

***The Use of Facebook as an Educational Tool to Develop the Writing Skill.
The Case of 'Master One' learners at the Department of English/ University of Jijel.***

Received date: 07-02-2018 Publication date: 08-05-2018

Fouzia BENNACER, university of jijel

bennacerfawzia@yahoo.fr

Salah KAOUACHE, university of jijel

skaouache-@live.fr

المخلص

تقدم هذه المقالة بحث إجرائي قام بالتحقيق في امكانية استعمال الفيسبوك كأداة تعليمية لتعزيز مهارة كتابة المتعلمين في قسم الانجليزية بجامعة محمد الصديق بن يحيى / جيجل. تم اجراء الدراسة مع طلاب "ماستر 1" باستخدام طرق بحث نوعية (الملاحظة ومجموعات المناقشة) لجمع البيانات. وأظهرت تحاليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها أن دمج تجربة الفيسبوك كان مفيدا في تعزيز الكتابة وعلاج بعض المشاكل ذات صلة. ومع ذلك ، عدم توفر الانترنت وعدم وجود الحافز والمواقف التي تشكلت من قبل هي اهم التحديات التي تواجه تطبيق هذه الطريقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارة الكتابة ، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ، الفيسبوك ، مشروع تعاوني ، التعليم المختلط.

Abstract

The present article discloses an action research that investigated the applicability of Facebook, as an educational tool to enhance English Foreign Language (EFL) learners' writing skill. The research was carried out with 'Master One' students at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia/Jijel, using a triangulation of qualitative methods- participant observation and focus groups-to collect data. The analysis of the obtained data showed that the integration of Facebook experience was beneficial in promoting writing and treating some related problems. However, obstacles like the lack of the net connection, lack of motivation and already formed attitudes represented the main challenges that face its applicability.

Key words: the writing skill, Social Media, Facebook, Telecollaborative project, blended leaning.

Résumé

Cet article présente une recherche-action qui a étudié l'applicabilité du Facebook, comme un outil éducatif pour améliorer les compétences d'écriture chez les apprenants d'Anglais comme une langue étrangère. La recherche a été menée avec des étudiants « Master 01 » à l'université de Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia / Jijel, en utilisant une triangulation de méthodes qualitatives - l'observation des participants et les groupes de discussion - pour recueillir les données. L'analyse des données obtenues a montré que l'intégration de l'expérience du Facebook a été bénéfique quant à la promotion de l'écriture et le traitement de certains problèmes connexes. Cependant, des obstacles tels que le problème de la connexion, le manque de motivation et les attitudes déjà formées représentaient les principaux défis auxquels son applicabilité est confrontée.

Mots clés: compétences en écriture, médias sociaux, Facebook, projet de télécollaboration, apprentissage mixte.

Introduction

Nowadays, the wide spread use of technology and the net have resulted in a generation that is completely different from the old generations in terms of their life style. The so-called ‘the Net Generation’ shows different thought patterns, learning styles and social experiences. This reality has pushed researchers in the field of language teaching/ learning to call for an adaptation of the teaching methods to reconsider those practices with which learners are familiar.

The use of Social Network Sites is a common feature of this generation and the Algerian youths are no exception. The use of Social Network Sites - especially Facebook- has become a feature of the secondary and university learners. Although such immense use has been under attack for it is seen as a waste of time and a reason behind reducing academic achievements, learners keep using it frequently for different purposes. Therefore, instead of asking learners to close their Facebook accounts –the thing that they will not do-, they are asked via this study to integrate such social experience in their educational system for the purpose of promoting their writing skill.

The present article begins with a definition of Social Media and how researchers have recently started testing the possibility of its integration for educational purposes. It moves to shed light on Facebook which is the tool used in the present study. Then, it describes the main problems that learners face when writing, the different approaches to teach writing and to provide corrective feedback. The second part of the article is practical; it presents the study that attempts to use Facebook as an educational

tool to develop master one learners’ writing skill at the university of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia/Jijel.

