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EFL Students' Perceptions towards Using Social Media at Ajloun National University

Nour Bani Salamah, Amenh Abu-Dames & Hanaa Al-Zaareer

B.A Students, Ajloun National University, Jordan

Samer Mahmoud Al-Zoubi *

Assistant Professor, Ajloun National University, Jordan

Mahmoud A. Al.Sobh

Associate Professor, Ajloun National University, Jordan

Abstract

This study aims at investigating EFL students' perceptions towards using social media at Ajloun National University. For the purpose of the study, the researchers used a questionnaire that includes statements about students' perceptions towards using social media. The participants in this study were 50 (23 males & 27 females) EFL students chosen randomly from the Department of English Language and Literature at Ajloun National University. The results showed that the overall degree of the students' perceptions towards using social media sites used by EFL students at Ajloun National University was high. This result highlighted the importance of those sites as effective sites used by the EFL learners in learning English language efficiently in the classroom communication. Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students in their perceptions towards using social media sites. Finally, the researchers recommended that it is useful to encourage students to use different activities and exercises available on social media sites as much as possible because they could improve the process of learning English language. Besides, further studies should be conducted to measure the impact of social media sites in developing the four language skills (Listening, speaking, reading and writing).

Keywords: Students' Perceptions, Social Media, EFL, Ajloun National University

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, technology has become as an integral part of people's lives as the world has become a small village due to the progress in technology means. As social media sites become more popular among older and younger generations, sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, gradually weaken the traditionally authoritative voices of news media. Social media can be defined as computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Principally, the use of social media over the last

decade has definitely affected the way people all over the world interact with each other, as well as the way they access to the great quantity of information that surrounds them and their societies. Thus, the availability of information on social media websites can now be accessed at anytime from anywhere in the world due to the features that are best known as cloud-based technologies (Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2012).

However, there are some common features of social media means such as: Firstly, they are interactive Internet-based applications. Secondly, users generate content, such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions. Thirdly, they facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups (Obar, et al, 2015). In fact, social media technologies take many different forms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, business networks, enterprise social networks, forums, micro blogs, photo sharing, products/services review, social bookmarking, social gaming, social networks, video sharing, and virtual worlds. Beside of the entertainment, these sites of social media have become the main ways to improve learners' abilities to learn and work independently, analyse language form, think meaningfully and critically, as well as solving communication problems.

It should be emphasized that technology in general and social media sites in particular have played an essential role in the field of teaching and learning languages. Murphy (1996) clarified that technology integrated into classrooms promote higher-level learning, thinking critically and solve problems skills among students. Today, learners view social media as important sites in providing social learning activities that help to increase communication skills and provide more spaces for shy learners. While many students struggle with speaking in front of their classmates, they may feel more comfortable speaking using social media sites. Furthermore, social media sites depend on the written word, making it an excellent means of improving writing skills. Basically, computer technology is very important in education, and plays a key role in English language learning.

Paul (2013) indicated that technology is clearly having some impact on the English language and the words the learners use. There has been an evident to support the use of technologies in education, such as the computer and Internet, in educational process in general and in teaching languages in particular. Consequently, there is a need to learn English language, especially as it has become widely used in many fields. Raimes (1983) explained that language teaching is a paradigm which sees language as communication; promotes a student-centred classroom encourages real language acquisition instead of just learning a set of grammatical rules; interpersonal approaches and takes into account many variables such as the nature of the learner, the learning process and the learning environment.

Coverdale-Jones, (2000) stated that the internet gave the learners the opportunity to communicate immediately with language and offered a great deal of advantages for teaching and learning language. Moreover, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube may have many benefits such as teachers can provide bonus points for students who answer questions that are posted, special interest groups can be easily created by using

hash tags to collect information, homework assignments can be posted to easily remind students to do their homework, students can share online resources related to coursework, teachers can facilitate online discussions about course material and students can ask teachers questions about difficult course material. Moreover, using YouTube helps teachers post videos that explain how to navigate specific homework assignments. On other hand, students can create and post videos for one another to view rather than do in-class oral presentations. Additionally, having social media sites, many parents and educators have been fearful of the consequences of having social media in the classroom. There are concerns that social media sites can be misused for sharing inappropriate content. As result, cell phones have been banned from some classrooms, and some schools have blocked many popular social media websites.

