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The Role of Social Networks in Improving Students'

Communicative Competence

Case study of third-year English students at Biskra University

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Sciences of the Language

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Dedication

*With all love that covers my heart, I dedicate this work:
To my mother and father, source of my happiness and success in life.*

May Allah bless them.

To my lovely little sisters and brother Karima, Lydia, Amir

To Lamine who was always there to support me

To all the members of my family

Benhannachi and Sini

To all my friends

To all those who believed in me and pried for my success

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Abstract

The present dissertation attempts to investigate the role of social networks in improving students' communicative competence. The main problem underlying this endeavour resides in most of students' inability to carry on a spontaneous interaction, whether in the classroom or in any natural setting. As a result, most of them spend long periods of time in social networks believing that these means of communication may help them develop their communicative competence. In this research, it is hypothesized that Students' use of social networks would have a positive impact on their communicative competence and that the online environment may provide a comfortable atmosphere for shy students to interact with others and to improve their communicative performance as well. The present dissertation is constructed of three main chapters, the first and the second chapters deal with the theoretical framework and the last one is devoted to the field work. Moreover, the current study was based on the qualitative design as an approach to gather and analyze data. Through a questionnaire administered to 41 third-year students, and interviews conducted with 6 teachers of oral expression module, we intended to explore both learners' and teachers' opinions about the nature of language learning and the mechanics of developing students' communicative competence as well as providing a comfortable atmosphere for shy students through the use of social networks. Therefore, the obtained results showed that most teachers strongly believe that through interaction on social networking sites, learners (especially inhibited ones) could build up their communicative competence in using the target language. In addition, with an appropriate training and use of these social networks, they considered the integration of such devices in the academic setting as an effective strategy to achieve their communicative goals. Hence, both of our hypotheses were successfully proved.

List of abbreviations

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

SLT: Situational Language Teaching

CLA: Communicative Language Ability

SNSs: Social Networking Sites

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General introduction

Over the last decade, the new technological developments in the world have made the Internet a modern way for individuals to communicate. Social networks have gained a huge popularity and their use has become a widespread practice among individuals. People use such websites such as Skype, Twitter and Facebook primarily to maintain and create relationships with others. In particular, many students have spent long periods of time on the web. Hence, they present a large number of users of social networks to communicate with family, friends, and even strangers.

Furthermore, the fact that these students have been using such means for communication means that they unconsciously tend to improve their communicative ability. Furthermore, social networks have been believed to have considerable negative effects on their users. However, if these websites are appropriately used, they are likely to have spectacular results to their users and they are going to be perceived as indispensable ways for language teaching and learning processes.

Given that communication has recently been the central aim of language learning, teachers have to be innovative and talented in meeting their students' needs and interests in order to reach the objectives of their instructions. Accordingly, it is the purpose of the present study to explore the role of social networks in improving students' communicative competence as well as providing a comfortable atmosphere for students to interact using the target language.

1. Statement of the problem

Developing oral proficiency or communicative competence, i.e., the skill which most learners today regard as their first priority is the students' challenge in learning a second

or foreign language, especially with introverted (shy) students and when there is no authentic exposure to the target language. As a result, many students try to search for the appropriate ways to enhance their communicative performance. On the other hand, recent studies have shown that several students are using social networks in increasing rates. The problem that is raised in this research is to explain the reasons behind the students' usage of such websites and to examine the role of social networks in helping students develop their communicative performance.

2. Aim of the study

The aim of the present study will focus on the role of social networks in improving students' communicative competence. We believe that social networking sites provide students (especially introverts) with the opportunity to interact with others. Thus, our aim, in the present piece of research, is to propose social networks as an effective way to meet language learning/ teaching objectives.

3. Research questions

Two research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How can social networks be effective in improving students' communicative competence?
2. How can social networks help shy students overcome their inhibitions in communication?

4. Research hypotheses

The present study is based on two (2) main hypotheses that should be tested and verified:

1. Students' use of social networks would have a positive impact on their communicative competence.
2. The online environment may provide a comfortable atmosphere for shy students to interact with others and to improve their communicative competence.

5. Significance of the study

This study is significant because social networks are new developments in the technological world. They have created a modern way for individuals to communicate in an easy and effective way. Many students tend to use this recent technological phenomenon in their daily life because they help students modernize their way of thinking, learning and therefore their communicative ability. Thus, the significance of this study is to spot the lights on the students and teachers' attitudes towards using social networks as an effective strategy to help students improve their communicative skill.

6. Research methodology

The research study will be based on the qualitative design as an approach to gather and analyse data. As far as we are concerned, the topic of our present research is considered to be a fresh and new subject matter. Therefore, data in this work are intended to be collected from different sources. We intend to use a structured questionnaire to seek students' responses, and semi-structured interviews for gathering teachers' opinions. Finally, the results will be stated after analyzing the collected information.

6.1. Sampling

Third-year students of English, at the University of Biskra, represent the entire population of the present study. Particularly, our sample comprises forty one (41)

students, from a total population of about 337 students. The participants in this study were randomly selected from different classes. Again, the majority of participants (32 students) were from the same group, but the rest were selected from different groups. The reason behind choosing to work with third-year is that they are more aware of the best methods that motivate them to develop their communicative competence.

In addition, our sample consists of six (6) teachers who teach oral expression at Biskra University. It is very important to take into consideration teachers' opinions about the increasing rate of students' usage of social networks for the sake of developing language learning as well as improving their communicative performance. Teachers have to adapt to the technological development by choosing the best methods and ways that fit their students' interests and which, in turn, will motivate them to well perform communicatively.

6.2. Research instruments

For this research, we have used two data gathering tools; the first instrument would be a structured questionnaire to students. The questionnaire would be consisted of a mixture of close and open ended questions that measured respondents' attitudes and frequency of using social networks.

