

Chapter 20

“Visit to a Small Planet”: Achievements and Attitudes of High School Students towards Learning on Facebook – A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The current chapter deals with the use of Facebook as a social network for learning. Collaborative learning, metacognition and reflectivity are theoretically discussed and assessed in the current Facebook learning environment, as essential skills of the 21st century. The case study presented examines the relationship between attitudes and achievements of high school students learning an English play in the Facebook closed-group environment. Its findings reveal a significant improvement in students' attitudes at the end of the sessions. However, these were not found to correlate with students' final achievements. In addition, low achieving students preferred to study collaboratively, as they did in the Facebook closed group, more than higher achieving students. These findings may indicate the contribution of other factors to achievement in addition to positive attitudes and satisfaction in the Facebook learning environment. A metacognitive analysis of the students' written responses supports and expands the findings of this study.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade the use of Facebook for educational purposes has increasingly become widespread. As a result, various studies have been conducted to examine and characterize students' and teachers' usage habits in educational institutions throughout the world, especially in colleges

and universities. The current research studies the relationship between attitudes and achievement of high school students in the Facebook learning environment, and reviews the current trends and controversies in the research literature concerning the use of Facebook as a learning environment for various age groups and subjects. Thirty 12th grade students studied an English play “Visit to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9441-5.ch020

a Small Planet” by Gore Vidal, during a period of two and a half months. A blended learning method combining both face to face and virtual learning through Facebook was used in this study. The virtual class took place in a Facebook closed group created exclusively for the EFL (English as Foreign Language) class. The importance of a closed group in Facebook is identified in the literature concerning communities of knowledge which share a common goal, common knowledge and access to resources and communications for creating collaborative products.

This study aims at examining Facebook or, more specifically, the potential of the closed group in Facebook as a formal learning platform for high school students. This examination will be carried out - using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies - by comparing students’ attitudes at the beginning and at the end of the learning process and by checking whether there is a relation between these attitudes and their achievement. Students’ metacognitive processes will also be analyzed by using a *Tool for Analyzing Metacognitive Thinking of Learners on Facebook* which was designed especially for this research. We aim to obtain richer, more accurate and more reliable findings as a result of using the metacognitive tool.

In addition, this study will present a model for teaching English literature to EFL high school students in a closed group on Facebook. The effectiveness of this model will be tested through three different aspects: attitudes, achievement and metacognition. We assume that attitudes towards learning in the Facebook environment will be improved at the end of the course. We also expect to find a relation between students’ attitudes towards studying English literature on Facebook and their achievement in the final test on the play.

The closed group offers the possibility to perform various activities which contribute to collaborative learning (such as, uploading collaborative files, posting on a group wall, messaging the whole group). There are various platforms that allow it, such as Google class and Google doc. Yet

the importance and advantage in Facebook is that the environment is part of the daily routine of the students today, and through this activity they get learning experience “anywhere” that is relevant for their life, beside the social media literacy skills.

If Facebook is proved to be effective as a learning environment, it would be possible for teachers to design and implement learning processes that meet professional standards which are not always easy to meet in highly populated traditional classes. The following research questions reflect the above objectives.

Research Questions

1. What are the students’ attitudes towards learning in the Facebook environment?
2. Did these attitudes change following the learning process?
3. Is there a relation between the students’ attitudes towards learning on Facebook and their achievement at the end of the learning process?
4. What can be concluded from the students’ metacognitive reflections on their learning experience on Facebook?

The literature review in the following section will include an overview of studies in four domains:

1. Attitudes, motivations and personality factors in the context of Facebook use.
2. Facebook as a learning environment.
3. Formal learning in the Facebook “closed group”.
 - a. The pedagogical rationale for using the “closed group” as a collaborative learning environment.
 - b. Collaborative learning and its relation to an online environment: Research results.
4. Metacognition in a collaborative online learning environment.

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