1. Social Media

The World Wide Web, or the Internet, was first created in 1990 for the management of the USA army. However, in the last twenty years, it has been widely used by civilians for communication and learning (Naizabekov, 2012). Social media are considered to be the most important outcome of the technology of web 2.0. They are interactive social platforms through which people establish communities to share knowledge, experiences and everyday life interests (Çetinkaya et.al. 2014). People use Social Media to establish relationships with peers, colleagues or groups in order to profit and be more effective. Hence, individuals can move from one community of publishers to another if they feel uncomfortable or unsatisfied (Blossom, 2009). According to Mayfield (2008, p. 05), there are five characteristics of Social Media:

- 1) Participation; every one interested can contribute.
- 2) Openness; open to freely add comments and feedback.
- 3) Conversation; it is a two way conversation in contrast to old Media.
- 4) Community; communities can be formed quickly to share interests.
- 5) Connectedness; the usability of other websites and resources.

Social network sites (SNS) include Blogs which are online journals, Wikis or online encyclopedias like Wikipedia, Podcasts that represent audio and video files, Forums refer to online communities that discuss online different topics,

Content communities are platforms to organize and share content like YouTube, and Micro blogging through which only small amounts of content are distributed online as in Twitter (Mayfield, 2008). Social Media play a significant role in educating people both formally and informally; without seeking to replace instructors, Social Media “is changing people from being passive vessels into which knowledge is poured into active creators and distributors of knowledge” (Blossom 2009, p. 233). Besides, learners use Social Media to share and create their learning experiences i.e. it provides a space where learners can collaborate while studying a subject, and share their findings.

Recently, Social Media have been used in Telecollaborative pedagogy. The latter is characterized by the use of internet communication tools to bring together geographically distant groups of language learners and teachers in institutionalized settings for the sake of developing their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through social interaction, telecollaborative tasks, and project work (Belz, 2007; O’Dowd, 2013). This kind of pedagogy “is commonly characterised as ethnographic, dialogic and critical” (Belz, 2007 p.138). It takes place “under the careful guidance of languacultural experts” (i.e. teachers) (Belz, 2007, p.158).

1. The Use of Facebook

Nowadays, Facebook is one of the most popular social network sites among youth, and mainly university students. It was first designed in 2004 by Zukerberg for Harvard College/ US students, then spread quickly to be used in other institutions (Peterović et.al. 2012). Later on, it expanded to the

public use and became “both a basic tool for and a mirror of social interaction, personal identity and network building among students” (Debatin et.al. 2009 p. 83). By 2010, Facebook users’ number reached 500 million, using it as one of their daily life activities. It is a social media service that may function as a tool for:

- Personal publishing like Twitter,
- Social network publishing; it enables people to initiate relationships with others to share information, needs and interests,
- Feedback and discussions; it enables its users to provide or receive comments, insights or opinions to gain knowledge about a given topic or product,
- Aggregation and filtering; it enables its users to gather content from other resources and use it to provide insights,
- Widgets and mashups; it encourages individuals to engage on a personal level by adding value to its content through providing additional one,
- Personal markets and marketing; it enables individuals to easily find people interested in offers be they content, products or services without intermediaries (Blossom, 2009).

Although the utility of Facebook in education was not investigated until recently, compared with other Social Network Sites as blogs and wikis, some researchers (Debatin et.al. 2009; Jin, 2015; Peterović et.al. 2012) claim that Facebook can be used successfully in educational settings. These claims are supported by theories of learning including incidental learning, socially situated learning, and the social theory/ constructivism (Kabilan et.al. 2010).

Facebook is recommended in education especially in the field of foreign language teaching and learning because of the interactive nature of

language, and because it is beneficial for both learners and teachers. For learners, the use of Facebook in learning allows for an easy and quick interaction, collaboration, active participation, resource sharing, and increasing socio-experiential opportunities. As a result, Facebook fosters learners' positive relationships with both their colleagues and their teachers, encourages knowledge transfer through involving learners in various learning tasks, and helps them develop positive attitudes towards learning, besides interpersonal intelligence and critical thinking (Peterović et.al. 2012). Furthermore, it represents a platform for authentic interaction and communication that raises learners' motivation, on the one hand, and provides teachers with opportunities to construct and practice a pedagogy that is based on learners' interests, on the other hand. Teachers would use Facebook as a tool to evaluate their learners formatively; to change attitudes and behaviours accepting learners as partners and allowing them to learn by themselves rather than through lecturing; and to establish efficient educational relationships that would help in developing new skills and knowledge (Peterović et.al. 2012).