However, despite apprehensions, students in industrialized countries are (or will be) active social media users. As a result, many schools have realized that they need to loosen restrictions, teach digital citizenship skills, and even incorporate these tools into classrooms. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the students' perceptions towards using social media at Ajloun National University., and how social media sites can be useful in improving English language acquisition.

Many researchers indicate that there is a significant positive correlation between students' perception towards using social media sites and their performance in the classroom and developing their linguistic proficiency in learning English language. The researchers have noticed that students have different points of views concerning the use of the social media sites in their learning process, some of which are positive while others are negative. Thus, this research was conducted to find out whether social media sites are useful in improving English language or not and if they contribute to English language learning enhancement.

THIS STUDY

This study can be helpful for teachers because it provides them with the impact of using social media sites on students' performance in learning English language and gives them a clear idea about their student's weaknesses and strengths in the language proficiency, and to improve their proficiency in learning English language through using social media sites. Moreover, it provides students with a new learning environment for learning English language by exposing them to larger quantities of images, exercises, texts and authentic material used in the social media sites.

This study tries to answer the following questions:

- What are EFL students' perceptions towards using social media sites at Ajloun National University for EFL learning purposes?
- Are there any statistical significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between male and female students' perceptions toward using social media sites in learning English language at Ajloun National university?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical studies

Recently, many studies have focused on the importance and effectiveness of using the social media sites to improve and develop English language learning. Thus, they gave the learners the opportunity to communicate immediately with language and offered a great deal of advantages for teaching and learning English language. Many studies have found that students' use of social media sites may have both positive and negative impacts on their academic performance. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) noted that the use of social media sites is one of the most important factors that can influence educational performance of student positively or negatively. Bruce and Educorp (1998) reported that, computer media was used as a students learning tool. It has been used in the classes as a new tool to facilitate communicative competence of second language so that using computer media by teachers and learners could be an effective in process of second language learning. Martínez Alemán & Wartman (2009) assumed that the significance of social media for university students is related to how these tools assist in the creation of learning communities. These learning communities work together to provide the new members with support and guidance, and moreover, to provide students with information and opportunities that they can use for their personal growth and development.

Haverback (2009) examined her students' creation and participation in an online learning community on Facebook to discuss assignments, ask and answer questions, post information, and support one another for their reading education and methods course. The results showed that social media sites provide educators with an opportunity to engage learners in the online classroom, as well as to support development of learner skills and competencies. *Marchi's (2012)* study on high school students ages 18 and younger examined in an effort to find their preference for receiving news. Based on interviews with 61 teenagers, conducted from December 2007 to February 2011, most of the participants reported that reading print newspapers only "sometimes," with fewer than 10% reading them daily. Instead, the teenagers reported that learning about current events from social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and blogs is more preferable.

On the other hand, there are some negative effects of social media sites on college students learning. Anderson (2001) pointed out that social media websites can make students isolated from peers and society. For instance, the excessive use of the Internet may withdraw students from other social involvement activities and create difficulty in maintaining real-life interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Cotten (2008) emphasized that using social media sites can affect student health, as found in the increased sleeping problems, depression, stress, health conditions, and illnesses, and decreases in self-esteem. Although sometimes it may not impact college students' well-being directly, it can impact student self-concept, self-efficacy, and perceptions of their abilities in relation to technologies and college life. In terms of academic outcome, it could affect students' grades as well as plagiarism has been a concern for the public and the educational field

(Scanlon & Neumann, 2002). Jones (2008) mentioned that there is an evidence of the misuse of the Internet by college students. Such misuse includes: cutting and pasting material into papers from websites without giving a credit to authors and purchasing term papers from online sources.

Empirical studies

Cuban (2001) conducted a survey at Stanford University that indicated the overhead projector and VCR were the two most frequently used machines in the classroom. The findings further revealed that computers, while used in the preparation for instruction, are very rarely utilized during the instructional process. He has further found that (i) teachers are not technophobes; (ii) most teachers do not use computers during class time; (iii) most high school students do not have a "tech-heavy" experience; (iv) most teachers are not serious users of technology; (v) when computer use occurred, it was most often peripheral to instructional tasks; (vi) there is no concrete evidence of gains in academic achievement as the result of using computers; (vii) the majority of teachers using computers maintain existing practices of teaching; and (viii) few students used technologies at the invention level. He also reported that there was a little use of computers in American foreign language classrooms.