Moreover, the second instrument would be semi-structured interviews to teachers of oral expression module to examine their opinions about using social networks as an instructional strategy to provide a released environment to develop students' communicative competence. At the end, the collected data would be carefully analyzed in order to draw on the role of social networks in improving students' communicative competence.

7. Structure of the dissertation

The present research is basically divided into three main chapters. Both of the first and second chapters are devoted to the literature review and the third chapter is concerned with the field work. This dissertation starts with a general introduction that deals with the statement of the problem and the aim of the study. It includes also the research questions, hypotheses, and the significance of the study. The general introduction ends with the research methodology, research instruments and the structure of the study.

The first chapter provides a historical background of communicative language teaching, and highlights different perspectives and aspects of communicative competence. This chapter ends with the applications of the concept of communicative competence to language teaching.

The second part of the research deals with the concept of social networks. In this chapter, we provide a distinction between the confusing concepts: social media and social networks. Moreover, it draws attention to the use of Facebook in higher education and ends with the implementation of Facebook in the classroom.

The last chapter is devoted to the analysis of data gathered from the research tools. It contains a detailed description and analysis of the students' questionnaire and teachers' interviews. In this chapter, we answered the research questions and checked the results as to the truthfulness of the hypotheses, and at the end, we put forward some practical recommendations.

Chapter I

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Introduction

Over the last few decades, and from the beginning of the modern age of foreign language teaching, the focus of language learning shifted from the traditional use of grammar and vocabulary to a more functional interest in the language use in different social situations. Hence, improving students' communicative competence has become the major challenge in the teaching/learning of second or foreign languages. This chapter highlights a brief history of communicative language teaching as well as the learner and teacher's roles in the communicative classroom. Then, it focuses on the notion of communicative competence from different perspectives. Finally, it involves some applications of the concept of communicative competence to language teaching in order to improve the learners' use of the language.

1.1. The History of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is defined as an approach to teaching a second or foreign language, and which focuses on interaction as a means of learning a language in real-life situations. It pays more attention to the needs and desires of its learners, and links between the language taught in the classroom and its use outside the classroom. In other words, CLT helps learners develop their communicative competence in an authentic context.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the historical development of CLT was originated to the changes in the tradition of teaching the British language in the 1960s. Situational Language Teaching "SLT" (teaching the language by practicing basic structures in appropriate contexts) was the main British approach used for teaching English as a foreign language. However, the theoretical assumptions concerning SLT were begun to be doubted about by British applied linguists.

The prominent American linguist Noam Chomsky explained that the fundamental characteristic of language “the creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences” (p. 153) cannot be described by the present structural theories of language. As a response to this, Richards and Rodgers noted that there was no significance in following the SLT Approach. On the other hand, what was required was a closer study of the language itself and a return to the traditional concept “... that utterances carried meaning in themselves and expressed the meanings and intentions of the speakers and writers who created them” (Howatt, 1984, p. 280).

At that time, the functional and communicative potential of the language was another fundamental dimension of language dealt with in approaches to language teaching, which was highlighted by British applied linguists, who saw the necessity to concentrate on the communicative ability rather than the mastery of the linguistic rules of a language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Furthermore, greater efforts of teaching the main common European languages to adults grew with the independence of European countries. The council of Europe, whose main interest was education, was the responsible of solving such problem. It played a great role in developing different methods for language teaching.

In 1971, developing language courses on a unit-credit system started to be the subject matter of investigation of a group of experts. A unit-credit system is a system in which learning tasks are split into units, each unit deals with the need of European language learners and it is related to all the other units (Alexander, 1980. Cited by Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The British linguist D. A. Wilkins (1972) played a great role in the development of CLT. Initially, he introduced a functional or communicative definition of language that

the language learner needs to understand and express to develop communicative syllabi for language teaching. Then, he tried to focus on the system of meanings of the communicative uses of language rather than dealing with the traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary in describing the language. Furthermore, Wilkins' (1976) major role in the development of CLT flourished when he enlarged his document into a book entitled "Notional Syllabuses". Afterwards, his semantic and communicative analysis was included by the Council of Europe in the communicative language syllabus, which had a great influence on the creation of communicative language curriculum and textbooks in Europe.

As a matter of fact, the communicative approach has been extended nationally and internationally. It plays a central role in most modern language teaching situations under many developments such as: the work of the Council of Europe, the writings about the theoretical principles of the functional approach to language teaching of some British applied linguists, mainly Wilkins, Widdowson, and Candlin, and the rapid agreement on these new principles by British language teaching specialists, curriculum development centers, and yet governments (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

1.2. Widdowson's concept of communicative language teaching

Widdowson was very influential in English language teaching. He (1978) said: "We do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence; but also how to use sentences appropriately to achieve communicative purposes" (Cited in Ohno, 2011, p. 27). In other words, he regarded Language learning as not only the acquisition of knowledge of constructing grammatically correct sentences and combining expressions when needed, but also the ability to use language according to different contexts.

Widdowson (1972) rejected the idea that the acquisition of competence determines one's performance and proved that a number of years of instruction will not assure normal language communication. Hence, in his book of *Directions in the Teaching of Discourse* (1973) he was influenced by Hymes' idea that when children acquire the knowledge of grammar, they also acquire the knowledge of appropriateness as well. Accordingly, he suggested that the acquisition of only the linguistic skills will hinder the development of communicative abilities. That is to say that the communicative abilities must be developed in parallel with the linguistic skills. Thus, we need to teach communicative competence at the same time as teaching linguistic competence.

Concerning teaching linguistic and communicative competence, Ohno supported Widdowson's distinction of the two aspects of performance: "usage", which is said to mean: "the extent to which the language user demonstrates his knowledge of linguistic rules" in one hand, and "use" which is defined as: "the extent to which the language user demonstrates his ability to use his knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communication" (Ohno, 2011, p. 27). Moreover, Widdowson (1978) made a distinction between two aspects of meaning: "significance" which is the meaning of a sentence detached from the context, and "value" is the sentence meaning when communication is taking place. Hence, he viewed that when presenting the language, teachers have to provide both linguistic and communicative contexts to ensure both types of competence.