However, because the quick wide spread of Facebook is due to school and university students' usage, some researchers (Debatin et.al. 2009; Kabilan et.al. 2010; Naizabekov, 2012) warn against its negative effects on learners' performance. Multitasking is one of the problems related to the extensive use of Facebook. It refers to the learners' potential to carry out several tasks at the same time; they write messages, search on the net, watch pictures and videos, and play game... at the same time. Learners use Facebook while doing their homework

which would result in a lack of attention and concentration, and thus, decreases their academic performance and achievement. Attention is not the only aspect facing risk, but also learners waste and overuse time on Facebook which affects negatively their ability to finish their tasks on time. In other words, frequent users of Facebook would lack the skill of time management which may cause cheating, plagiarism, and procrastination, and hence, learners lose their motivation of learning.

Facebook was also criticized for the privacy concerns and threats that it poses for its users, on the one hand, and for encouraging negative attitudes as addiction and lying, on the other hand. McBride (2009, p. 35) opposes this view stating that "If language learners become similarly involved with SNS activities containing pedagogically useful FL experiences, they might become more motivated and spend more time on the FL tasks". Therefore, teachers need to stress the usefulness of Facebook as an educational tool for their learners through clarifying the objectives and the outcomes of the projects that they are expected to be involved in using Facebook. Consequently, learners will be able to "(1) increase their competencies, (2) increase their self-knowledge, (3) value life-long learning, (4) improve their life skills, and (5) develop self-confidence" (Kabilan et.al. 2010 p.07).

To sum up, although some researchers (Kabilan et.al., 2010; McBride, 2009) argue for the usefulness of Facebook as an educational tool to increase learners' competences including the linguistic competence, and more particularly the writing skill, others (Debatin et.al. 2009; Kabilan et.al. 2010; Naizabekov, 2012) report that Facebook damages learners' academic performance. The results

differed from one context to the other, and encouraged the investigation of the use of Facebook in the Algerian educational context.

2. The Writing Skill

Writing is a system of rules that govern a group of symbols and signs to be used as a tool of communication by individuals who know the language in question (Hyland, 2003). It is defined by Weigle (2002, p. 19) as “an act that takes place within a context that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience”. In language learning and teaching, writing is a productive skill that requires learners to acquire vocabulary, grammar and syntax to be able to write a paragraph, together with other abilities to be able to revise it and to provide appropriate feedback. In this respect, Hyland (2003 p. 27) explains that “while every act of writing is in a sense both personal and individual, it is also interactional and social”. In other words, although the act of writing is individual, revision and corrective feedback need social interaction with others, be they teachers or peers.

Rivers (1968 cited in Harmer, 2005) manifests five main stages to develop the writing skill. The first stage is *copying/ transcription*; it involves an exact reproduction of words and phrases which allows for learning the conventions of the code, and developing “a basic mechanical competence” (Harmer, 2005 p. 44). The second stage is *reproduction*; this stage involves writing what has been already read or heard without returning back to original scripts. *Recombination* is the third stage; it refers to the reproduction of previously heard or read material with minor adaptation that may include

substitution, expansion, transformation or contraction. The following stage is *guided writing*; learners are given the freedom to write using what they have already acquired in terms of vocabulary and grammar, but they use a model as a guide. The final stage is *composition*; if learners were adequately trained in the previous stages, they would be able to transmit their thoughts freely and easily in a paragraph or essay.

2.1. Writing Problems

When writing in a foreign language, learners face many problems that would debilitate their performance, and may result in failure. These problems can be divided into psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and affective problems. Psychological problems lie in the absence of interaction and feedback as explained by Byrne (1988 p. 04) who states that learners “are required to write on [their] own, without the possibility of interaction or the benefit of feedback”. He adds that learners face linguistic problems since they cannot use facial expressions or body language in case of lack of vocabulary. In other words, the helping features used when speaking are not available when writing; instead learners need to select the appropriate structures and words to convey their messages. Besides, learners face the problem of organizing ideas in a comprehensible manner which is classified as a cognitive problem.