Egbert et al (2002) examined how 20 English as a second language and foreign language teachers apply practical experiences from CALL coursework to their teaching and how teachers continue their CALL professional development. Their findings suggest that teachers who use CALL activities are often those who had prior experience with CALL; that lack of time, support, and resources prohibits the use of CALL activities while more time, more resources and better support enable CALL use; and that colleagues are the most common resource of new CALL activity ideas outside of formal coursework.

Bataineh and Bani abderahman (2006) investigated the perceptions of EFL students toward their computer literacy. The study sample consisted of 210 EFL students at Yarmouk University. The findings revealed that the majority of the students are proficient in computer skills such as deleting files, formatting a floppy disk, copying files, and installing a program on a hard disk, while most of them are a little proficient in some computer skills such as using PowerPoint, using images from a camera or digital camera in computers, and creating databases. The results also showed that there is no significant effect for gender but a significant effect for the year of study on students' perceptions of their computer literacy.

Al-Zaidiyeeni, and Fook (2010) investigated the level of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) use for educational purposes by teachers in Jordanian rural secondary schools. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers collected the data through the use of quantitative data. Then they distributed a questionnaire to 650 teachers in Jordan randomly. The findings of the study showed that teachers had a low level of ICT use for educational purpose. The results also showed that teachers hold positive attitudes towards the use of ICT.

Though, Mahdi and El-Naim (2012) examined the impact of computer-mediated communication (CMC) on EFL learner's interactions when used informally outside the

classroom. The researchers conducted experiments on fifty adult EFL Saudi learners at Najran University, Saudi Arabia, using Facebook, to investigate the extent of active participation by students in informal CMC, the factors that facilitate effective informal CMC, and the effect of informal CMC on student written output. The results of the study revealed that informal use of CMC can be affected by several factors include the degree of voluntary participation on the part of the learners and teacher interference, but the participant attitudes towards the use of informal CMC such as Facebook to improve language learning were mostly positive.

Alwagait, Shahzad, and Alim (2014) investigated the effect of excessive social media use on academic performance on universities students in Saudi Arabia. The researchers collected surveys from 108 students to recognize social media platform popularity. The results showed that there was no linear relationship between social media usage in a week and GPA score. The results also presented that other factors such as time management were reported to negatively affect academic performance.

Abu Sa'aleek (2015) attempted to present a comprehensive picture of what has been investigated in terms of the use of Facebook as an online English language-learning environment and inquires whether this learning model can enhance students' learning of English. It also aims to explore the students' perceptions towards learning English in the Facebook context following four treatments, language improvement confidence, motivation and attitude. The sample who participated in the study was N=65, in the department of English language and translation enrolled in a B.A program. Findings revealed that the EFL students believe that FB as an online learning. Environment facilitates, supports, and encourages their English language learning. In addition the findings indicated that students' motivation and confidence towards English language learning improved via FB.

AL-Khataybeh and AL-Awasa (2016) investigated the effect of using Web Quest on improving seventh grade female students' writing skills in southern AL-Mazar of education. To achieve the purpose of the study, a pre-post test was constructed to measure students' achievement in writing skills of 11 items on English language. The sample of the study comprised (100) seventh grade female students who were randomly selected from three schools, and was distributed into two groups: the control group (30) female students which was taught using the conventional method and two experimental group; the first group was (35) female students who were trained for (2 hours) and the second group was (35) female students who were trained for (4 hours) on using web quest. The findings of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.01$) between the experimental group and the control group in favour of experimental group, and there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.01$) between the (two hours) and (four hours) at experimental group in favour of the (four hours).

Alsulami (2016) carried out a study on the effects of technology on learning English as a foreign language among female EFL College students. To achieve this aim, a questionnaire with Likert scale questions was used in the study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part began with two general questions about age and educational level.

The second part included four specific questions regarding technology tools that enhance learning the English language. Thirty-Six participants were included in this study. The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain accurate results. The findings clearly indicated that computer software, social networking websites, online videos, audio tools (i.e., YouTube, Skype, MP3 players), and smart phone and tablet apps have a positive impact on learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, technology tools can clearly be effective in improving the students' language and communication skills.