1.3. Roles in the Communicative Classroom

Nunan (2001) claimed that both roles of the teacher and the learners are complementary, and each individual plays a crucial role in the language classroom.

1.3.1. The Role of the Learner

According to Nunan (2001), the role that learners need to adopt has been affected dramatically by the development of CLT. In oral interaction tasks, and particularly in the small-group interaction tasks, learners are required to negotiate meaning by using the language, which Nunan described as “language which has been imperfectly mastered” (p. 86), to make them rely on their own abilities and resources, rather than just repeating and absorbing language. Learners are required to interact with each other and not only with the teacher. Lerson-Freeman (1986, p. 131) says:

Students are, above all, communicators. They are actively engaged in negotiating meaning- in trying to make themselves understood even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete. They learn to communicate by communicating. Since the teacher’s role is less dominant than in a teacher-centred method, students are seen as more responsible managers of their own learning.

Students must be encouraged to communicate and negotiate meaning using the target language without paying attention to their mistakes. When they are involved in interactions they are more likely to develop their communicative ability.

1.3.2. The Role of the Teacher

If the learners have already set ideas concerning language learning, which are quite different from the teachers’ own principles, this may cause him or her numerous problems. Therefore, Nunan suggested that the teacher should insist that he/she is most knowledgeable and the learners must do what is asked from them to do. Moreover, the teacher can design activities around their preferences. Another option is to interact and communicate with the learners by discussing the topic, explaining the benefits of

engaging and negotiating in communicative tasks. Accordingly, Nunan provided an example of a teacher 'Sally'. This teacher was worried about her students' hesitation to engage in pair work. She decided to negotiate with her students in order to convince them to use role play without any revolt. She reported that:

At first (the students) were a bit stunned and amused at the teacher wanting them to give their opinions on content and methodology... as a result of the consultation process, all learners were quite prepared to continue with the pair work. Clarifying the rationale also made 'an incredible difference' to how they went about their pair work.

Furthermore, the teacher should be aware of the great responsibility he/she is carrying upon his/her shoulders. The teacher plays many roles in the communicative classroom. He/she acts as a facilitator, participant, observer and learner (Breen & Candlin, 1980. Cited in Nunan, 2001). Bright and Mc Gregor (1970, p. 4) summarized the role of the teacher in developing the communicative competence of the learner, and advocated: "stop teaching and let them learn".

1.4. Communicative competence

Communicative competence is a key concept in the CLT approach. The Longman dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1985) defined it as: "The ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom" (p. 49).

The concept of 'communicative competence' was first coined by Dell Hymes (1972) as a reaction to Noam Chomsky's notion of 'linguistic competence', and which has been further developed by researchers such as Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), Bachman (1990) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), Who attempted to define the

specific components of communicative competence. Dell Hymes considered Chomsky's view as being 'too narrow' to describe language behaviour as a whole, also knowing the grammatical rules is not sufficient for speaking and communicating using a language (Knapp & Antos, 2009). Furthermore, Canale and Swain (1980) strongly believed that the study of grammatical competence is as essential to the study of communicative competence as the study of sociolinguistic competence. Furthermore, Saville-Troike (2003) mentioned that communicative competence involves knowing not only the linguistic code, but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any situations. That is, in order to use and interpret the linguistic forms, speakers need to have the social and cultural knowledge of that target language.

Moreover, Knap and Antos claimed that communicative competence is found not only for scientific purposes, but also for practical application. They explained that "A certain amount and quality of communicative competence is needed not only in social interaction at the interpersonal level, but also at organizational and public levels, as well as for intercultural exchanges" (2009, p. 24).

1.4.1. Chomsky's perspective on competence

The following argument, which is made by the generative grammarian Noam Chomsky (1965), and from where he came about the distinction between "competence" and "performance", was the main stimulus for the emergence of the conception of communicative competence:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random

or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. (Cited in Kamiya, 2011, p.64)

According to Knapp, Seidlhofer and Widdowson (2009), Noam Chomsky viewed that the term ‘competence’ contrasts ‘performance’. The former is “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language” and the latter is “the actual use of language in concrete situations” (p. 493). Ohno (2011), in his paper, claimed that competence is a shared knowledge which enables a user of language to produce and interpret an unlimited set of sentences through a limited set of rules. Performance, on the other hand, is related to the process of applying the shared knowledge of language users to the actual language use. In making such a distinction, Lyons (1996) reported that Chomsky considered languages as rule-governed systems which have no link with social and situational variation (cited by Enric Llurda, 2000).

1.4.2. Perspectives from sociolinguistics

From the sociolinguistic perspective, the concept of communicative competence is seen from three different viewpoints:

1.4.2.1. Hymes’ perspective of communicative competence

According to Margie Berns (1990), in the 1970s, the term communicative competence appeared as an essential theoretical concept to explore the relationship of language to culture and society. In the United States, and as a reaction to the Chomskyan distinction between competence and performance, the anthropologist Dell Hymes viewed this notion as being very narrow to describe language behaviour as a whole and it is an incomplete reflection of competence (Ohno, 2011). Instead, he rejected this dichotomy because he considered the two concepts as “two sides of a coin” arguing that “Performance is the observable part, and competence is the inferred ability

to produce the observed performance in the future, and both of them may be influenced by special cognitive and social factors” (Rickheit & Strohner, 2008, p. 17-18).