The affective factors that would debilitate the learners’ performance include motivation, anxiety, attitudes and self-esteem. In other words, learners would give up writing if they felt not interested or motivated. The reasons behind the loss of motivation vary and can be due to the learners’ personality, the

learning setting, the learning task, or the teacher's behaviours (Slavin, 2003). They may experience a high level of anxiety (i.e. debilitating not facilitative) that can be the result of either a lack of practice or a lack of sufficient background knowledge (Harmer, 2005). Consequently, these learners may develop negative attitudes towards writing and tend to skip the writing tasks. Last, self esteem is a personality trait that affects the learners' achievement in a foreign language in general, and writing in particular. It refers to the learners' emotional evaluation and judgment of the self, the way they write, and the final product they come at. Learners who have a high self esteem are viewed to be good writers in contrast to those with low self esteem. However, the teacher in class would help learners to build self confidence (Fontana, 1995).

2.2. Approaches to Teaching Writing

Researchers in the field of language teaching/learning described four main approaches for teaching writing; the product approach, the process approach, the creative approach and the cooperative approach. They vary in their focus, the role of the teacher and that of the learners.

The product approach focuses on the result of the learning process in terms of well-produced composition. In other words, the mastery of grammar and lexical systems gain paramount importance, and the learners' final performance is guided by various models. Therefore, copying and imitation are required. When scoring, teachers focus on the clarity, the originality and correctness of the final product. This approach is characterized by classroom writing, error analysis, and its focus on stylistics and on the objective outcomes (Badger and White, 2000).

The process approach puts emphasis on the process itself rather than on the final product, giving more attention to what teachers should do to help learners accomplish the writing task successfully. Henceforth, teachers clarify for their learners the different steps of the process starting with the selection of the topic that is based on the learners' interest and experience, to the stage of prewriting that includes brainstorming, collecting data, etc., to composing, to revising, to editing and correcting, to evaluating and reviewing (Hyland, 2003). This approach aims to raise the learners' awareness of the different steps and strategies applied within the process of writing, for that priority is given to the learners' interaction while accomplishing immediate tasks.

The creative approach focuses on the writer rather than the form; it requires learners to reflect on their own experiences spontaneously without worrying about grammar and spelling. The teachers' role lies in stimulating learners' ideas through the use of pre-writing tasks, and responding to their ideas rather than to form. Hyland (2003p. 10) manifests that "all writers have a similar innate creative potential and can learn to express themselves through writing if their originality and spontaneity are allowed to flourish".

The cooperative approach provides "opportunities for students to write as a part of the community and use each other for support and guidance" (Kessler et.al., 2012 p. 92). In other words, during their collaborative writing of a joint product, learners learn from each other, share success and failure, promote motivation feelings, and provide feedback for each other. The role of the teacher here is a facilitator.

Although these approaches differ in principles and the roles of teachers and learners, it is found that teachers rarely follow just one particular orientation; they instead mix more than one approach i.e. teachers follow an eclectic approach where different approaches are combined to suit the classroom needs in an effective way (Hyland, 2003).

2.3. Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback is the information that learners receive as a reflection on their written products, and that aims at improving their writing skill. Corrective feedback can be provided by the teacher, the peers, or both.

One of the most common feedback methods is the teachers' written commentary, the teachers' comments can be either responding or correcting. The former emphasizes the ideas, content and the writing design, while the latter addresses different language aspects as grammar, Lexis, Syntax, etc. (Harmer, 2005). However, learners may ignore the written comments of the teacher.

Peer feedback is regarded as a valuable method because it encourages collaborative work among learners. Harmer (2005 p.116) posits that "peer review is less authoritarian than teacher review and helps students to view both colleagues and teachers as collaborators rather than evaluators". Thus, learners would develop skills to critically analyze their writing products. However, this method is criticized for peers' inexperience to provide appropriate feedback and that goes beyond the level of the sentence, the fact that makes teachers' guidance, support and patience compulsory (Hyland, 2003).

Teacher-Student conferencing is another feedback method that requires oral or face to face interaction in order to discuss the written products. Hyland (2003 p. 192) explains that "the interactive nature of the conference gives teachers a chance to respond to the diverse cultural, educational and writing needs of their students, clarifying meaning and resolving ambiguities". He further manifested that for these conferences to be successful, learners need to have adequate interactive oral skills, and should be active participants who ask questions to clarify meaning, not passive recipients.