Concluding Remarks

The researcher concludes from reviewing the previous related literature the following points. The literature review is very rich in studies that focus on the subject of using social media sites in education either theoretical or empirical as well as presenting their advantages and disadvantages. Teachers who provide their students with lessons on how to use these social media sites effectively and efficiently have also been recognized as producing high levels of student success in learning English language. Many researchers conducted researches on EFL students at Jordanian Universities and hoped that this study could provide successful recommendations that benefit students, teachers and educators.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 50 EFL students (23 males & 27 females) chosen randomly from the Department of English Language and Literature at Ajloun National University.

Table 1. Distribution of the Sample according to Gender Variable

| Variable | Categories | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 23 | 46% |
| | Female | 27 | 54 % |
| | Total | 50 | 100% |

Table 1 shows gender variable, it includes (50) students (23) males and (27 females).

Instruments

To investigate EFL students' perceptions towards using social media at Ajloun National University a questionnaire was adopted from Laila Al-Sharqi & Khairuddin Hashim (2016). The questionnaire has 15 scale items with five Likert-type responses ranging from '*Totally agree*', '*agree*', '*neutral*', '*disagree*', and '*Totally disagree*'. The questionnaires were distributed to the students in classroom. The researchers remained in the classroom while the participants answered the questionnaires to respond to any questions that the participants may have in regards to the questionnaire. Upon completion, the researchers collected all answered questionnaires.

Data Analysis

In order to give judgments on the degree of acceptance, means were classified into three levels according to the relative statistical model as follows: Categories less than (3)

represent negative view, and categories more than (3) represent positive view. In fact, the researchers used the following categories to judge the items estimation:

- Means (1-less than 2.33) low estimation
- Means (2.34-less than 3.66) medium estimation
- Means (3.67-5) high estimation

Statistical Analysis

The following statistical treatment through statistical software packages (SPSS) were used:

- Frequencies and percentages of the characteristics of the study sample.
- Means and standard deviation for study tools and items.
- Independent sample.

Procedure

The study was carried out in the following manner:

1. Reviewing the related literature review to establish a theoretical and empirical background.
2. Preparing the instrument of the study and verifying its' validity.
3. Getting the approval from Department of English Language and Literature to conduct the study.
4. Meeting the participants of the study to clarify the purpose of the study.
5. Analysing the participants' answers to the questionnaire.
6. Using the proper statistical techniques to analyse the collected data according to the questions of the study.
7. Drawing the conclusions and recommendations at the close of the study.

RESULTS

This chapter presents findings of study which aims to investigate EFL students' perceptions towards Using Social Media at Ajloun National University by answering the study questions.

The first question

What are EFL students' perceptions towards using social media sites at Ajloun National University for EFL learning purposes?

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviation, Rank and Agreement degree for EFL students' perceptions towards using social media sites

| No | Items: Using social media sites can ... | Mean | SD | Rank | Agreement Degree |
|-------|--|------|------|------|------------------|
| 1 | Facilitate my learning of English Language. | 3.95 | 0.76 | 8 | Medium |
| 2 | Assist me to exchange opinions regarding subject. | 3.90 | 0.85 | 9 | High |
| 3 | Learn collaboratively with others. | 4.20 | 0.52 | 2 | High |
| 4 | Make me learn more convenient. | 3.55 | 0.89 | 15 | High |
| 5 | Improve my group-problem solving skills. | 3.85 | 0.75 | 11 | High |
| 6 | Develop my interaction with my classmates. | 4.30 | 0.57 | 1 | High |
| 7 | Improve my communication with instructors. | 3.65 | 0.81 | 13 | High |
| 8 | Help me co-create knowledge. | 3.90 | 0.85 | 9 | Medium |
| 9 | Assist me increase my leadership skills. | 4.00 | 0.86 | 7 | High |
| 10 | Help me become an independent learner. | 4.20 | 0.77 | 2 | High |
| 11 | Make my learning more interesting | 4.10 | 0.85 | 4 | Medium |
| 12 | Assist gaining more information on different subjects. | 3.80 | 1.11 | 12 | High |
| 13 | Make learning more competitive. | 4.05 | 0.83 | 5 | High |
| 14 | Increase my research skills. | 3.60 | 1.05 | 14 | High |
| 15 | Develop my ability to be creative and innovative. | 4.05 | 0.83 | 5 | High |
| Total | | 3.94 | 0.46 | - | High |

Table 2 shows that the highest means reached (4.30) out of (5) for item (6) "Improve my interaction with my classmates " by high agreement degree, then for item (3) "Learn collaboratively with others" and item (10) "Help me become an independent learner" (means 4.20) by high agreement degree, and the lowest means was (3.55) for item (4) "Make me learning more convenient" by medium agreement degree. The total means for EFL students' perceptions towards using social media at Ajloun National University reached (3.94) by high agreement degree.