In 1972, Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence in a variety of interpretations; each interpretation differs according to the discipline where it is used. In her book *contexts of competence*, Margie Berns claimed that Hymes viewed the concept of communicative competence as an accounting “for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical but also as appropriate” (1971, p. 30). She explained that apart from knowledge of grammatical rules, this knowledge of appropriateness refers to the sociolinguistic rules.

Furthermore, by maintaining the idea of Chomsky concerning grammatical competence, Hymes (1974) focused on the contextual relevance which is regarded to be one of the main aspects of one’s knowledge of the language (Kamiya, 2011). In other words, he brought the sociolinguistic perspective into Chomsky’s linguistic view of competence (Bagaric & Djigunovic, 2007). Moreover, Hymes said: “... he or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner” (1972, p. 277).

Indeed, he argued that the speech community and the current communicative event are those who determine meaning in communication. Therefore, He developed a valuable model to resume the main components of speech events in the acronym SPEAKING, under which he grouped the sixteen components within eight divisions: Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms of interaction and interpretation, and Genre (Kamiya, 2011). As cited by Troike (2003), in addition to the knowledge of appropriateness in using a particular language, Hymes established the issue of occurrence (whether and to what extent something is done), and feasibility

(whether and to what extent something is possible under particular circumstances), which improves one's expectation of his or her competence (ibid.).

1.4.2.2. The ethnographical point of view: Muriel Saville-Troike's perspective

Muriel Savil-Troike is an ethnographer whose ideas extended from Dell Hymes' notion of communicative competence. In her book, *The Ethnography of communication*, she considered the issue from the perspective of second or foreign language contexts arguing that communicative competence "involves the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and interpret linguistic forms" (Troike, 2003, p. 8). That is to say, communicative competence includes knowing the knowledge of the linguistic code and considering the appropriate contexts of use.

Communicative competence within the ethnographical point of view deals with the communicative knowledge and skills shared by a speech community. Therefore, in providing adequate descriptions of the concept of communicative competence, Saville-Troike (1989, 1996, & 2003) distinguishes three types of knowledge that are used in appropriate communication, namely: linguistic, instructional and cultural knowledge (cited in Kamiya, 2011). In other words, she (2003) provided few examples of these types of knowledge and skills that are needed to be possessed to say that a particular speaker is communicatively competent. They are: knowledge of when and when not to speak, social structure (status, power, and speaking rights), what nonverbal behaviours are appropriate in various contexts, how to take turns in conversation, how to provide and obtain information, and how to perform speech acts appropriately within different speech events and communities. To sum up, communicative competence is "everything involving the use of language and other communicative modalities in particular social settings" (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 18).

1.4.2.3. The interactional aspect: Gumperz' perspective

Gumpers is known to be the founding father of interactional sociolinguistics. He (1982) viewed it as a current field of inquiry which is interested in “the language usage of particular human groups and relies on data sources and analytical paradigms quite distinct from those employed by linguists” (p. 2). In Kamiya (2011), Gumperz reported Gofman's (1981) “interactional Order” that is used to link between the linguistic and social factors.

In addition to that, he claimed that talk is a form of practicing communication that should be related to the context where it takes place. Accordingly, Gumperz (2001) said that talk helps conversationalists reach their communicative goals in real-life communicative exchange, rather than being just an encoding and decoding of individuals' messages. Moreover, in the same year, he added that in order to determine a sentence, one should have not only the grammatical knowledge alone, but also the speaker's ability to imagine the context in which the sentence is interpreted.

Concerning the general level of creating and interpreting meaning (productive and interpretive processes), Gumperz focused on the significance of how the necessary conventions are shared by the interlocutors to carry on their conversations. His particular interest was contextualization cues that are defined as: “constellations of surface features of message form are the means by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence relates to what precedes or follows” (Gumperz, 1982, p. 31).

In other words, Gumperz views that an individual's language competence has to be discussed in relation to interaction, and in order to succeed in conversational exchange, the communicative conventions have to be marked using appropriate contextualization

(Kamiya, 2011). Finally, although the focus is different, Hymes, Saville-Troike, and Gumperz have developed a similar notion referring to competence.

1.4.3. Perspectives from second language acquisition

The current research on communicative competence from the second language acquisition viewpoint is based on the work of two main models of communicative competence: the model of Canale and Swain as well as the model of Bachman's communicative language ability.

1.4.3.1. Canale and Swain (1980) Canale (1983)'s Model of Communicative Competence

In relation to second language pedagogy, and following Hymes' work, this cited model by Canale and Swain (1980), contained three main competencies under the title of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic competence, in which they gave an equal importance to the grammatical competence and socio-cultural competence and said: "Just as Hymes (1972) was able to say that there are rules of grammar that would be useless without rules of language use, so we feel that there are rules of language use that would be useless without rules of grammar" (1980, p.5). However, this theoretical framework is expanded by Canale (1983) who later divided sociolinguistic competence into sociolinguistic and discourse competence (Kamiya, 2011).

1.4.3.1.1. Grammatical competence

The grammatical competence is "the implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 04). This means that it is the ability to construct grammatically correct utterances by mastering the knowledge of phonology,

morphology, lexical items, and semantics, in order to express and interpret the literal meaning of these utterances.

1.4.3.1.2. Sociolinguistic competence

Canale and Swain (1980) defined this component of communicative competence as the “knowledge of the rules of language use” (p. 4); that is, the ability to understand and produce appropriate utterances in different sociolinguistic and socio-cultural contexts, by mastering socio-cultural rules of the target language. For instance, as Kamiya illustrated: “understanding of speech act conventions, awareness of norms of stylistic appropriateness, the use of a language to signal social relationships, etc.” (2011, p. 71).

1.4.3.1.3. Strategic competence

It refers to the knowledge of how to use communication strategies to handle breakdowns in communication and to take an active part in an interaction. Basta (2011) believes that strategic competence refers to “critical and creative aspect of human mind” (p. 127). She also supported Douglas’ idea (2000) that it “mediates between the internal traits of the user’s background knowledge and language knowledge and the external characteristics of the situational and cultural context” (cited in Basta, p. 127). In other words, strategic competence includes verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication (Ohno, 2011).