3. The Study

Inspired by recent innovations in the field of language teaching and learning, the study aimed to embody the learners' social experience in class to improve their learning in general, and the writing skill in particular. The learners' social experience that the study dealt with is their use of Social Media. In other words, the study followed a blended learning approach and aimed to include learning/ writing tasks within the use of social media to be a part of the learners' everyday life, and which would make them regard the writing tasks as everyday behaviours, discussions with friends, and reflection on ideas. It is hypothesized that this method would help learners overcome the writing problems they face in class; they would be more motivated, reduce their anxiety, interact and receive feedback, and enrich their vocabulary. Consequently, learners would perform better in class assignments and increase their self-esteem. To test this hypothesis, the following questions are asked to guide the design of the study:

- Does the embodiment of learners' use of Social Media help them overcome writing problems?

- Does this method help learners write better?
- Does the practice of writing on the Facebook group result in improvements in class assignments?
- What are the learners' attitudes and reflections on the use of such method?

3.1. Research Design

The present study followed a blended learning approach which is defined as "learning that combines online activity with more traditional periods of face-to-face contact and classroom interaction" (O'Dowd, 2007 p. 18), thus, the evaluation of participants should consider both. The online activity is a telecollaborative project, in which learners interact with other users of English by the use of a Facebook group. The study was carried out with 'Master One' students of English, at the department of English language and literature at the university of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia/ Jijel. These students interacted with a class of Brazilian EFL learners, and a group of Algerian learners who gained a scholarship to England to work on their PHD degree. It is an action research since the researcher (teacher) is involved in the study. The Algerian and the Brazilian teachers designed the tasks and posted them weekly, and interfered to provide explanations in case of misunderstandings or in case help was needed. The learners were given a week to discuss a particular topic before moving to another. They were recommended not to use symbols, abbreviations and icons because their meanings vary from one culture to another.

'Facebook' was selected to be the tool of interaction, after a class discussion through which

learners together with the researcher/teacher evaluated learners' use of technology, the net and different interaction tools as emails, videoconferencing, Skype, etc. The vast majority of 'Master One' learners agreed that the most suitable tool is Facebook because they are familiar with it; they assumed that they can use it easily since it is part of their everyday life. In this vein, O'Dowd (2007) argued that for an online language learning process to be successful, learners should perceive the activities / tasks together with the communication tool (e.g. email, chatrooms) as relevant to their learning practices in class and habitual practices in society respectively. Therefore, a Facebook Group named 'Critical Cultural Thinkers' was created beforehand through which learners can comment and discuss different topics under the supervision of the their teachers (the researcher and the Brazilian teacher). The group was closed i.e. only the participants can join it; they can use real or fake names provided that they send inbox messages to their teacher to identify themselves. The group feature gives the learners the opportunity to discuss with each other without accessing to each others' profiles i.e. privacy is secured. Besides, the learners had the opportunity to chat synchronously and asynchronously. The teacher hold the belief that Facebook gave her the opportunity to examine learners' participations and any editing that would take place in detail.

This project took place during the academic year 2016-2017. It ran through more than three months; from mid January to the end of April. 'Master One' learners were selected to be the population of this research for they do not have the 'written Expression module'; they have just a module labeled '*Pratiques Communicationnels*' which aims

at developing the communicative competencies. However, the time allocated for this module is only a one hour and a half session per week, this fact led learners at the beginning of the first semester to ask the teacher for help concerning the writing skill; they perceived it as important because they needed to develop their dissertations. Their number is 126 students, organized in four groups.

3.2. Data Collection

Since it was the writing skill that is under examination, data were collected through the use of qualitative research tools; participants' observation and focus groups are, therefore, triangulated to reduce bias.

a- Participants' Observation: Participants observation was divided into two. First, the observation of participants' interaction on Facebook; it was done through the use of note taking where a grid is used to evaluate the frequency, the significance of the learners' participation, and the appropriateness of the language used. The frequency refers to the extent to which learners were active participants in the Facebook group because it cannot be assumed that this method was beneficial for those who did not participate. The significance refers to the quality of learners' participation i.e. whether they participated responding to others' views or they just answered the question of the teacher giving one's point of view ignoring other different views. Besides, the learners may google the information, copy it and post it which means that they did not spend any efforts, and the language used does not reflect their own competence. The appropriateness of language use was evaluated not just in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and

structure, but in terms of communicative competence i.e. whether it was disrespectful or obscene.