The second question

Are there any statistical significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between male and female students' perceptions towards using social media sites in learning English language at Ajloun National university?

To answer this question, (Independent Sample t-test) was applied to explore significant differences between male and female students at Ajloun National University.

Table 3. The result of (Independent Sample t-test) to explore the differences between male and female students at Ajloun National University.

| Students' perceptions | Gender | N | Mean | SD | "t" value | Sig |
|-----------------------|--------|----|------|------|-----------|-----|
| | Male | 23 | 3.97 | 0.54 | | |
| | Female | 27 | 3.91 | 0.39 | | |

The findings of the t-test as shown on table 3 present the number of male students was (23) while the number of female students was (27). The means of achievement of the two groups were approximately equal in each item. The total means of all the items for the male students was (3.97) while it was (3.91) for the female students. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are NO statistically significance differences in EFL students' perceptions towards using social media sites in learning English language due to gender (Male and Female) variable, since t. value was (0.254) at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) and "Sig" value was found to be(0.803).

DISCUSSION

The first question

The results of the first question showed that the total means for EFL students' perceptions towards using social media at Ajloun National University reached means (3.94) by high agreement degree. This result highlights the importance of social media as effective strategies used by the EFL learners in learning English language. In fact, those social media sites are very useful in learning English language in classrooms and out classroom. Social media play a significant role in communication and is considered one of the fundamental sites in learning English Language as students who use social media sites to improve their ability to speak English better. Moreover, they give students an opportunity to listen to natural English through educational videos and news written in English, and in playing electronic games. The students can communicate with the teacher in another country or region easily, at any time or place, and save the effort, time and cost. The participants' responses to most of the items in the questionnaire showed their high positive agreement in using different social media sites in improving their English Language learning.

Affective social media sites can help the users to recognize their feelings and exchange their feelings with their friends, to share information and to check comprehension or to solve questions. The results of this question agree with the results of a study by Bataineh and Bani Abdurrahman (2006) who investigate Jordanian English as a use their perceptions of the students' foreign language (EFL) Internet for both general purposes and EFL learning purposes. The findings revealed that 47% of the sample reported using browsers to view documents, while slightly smaller percentages reported using the Internet for personal purposes, mailing lists and discussion group sand e-mail.

The second question

The second question is about if there were any statistical significant differences between male and female students at Ajloun national university towards using social media sites in learning English language. However, male and female students used different social sites media to improve their learning effectively and efficiently. The results revealed that there were no statistically significance differences in EFL students' perceptions towards using social media sites in learning English language due to gender (Male and Female) variable, since the t. value was (0.254) by significant (0.803). The results of this question agree with the results of a study conducted by Bataineh and Bani Abdurrahman (2006) who investigated the perceptions of EFL students towards their computer literacy. The study sample consisted of 210 EFL students. The results revealed that there is no significant effect due to gender, but a significant effect for year of study on students' perceptions of their computer literacy.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at investigating EFL students' perceptions towards using social media sites in learning English language (e.g., practicing various language skills, vocabulary, and structure through instructional software. The results showed that the overall degree of

the students' perceptions towards using social media sites in learning English language was high. This result highlights the importance of those sites as effective sites used by the EFL learners. Those social media sites were significant sites in learning English language efficiency in the classrooms. Social media play a significant role in communication. The findings of the study also revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students in their perceptions toward using those sites due to gender.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommended the followings:

- It is important to make a deeper investigation on the impact of the learners' level and background knowledge on using these social media sites, so the researchers recommends to conduct similar studies at other universities with larger groups.
- It is important to encourage students to use different activities and exercises available on social media sites as much as possible, because in this way they will find a great help in their process of English language learning.
- The researchers recommend that the authors of the curriculum focus on encouraging the use of social media sites in teaching English because they have a significant role in improving English language learning of the students.

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