1.4.3.1.4. Discourse Competence

It is concerned with the mastery of rules for combining forms and meanings to achieve a meaningful unity of texts. For instance, cohesion (e.g. anaphora, cataphora, conjunctions, synonyms, etc.) aids to link different parts of texts. Whereas, coherence (e.g. Repetition, consistency, relevance of ideas, etc.) refers to the semantic unity of the spoken or written texts (Bagarié, 2007).

1.4.4. Communicative language ability: Bachman

Bachman (1990) claimed that communicative language ability (CLA) consists of competence (knowledge) as well as the ability to apply, or perform that competence appropriately in different social contexts in language use. In his model of CLA, he proposed three components of communicative competence: language competence, strategic competence, and psycho-physiological mechanisms. Language competence comprises two major components: organizational and pragmatic competence and each of these consists of many categories.

1.4.4.1. The organizational competence

It is “the organization of the linguistic signals that are used in communication and how these signals are used to refer to persons, objects, ideas, and feelings” (Bachman, 1990, p. 89). It involves, first, grammatical competence which reflects Canale and Swain’s grammatical competence, meaning that it is the knowledge of linguistic code. Second, textual competence is another subpart in language competence which involves the knowledge of cohesion and coherence and rhetorical organization. Moreover, it comprises rules for language use in conversation, such as starting, maintaining, and ending conversations. This competence is said by Kamiya (2011) that it is in parallel with Canale and Swain’s discourse and strategic competence.

1.4.4.2. The Pragmatic Competence

Bachman (1990) was the first who came with the concept of pragmatic competence as a main component of communicative competence. It implies both of illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence, the former refers to knowledge of speech acts and language functions and the latter refers to the knowledge of how to use language functions appropriately in any context. In other words, the illocutionary competence helps not only the addresser to use the language and to express different

functions of speech, but also it enables the addressee to understand and perform the speech acts.

However, the sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of language use in appropriate contexts. More precisely, Bachman (1990) included four main abilities under the sociolinguistic competence: sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety, sensitivity to differences in register, sensitivity to naturalness, and finally ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech.

1.5. Applications of the concept of communicative competence to language teaching

After realizing the important role of the communicative language teaching approach, many questions arose about what is its nature? Is it applicable? And how to help our students acquire communicative competence in the classroom? Ohno (2011, p29) reported that “language teaching can and should approach language learning objectively and analytically through the study and practice of structural, functional, and socio-cultural aspects.” Stern (1981). On one hand, Stern suggested that the language teaching should provide learners with authentic contexts to experience the use of language through direct contact with the target language society.

On the other hand, Ohno presented a methodological distinction between “skill-getting” and “skill-using” activities proposed by Rivers. In the skill-getting activities, the learners are taught in separate steps of communication skills. Rivers (1972) pointed “the student must learn to articulate acceptably and construct comprehensible language sequences by rapid associations of learned elements.” (Ohno, 2011, p. 30)

Whereas in the skill-using activities, the learners should not be supported or directed by the teacher, but they are left by their own and are allowed to use anything they know

of the language to express what they want to mean. Consequently, both Stern and Rivers argued that the skill-getting and skill-using are two levels of language teaching on which the teacher should focus on different stages of a language program.

Conclusion

Foreign or second language learning is a combination of mastering both of the linguistic competence; which is the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences, and the knowledge of language use in communication, and not each one separately. As researchers first and teachers second, we need to carry on studying and searching deeply to clarify and to fulfill the gaps in the area of communicative competence. In fact, we should adapt to the technological developments that help develop students' communicative competence. Thus, establishing better means and strategies that suits the learners' interests and needs of language learning is our main purpose of conducting this part of the research.

Chapter II

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Introduction

Over the last decades, the Internet gave birth to online social networking, which in turn played a great role in changing the world. The culture to meet people face-to-face slowly disappears. Young people now prefer to exchange ideas, feelings, pictures, and videos through online social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, blogs, emails and many others. These social websites gained a huge popularity and their use has become a widespread practice among individuals. Particularly, social networking sites (SNSs) are used by students in astonishing rates due to the fast technological changes. Students who are signed in these websites are said to be students of the 21st century. Hence, they present a large number of SNSs users, mainly to communicate with family, friends, and even strangers in order to maintain or to improve their communicative ability.

As a result, this part of the research provides a distinction between the concept of social media and networks, and provides a brief history of the emergence of social networking. It includes also some hints about the role of online education and social networks in helping shy students' interaction in the classroom. Moreover, it focuses on Facebook in higher education, and its implementation in the classroom. Ultimately, this chapter ends with some recommended safety guidelines for SNSs users.

2.1. Social Media

2.1.1. Definitions of social media

Social media has been defined in various ways. Chen and Bryer (2012, p. 88) used the definition elaborated by Bryer and Zavatarro (2011) "Social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation

across stakeholders. These technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds”. In other words, social media comprises not only social networking, video sharing, or blogging, but it is the whole digital tools that facilitate social behaviour. Thus, it is “a vast landscape of technology platforms with many different uses that vary by application” (Davis III, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar & Canché, 2012, p. 9).

2.1.2. Characteristics of social media

According to Tesorero (2013) social media is about acting in and characterized by:

2.1.2.1. Participation. Interested people are encouraged to provide their contributions and feedback.

2.1.2.2. Openness. Voting, making comments and sharing information are to be encouraged. Thus, most of social media are open to participation for everyone.

2.1.2.3. Conversation. Social media shifted from the traditional media about transmitting or distributing information to an audience “broadcast” to “two-way conversation”.