Second, the participants' observation in class; the sessions were divided to cover oral communication (three sessions per month) and written sessions (one session per month). The latter was devoted to ask the learners to write about a particular topic that has a relation with the online discussion, and to provide feedback. The approach followed in the feedback session was a mixture of peer feedback and the student-teacher conferences where both the aspects of language and the ideas were considered. While observing the participants in class, the researcher used note taking for oral discussions, and used the participants' **portfolios** to assess learners' progress formatively. The portfolios included learners' test results, and task achievements –especially written tasks–, together with their reflections and participations in the feedback sessions throughout the whole project.

b-The Focus Group: this method requires asking a group of people to come together to discuss a certain issue. For that, focus groups are called also 'Discussion Groups' or 'Group Interviews' (Dawson, 2002 p. 29). Focus groups are more useful when triangulated with other traditional methods as questionnaires and observation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2005). The use of this method should be guided by some issues;

- How many focus groups to be used? There should be more than one group.
- What is the size of these focus groups? They should not be too small or too large.
- Participants should have knowledge or experience in the required area.

- Participants should feel comfortable to talk i.e. the facilitator should make the participants trust him/her through ensuring that they will be heard and valued, and that they will experience no kind of pressure either from the facilitator (to oblige them to talk) or from the group members (Cohen et.al., 2005; Darling and Scott, 2002).

The main advantages of focus groups are related to the impact of interaction on the participants. In other words, they help each other overcome inhibitions, feel comfortable to share their experiences, and remember issues that they might have forgotten especially if they are friends. Besides, they might ask each other questions which allow for the emergence of ideas and a wide range of responses in one meeting and in a short time compared to one-to-one interview, and which decreases the interference and the impact of researcher bias. Furthermore, focus groups help in gathering feedback from previous studies (Cohen et.al., 2005; Darling and Scott, 2002; Dawson, 2002).

The learners were divided into focus groups based on the type of their online participation i.e. whether they frequently participated or not. However, because of the learners' big number (126), the researcher opted for sampling, more particularly 'purposive sampling' (cf. Dawson, 2002). In other words, when the 'saturation point' is felt to be reached and no new information is occurring, the researcher decides to stop listening to other focus groups. In this study, the 'saturation point' was reached with the tenth focus group, but the researcher added two other focus groups that constituted of learners with different participation rates, to seek

additional ideas, but unfortunately the same ideas were repeated.

To ensure making learners comfortable, the teacher/ researcher worked to strengthen her relationship with the learners from the beginning of the year both in class and through Facebook friendship establishment. The discussions were held on May, they lasted an hour for each group, and were guided by the following questions:

- Do you find the idea of using Facebook as a teaching tool interesting?
- How often did you participate? Why?
- Did the Facebook group discussion help you to develop your writing skill?
- How did this method help in developing writing?

3.3. Analysis of the Results

The analysis of the learners' participation in the Facebook group revealed that out of a population of 126 learners, 122 students participated and their participation varied from 'very often' to 'rare'. 57 learners participated frequently, i.e. they posted paragraphs to describe and explain their opinions or ideas related to the task in question, to respond to others' comments, and to provide feedback. 55 learners showed a medium participation, and 10 learners rarely participated. Besides, 04 learners did not participate at all, they are girls who belong to very conservative families; their parents or brothers prevented them from using Social Media or having a Facebook account because they perceived it as damaging.

Analyzing the language used by the learners in the Facebook group and comparing it to the language they used in class assignments revealed that the

learners who frequently participated (57 learners), in the online discussions, showed a significant improvement in their writing. This was neatly reflected in the marks they got at the final written task. These learners tended during the last month to modify their comments many times which is a sign of self-reflection and editing that takes place after revising.

Considering the class written products of the 55 learners who did not participate frequently, and comparing them with their online writings, it can be reported that learners divided into those who showed improvement in writing , and those who kept repeating the same kind of errors with very little improvement. Nevertheless, it should be pointed that those who did not manifest any improvements just

posted their opinions answering the teacher’s questions, without interacting with others or reflecting on their writings. Besides, most of their posted comments were taken from different websites. Therefore, it can be claimed that although they participated, their participation cannot be considered significant since they did not write their own comments as they did not interact with others to learn from the committed mistakes.

The essays developed by the learners who rarely participated and those who did not participate at all reflected a constant level. In other words, the same errors were repeated, and no improvements were signaled. The results of the participants’ observation are summarized in the table.

