 Definition of Feedback**

Feedback as a concept is composed of a series of information and data which are created through factors such as teachers, books, parents, friends and colleagues, experience, and the person himself (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and this information are related to the people's level of understanding or their performance in relation to a particular subject.

Of course, the role of feedback in e-learning is more important than in traditional learning (Lynch, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). The online peer feedback increases the relevance of feedback for both givers and receivers of feedback (Akbari, 2021; Akbari, Simons, Pilot& Naderi, 2017). By participating in an online discussion, students acquire better understanding of their peers' viewpoints. Moreover, online interaction promotes motivation in the target language.

## **2. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The article reviews various studies that examine the impact of social networks on education and highlights the potential benefits of using these networks as a tool for enhancing learning outcomes. One key finding is that social networks can be effective for providing feedback to learners. The article also highlights the importance of using social networks to create a collaborative learning environment. Another key finding of the article is that social networks can help to bridge the gap between formal and informal learning.

In conclusion, the article suggests that social networks have the potential to revolutionize the education process by providing learners with access to a wide range of feedback sources and creating a collaborative and engaging learning environment.

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