2.1.2.4. Community. Communities are now able to form rapidly and communicate effectively thanks to social media.

2.1.2.5. Connectedness. This characteristic is one among many reasons that made social media flourish.

2.1.3. Forms of social media

Mayfield (2008) classified seven types of social media claiming that innovation and change are common:

2.1.3.1. Social Networks. People use these sites to create personal web pages and share content and communicate with friends, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter.

2.1.3.2. Blogs. Mayfield said that “Blogs are online journals, with entries appearing with the most recent first” (p. 6). He believes that blogs are the best known types of social media.

2.1.3.3. Wikis. By wikis, people are able to add or edit data. The best known wiki is the online encyclopedia, labeled as Wikipedia.

2.1.3.4. Podcasts. Through subscription, people can find audio and video files by services like Apple iTunes.

2.1.3.5. Forums. These websites are areas for online conversation and discussion around particular subjects. They have gained a great popularity among web users because they are powerful elements of online communities.

2.1.3.6. Content Communities. “Communities which organise and share particular kinds of content” (ibid.), such content communities tend to form photos (Flickr), videos (YouTube) or bookmarked links (del.icio.us).

2.1.3.7. Microblogging. Like Twitter, they are “social networking combined with bite-sized blogging, where small amounts of content are distributed online and through the mobile phone network” (ibid.).

2.2. Social Networks

2.2.1. Definitions of social networks:

When defining social networks like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, Boyd and Ellison (2008) assert that they ‘capitalize’ on Web 2.0 technologies that grantee communication between people. Moreover, Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, and Canche (2012) claimed that the phrase “social networking sites” is considered as a term

which is not only limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social networking sites but also it refers to all social media and computer-mediated communication. Furthermore, sometimes SNSs referred to as “friend-of-a-friend” sites. Some networking sites may have purely social purposes, while others may focus on establishing business connections (McDowell, 2013). They are public web-based services that permit users to develop a personal profile, identify other users (friends) with whom they connect, leave publicly viewable messages on others’ profiles, and join social groups (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

For instance, in the *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Al-Saleem (2011) said that individuals use Facebook to create accounts with personal profiles that include detailed information about themselves. They involve a photograph of the user and information such as age, location, personal details and other information. Therefore, these accounts allow users to join groups, as well as to contact their friends, families and even to establish a list of new people and build friendly relationships. However, other SNSs such as Twitter are more limited in messaging, and it is also possible to invite others to join in a group (Jones, 2008), or to follow an individual or a celebrity (Mashable, 2009. Cited by Bednall et al., 2009).

Whilst Selwyn (2009) cited that social networking applications are viewed as instruments that are used to seek and collect data which are based on the Internet to achieve social interactions, self-presentation, and public performance (Tufekci, 2008). Furthermore, In its simplest form, Buzzetto-More (2012) defined social networks as being computer applications that help people to connect with tools to save and to present information and to communicate with others.

2.2.2. Social networking: The evolution

People think that social networking sites started only with the inception of the popular Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, but in fact, they started long before (Nickson, 2009. Cited in Mansour, 2012). In the 1990s, SNSs appeared on the web, but Internet was not available to the common public (Datar, & Mislán, 2010). Until 1997 the first social networking site that was created called 'SixDegrees.com'. This site (which do not work anymore) permits its users for the first time to create their own profiles, invite friends, organise groups and surf other users profiles. Whereas, in 2000, SixDegrees failed as a business, and was definitively closed (Boyd, & Ellison, 2008). Afterwards, social networking sites started flourishing with the introduction of Friendster in 2002, MySpace in 2003. In 2006, in addition to Twitter, Facebook aimed at supporting social networking among the students of the Harvard University, and later it was open to the general public (Sheldon, 2008). Consequently, a new age of social networking came to take place at the present time.

2.2.3. Benefits of social networks

As a matter of fact, social networking sites have become a social and cultural phenomenon among a large number of Internet users. Therefore, since their inception, many studies have tried to spot the lights on the importance of the use of social networks on their users. These studies undoubtedly found that the participation on these social websites have great benefits for people of different ages. However, in order to use these SNSs properly, firstly one needs to be educated about the ethical rules of using social networking. Vooren and Bess (2013) "Current technology in education offers the students a forum to use such tools properly as they communicate with each other, their parents, and their teachers" (p. 35). Similarly, Gallon (2010) stated, "We need to

educate our children about media behaviour, much as we have always educated children about other social behaviours” (ibid.). In addition, Brydolf (2007) described social media as an extraordinary tool if it is used in a positive way. Therefore, Drussell (2012), in his research paper, introduced the work of many researchers that have investigated on this issue.

For instance, it was found that online interaction allows people to learn how to connect to others, share different viewpoints in an appropriate manner, as well as to practice critical thinking skills (Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2002. Cited in Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Moreover, regarding social networks, Valkenberg and Peter (2007) claimed that the Internet helps connect people, and enhance self-esteem and feelings of well-being (cited in Drussel 2012). It also presents an essential situation where people can spend time and share ideas and objects, and keeps friends connected with each other regardless of the geographic distance (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008. Cited in Boyd, 2006).

Furthermore, according to Davis III, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, and Canché (2012), “Social media technology links people together in ways that resemble traditional feelings of connection, belonging, loosely defined memberships, exchange of feelings and ideas, and the reporting of experiences and actions” (p. 3). Indeed, social networks bring teens with difficulties to comfortable face-to-face relationships (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003).

Despite the social purpose of social networking sites, many students tend to use these sites for different reasons mainly academic. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement of 2009 found that the students’ level of engagement is related to their use of social networks when communicating with other students, instructors, and even college staff for academic purposes. In addition, Lampe, Wohn, Vitak, Ellison,

and Wash (2013) found that SNSs are associated with positive benefits, such as to connect with other students about works related to the course (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald, & Vocley, 2011). For instance, they reported:

In a national study by the non-profit organization EDUCAUSE, more than half of U.S. college students reported using SNSs for purposes such as communicating with classmates about school (Salaway, Caruso, & Nelson, 2008), and more than one-quarter of students reported using an SNS as part of a class (Smith et al., 2009)” (p. 2).