Table. A summary of the participant observation results

	Frequent Participation		Medium/Rare participation		No participation		T O T A L
	With improvement	No improvement	With improvement	No improvement	With improvement	No improvement	
G1	18	00	16	05	00	02	41
G2	20	00	09	04	00	00	33
G3	10	00	11	04	00	01	26
G4	09	00	10	06	00	01	26
Σ	57	00	46	19	00	04	126

In a nutshell, out of 126 EFL learners, 04 (3.17 %) did not participate and showed stable writing levels, while 122 learners participated in the project. 103 learners (representing 81.74%) improved their writing through decreasing the errors they committed, enriching their vocabulary, using better structures and grammar, together with self-reflection and correction. However, 19 learners (representing 15.07%) showed very little improvement, if any.

The analysis of data obtained from the focus groups revealed that the vast majority of learners liked the idea of integrating Facebook in the educational process; they found it interesting, motivating and different from traditional boring methods. They argued that it helped them to overcome the problem of shyness and anxiety, especially in the case of a large size class; they can equally express their opinions in the online group. Some of them confessed that they had not thought at the beginning that it would work but they changed

their attitudes later on. Moreover, they liked the fact of using Facebook for education because they did not waste time and they did not need to report their tasks. However, some students found it unfair because not all learners had the net connection or Facebook accounts, while two others explained that they had never believed in the usefulness of Facebook for education.

Describing their participation in the Facebook group, some learners claimed that they frequently participated because they found it interesting and motivating, and because they learnt a lot from the tasks posted by the teachers and the responses of their mates. Other learners confessed that they were not very active and the reasons can be summed up in these points:

- The lack of net connection especially in the campus.
- The evaluation mark they would gain; they participated only to get the mark not because they are interested in developing their skills.
- They had a lot of modules and studies that should be done; they did not have time.
- There are other social duties they needed to cover (e.g. responsibilities for wives, fathers and working learners).

However, they explained that even though they did not post frequently, they tended to read the teachers' and mates' posts, check the language and structures they use, and compare them with their own. Besides, those who had net connection problems used to ask friends about the topic, think of it, and write about it waiting for the net to post it.

Regarding the development of the writing skill, the vast majority of learners agreed that this method enhanced their writing skill because they

were given the opportunity to learn from their own errors and those of others, to enrich their vocabulary through reading others' writings, to profit from the feedback they provided for each other, to interact and exchange ideas, and gave them time to revise, reflect and correct their errors. Moreover, other learners claimed that this method increased their sense of competition. When they read others pieces of writing, they compared them with theirs and worked more to be better and to produce scripts that resemble those of excellent learners. Besides, they argued that this improvement in writing was reflected in their speaking; they liked to participate more in oral classes.

3.4. Discussion of Results

After a close examination of the results, it can be said that the integration of the Facebook experience as an educational tool was beneficial in developing the learners' writing skill, provided that learners participated significantly, i.e. they should avoid copying and pasting information from other sources, they should write academically avoiding symbols and abbreviation, they should be motivated to learn and interact with others. Its positive effects were reflected in learners' enhanced writing, promoted motivation, interest and sense of competition. Aided by class sessions of feedback to direct learners, the Facebook group gave them opportunities to practice, interact, benefit and help each other to learn more vocabulary, grammar, structure... together with an exposition of different points of view and ideas that were expressed freely. Hence, it helped shy students when it gave all learners equal opportunities to participate.

However, this method found some challenges mainly the net connection in that not all learners had a good net connection especially those in the campus; they needed to go home or cyberspaces to check the online activity and participate which affected negatively their participation frequency and skill enhancement. Furthermore, although this method increased learners' motivation and decreased anxiety, and helped in changing some negative attitudes towards the use of Facebook for education, it can be declared that this issue has a cyclic nature. In other words, learners with high debilitating anxiety, strong negative attitudes towards the use of Facebook, or those who lack motivation showed a rare participation, and if they did, it was just for getting the mark. In this vein, it can be argued that motivation problems related to the learning setting, the learning tasks, and the teachers' behaviours can be treated using this method, but those related to learners' personality together with deeply rooted attitudes may need other treatments.

All in all, it can be said that the hypothesis put at the beginning of the study was confirmed. This method helped learners to improve their writing skill and to overcome some writing difficulties including those related to the lack of interaction, feedback, vocabulary and the organization of ideas. Besides, the learners increased their motivation and interest which resulted in reducing anxiety and increasing self confidence.