This indicates that college students use social networks is increasing rates. Most importantly, to connect to other classmates and even to take part in the class.

Higher education in the U.K., tries to incorporate social networks for several purposes, essentially education. Melville et al. (2009) commented that SNSs are used in various “spheres of university life”. Firstly, in learning and teaching, social networks are used for discussion or project groups as well as for answering questions. These groups are established by students or by staff. Such courses help direct engagement and gain knowledge. Secondly, it has been found that the administration is using social networks for a range of purposes. For instance, changes of the schedule of a lecture, or passing on course information. Thirdly, it was also noticed that many universities are using social networks, usually Facebook, as a means of helping students connect each other. Some people consider this to be a good idea where students (especially introverts) feel comfortable.

Vooren and Bess (2013) stated another positive aspect of including social networks within education. They conducted a correlation study whose findings suggested a positive connection between the use of social networks (Twitter was their particular interest) and students’ academic performance in schools. Bess (2010) explored the

teacher's use of Twitter as an academic tool and he found that students who use Twitter have higher scores than students who do not use it. Moreover, Grosseck and Holotescu (2008. Cited in Voolen & Bess, 2013) assumed that the SNSs used in the classroom such as Twitter:

- Increase the sense of community.
- Encourage the use of writing as a fun practice.
- Serve as a tool for assessing opinion.
- Provide an engaging educational experience.
- Change the dynamic of a classroom.
- Improve communication.
- Allow teachers to post notes and other links.
- Encourage all students to have a voice.

The impact of social networking on students' engagement in the process of learning has been the interest of several studies. According to Shih's (2011) findings of an examination of the use of social networking in a learning environment, it has been found that integrating Facebook and peer assessment can improve constructing knowledge, increase students' interest and engagement, and encourage collaborative learning. In 2010, the United States Department of Education called for the application of the advanced technologies that are used in our daily lives for the entire education system to enhance students' learning (ibid.).

2.2.4. The disadvantages of social networks

Although social networks are known to have a range of benefits, researchers have explored other potential negative aspects of the use of these websites. It is cited by Drussell (2012) that a study conducted by Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukophadhyay and Scherlis (1998) examined the relationship between Internet use and

the aspects of social involvement and psychological well-being. This study hypothesized that the Internet (regarding SNSs) would enhance users' social support, decrease their feelings of loneliness as well as stress, and improve their mental health. However, the results of the study showed completely the opposite. Meanwhile, other results showed that spending a large amount of time using the Internet decreases communication among family members.

Another negative aspect concerning social networking, which has been covered in the research is the problem of online harassment or 'cyber bullying'. Advances in technology have allowed new ways for this issue to happen through electronics rather than during face to face interaction as it was in the past; for example, from cell phones texting, to websites posting of comments or videos (Marsh, McGee, Nada-Raja, & Williams, 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006. Cited in Drussell, 2012). Consequently, in another study, it was found that students who were exposed to online harassment were more likely to feel unsafe at school (ibid.). Thus, this problem should be seriously taken into consideration due to its unfavorable effects on its victims.

Furthermore, Jacobsen and Forste (2011) found a negative association between the use of social media in class with students' grades. In fact, Kalpidou, Costin, and Morris's (2011) study revealed that college students who use Facebook spend less time on studying. Therefore, they get lower grade than students who do not utilize these social networks (2011. ibid). That is because SNSs like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube are dangerous since they create a distraction and procrastination for students when trying to complete their homework. Frazier's (2015) study showed real correlations between social networking and negative consequences, they:

- Encourage poor grammar, usage and spelling
- Expose children to online predators

- Decrease productivity as workers habitually check social networking sites while they should be working
- Create a platform for cyber bullying
- Provide information that increases the risk of identity theft

Finally, like any other new technologies, social networks have a variety of benefits as well as drawbacks. However, people need to keep in mind that the benefits of this interactive technology are more than the risks (Wang, Chan, & Liang, 2011).

2.3. The role of online education and social networks in helping shy students' interaction in the classroom

In the recent years, several studies have concluded that online networking and online discussions have quite a positive impact on reserved and shy students. Online education and social media in courses are believed to help shy students to actively participate during the class activities. An Australian study discovered strong benefits from the use of social networks (Twitter) by students who are very uncomfortable to ask teachers questions in the course by the raised-hand method (Online colleges, 2012).

In this study, students sent anonymous “tweets” to their teacher, and this latter shared the questions and provided answers with the rest of the class. These shy students were able to sit in class with all the classmates and participate without worrying about their hindrances as when they do not understand something in class. Elements of online courses such as discussion boards and chats where students can participate at any time, offer the flexibility that shy students need (ibid.).

2.4. Facebook and higher education

According to Muñoz and Towner (2011), social networking sites such as Facebook was rapidly integrated into almost all American college campuses, and then quickly

growing internationally. Rates of Facebook adoption for college students are impressive. In the EDUCAUSE (2011) survey (center for applied research), it was found that 90 percent of undergraduates use Facebook and 58 percent are daily users (Dahlstrom, et al., 2011. Cited in Muñoz & Towner, 2011). Unlike other SNSs, Facebook has a number of qualities for academic usefulness. First, it encourages users to use their real identity (Boyd, 2006). Also, it allows students to contact their instructors in a non-verbal way because it eliminates face-to-face and verbal interaction. Thus, it allows some degree of anonymity (Postmes, et al., 1998, 2002). Moreover, other researches reveal that Facebook is the most trusted compared to other SNSs, like MySpace, Friendster (Acquisti, & Gross, 2006; Dwyer, et al., 2007). “In the future, the recently released network, Google+, may eventually overtake Facebook in popularity and usability. For now, however, Facebook remains the preferred social network of college students” (Muñoz and Towner, 2011, para. 10).