Conclusion

The present study examined the integration of the learners' social experience of using Facebook to promote 'Master One' learners' writing skill. It adapted a blended learning approach for teaching; a

telecollaborative project was designed for the online interaction, and the creative and the product methods were selected for teaching the writing skill. Feedback took the shape of peer- feedback and student-teacher conferencing in class, and peer-feedback in online discussions. To collect data, participants' observation and focus groups were used to get qualitative data. The analysis and the discussion of the results revealed that the hypothesis that guided the study was confirmed. However, issues of anxiety, motivation and attitudes were found to have cyclic influence i.e. this method would influence learners' motivation positively, and learners' lack of motivation and deeply rooted negative attitudes would restrict the success of this method. Besides, the lack of net connection still represents a challenging factor that would limit the application of such kind of teaching in Algeria.

References

- Badger, R. & White, G. (2000). A Process genre to teaching writing. *ELT Journal*. 52(2) pp 53- 60.
- Belz, J.A. (2007). The development of intercultural communicative competence in telecollaborative partnerships. In R. O'Dowd (ed.). *Foreign language teachers*. Multilingual Matters LTD. Clevedon. Buffalo. Toronto.
- Blossom,J.(2009). *Content nation: Surviving and thriving as Social Media changes our work, our lives, and our future*. Wiley Publishing Inc., Indiana Polis, Indiana.
- Byrne, D. (1988). *Teaching writing skills*. London, Longman.
- Çetinkaya,A.; Şahin, Ö.E.& Kirik,A.M. (2014). A Research on social and political use of Social Media in Turkey. *International Journal of Science, Culture and Sport (IntJSCS)*. December 2014: 2(4). Doi: 10.14486/IJSCS 207.
- Cohen, L.; Manion, L. & Morrison,K (2005). *Research methods in education (5th ed.)*. Routledge Falmer, Taylor & Francis Group. London and New York.
- Darlington,Y. and Scott, D. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Stories from the field*. Allen & Unwin. Australia.
- Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical research methods: A user-friendly guide to mastering research techniques and methods*. How To Books Ltd, United Kingdom.
- Debatin,B.; Lovejoy,J.P.; Horn,A.K.& Hughes,B.N. (2009). Facebook and online privacy: Attitudes, behaviors, and unintended consequences. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 15(2009) pp 83-108. International Communication Association.
- Fontana, D. (1995).*Psychology for teachers*. McMillan Press LTD.
- Jin,S. (2015). Using Facebook to promote Korean EFL learners' intercultural competence. *Language Learning & Technology*, October 2015, 19(3) pp 38-51.
- Harmer,J. (2005). *How to teach writing*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Hyland,K.(2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kabilan,M.K.; Ahmed,N.; Abidin, M.J.Z.(2010). An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education? *Internet and Higher Education*. Doi: 10.1016/J.iheduc.2010.07.003.
- Kessler, G.; Bikowski,D & Boggs, J. (2012). Collaborative writing among second language learners in academic web-based projects. *Language learning & Technology* 16(1) pp 91- 109.
- Mayfield,A. (2008). *What is Social Media?* England Forrester Research Social Computing. iCrossing.
- McBride,K. (2009). Social Networking Sites in foreign language classes: Opportunities for re-creation. In L. Lomicka & G. Lord (eds). *The next generation: Social Networking and online collaboration in foreign language learning*. (pp 35- 58). San Marcos,TX: Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO).
- Naizabekov, S. (2012). *Negative impact of Social Networking Sites on academic performance of students*. Retrieved March 15th, 2014 from www.Academia.edu
- O'Dowd, R.(2007). Foreign language education and the rise of online communication: A review of promises and realities. In R. O'Dowd (ed.). *Foreign language teachers*. Multilingual Matters LTD. Clevedon. Buffalo. Toronto.
- O'Dowd, R. (2013). The Competences of the telecollaborative teacher. *The Language Learning Journal*. Doi: 10.1080/09571736.2013.853374.
- Peterović,N., Peterović,D.; Jeremić,V.; Milenković,N.& Ćirović,M. (2012). Possible educational use of Facebook in higher environmental education. *In ICICTE 2012 Proceedings* (pp 355- 362).
- Slavin, R.E. (2003). *Educational psychology: Theory and practice*. Person Education,Inc.
- Weigle, S.D. (2002). *Assessing writing*. Cambridge University Press.