Nowadays, students use SNSs (mainly Facebook) for education-related communication. It was found that about 77 percent of students use Facebook to communicate with other students in their courses (Ophus & Abbit, 2009). Additionally, 58 percent of students use it to ask their peers about class assignments or projects, but 45 percent ask about exams (Muñoz and Towner, 2011). On the other hand, not only students, but also the faculty which expressed reservations in using Facebook for more formal, instructional purposes (ibid.). Roblyer et al. (2010) resulted with a total of only 26.6 percent of surveyed students who accept to connect with faculty on Facebook, whereas 22.5 percent who refuse to do so and claim that this website is personal or social and cannot be used for education. Indeed, the EDUCAUSE (2011) survey reported that 53 percent think that Facebook has a “limited” or

“nonexistent” academic value, while 25 percent view it “valuable”. Finally, although there is reluctance by both faculty and students’ viewpoints concerning the use of Facebook for educational purposes, there is still a remarkable percentage of students who are currently using and will use it in their educational experiences.

4. Facebook features: definitions and educational uses

In order to identify the usefulness of Facebook integration on education, first, one needs to be aware of its features (messaging, chat, wall, events, notes, News feed), the following table proposed by Muñoz & Towner (2011) provides a clear explanation of this subject.

Facebook features: Definitions and educational uses		
Features	Definition	Educational use
Messaging	Messaging is internal Facebook e-mail.	Privately communicate with students.
Chat	“Chat” is similar to instant messaging.	Privately communicate with a student in real-time. Instructors can hold virtual office hours using “Chat.”
Wall	The “Wall” is a public writing space. It is the most visible communication feature.	<p>Post relevant articles, videos, Web sites, photos, announcements, and upcoming events.</p> <p>Students can respond by commenting or “liking” a posting.</p> <p>Students can contact their instructor directly on the “Wall” and questions can be publically answered.</p> <p>Students can answer each others’</p>

		questions.
Events	The “Events” function allows the organization of social gatherings or parties. Event reminders are visible on the “Wall” and “News Feed”.	Remind students about exam dates, meetings, campus speakers, and study sessions.
Notes	“Notes” is a blogging tool.	Instructors and students can write comments and respond to reading materials, current events, assignments, class activities and study guides. Instructors can “tag” students in the Note to ask for comments.
News feed	The “News Feed” reports what’s happening in the instructor’s social circles on Facebook. That is, anything that is posted on your “Wall” becomes visible on your “News Feed.”	Make course-related announcements and remind students about posted “Events.”

Table 2.1: Facebook features: Definitions and educational uses

2.5. Implementation of Facebook in the classroom

It is believed that when implementing Facebook in the classroom, teachers should not make it obligatory or forced on students. “Instead, Facebook integration should be viewed as an optional, supplementary tool that complements traditional online (i.e., course management system) and off-line resources and discussions” (Muñoz & Towner, 2011, par. 34) because of students’ hesitation to use Facebook as a tool for academic works (Madge et al., 2009). However, Muñoz & Towner noticed that students are open

to use this website for formal learning and teaching purposes. Thus, after creating a Facebook profile, the following points are proposed to provide an overview of four different ways to use Facebook in a class (ibid.).

2.5.1. Profile page

It is where the instructors can insert different types of information about themselves. For example, favourite music or books, educational groups, a photo to share with students. They can decide how much data to provide and it can be used to communicate with students and post class materials.

2.5.2. Creating a course group

By creating a separate group on Facebook, instructors can manage it according to a particular course. It has the same features as the profile page. Moreover, instructors and students can communicate using two methods: the “wall” or group chat. That is to say, when any member posts on the group’s “wall”, all the participants will receive a notification (by email) about the post. While, the group chat permits instructors and students to communicate with anyone in the group (online members). For them, the course group represents an essential location to share the course together. Also, through the course group, students can find other classmates, collaborate and communicate with peers, or organise study groups.

2.5.3. Creating a page or public profile

Instructors can create a page (Fan Page) for a particular course. These pages have different features, such as discussion board where instructors can post a question or a topic for discussion with students. Additionally, other features of these pages include the ability to download and upload applications.

2.5.4. Facebook applications

Facebook has a number of useful applications that increase the significance of Facebook for educational purposes. Users may choose whether to add these applications to their profiles or pages to Chat with friends or not. For instance, “Courses 2.0”, “Super Courses”, “Course Hero”, “Blackboard Learn”, and the mostly common “SlideShare” are some popular applications for educational purposes. They allow students:

- To manage and share their class schedule.
- Meet other students in their classes.
- Form study groups.
- Collaborate on projects.
- Upload and share files.

Indeed, Facebook applications can be utilized as learning tools and course activities. However, instructors should assess the pedagogical value of an application before including it in the course because most of these applications are for entertainment. Thus, instructors can create their own applications if they do not suit their course needs.

2.6. Some recommended safety guidelines for SNSs users

Social networking is a worldwide revolution; it enables people to keep connected with each other, share different kinds of personal and common knowledge. However, the nature of these sites introduces security risks. Hence, their users should take into consideration certain precautions and must: by Datar, & Mislán (2010), and McDowell, (2013).

- Be aware of the fact that any content which is put on the Internet always remains there even though it appears to be deleted.

- Not leave the user's profile open to be accessed by everyone and use strong passwords that cannot be easily guessed.
- Not accept friend/contact requests from unknown people, or limit people who are allowed to contact with on these sites.
- Avoid putting detailed or personal information about oneself, including photos, family members, address, and information about one's schedule or routine
- Always be cautious of the risks of social networking and different uses of SNSs.
- Be skeptical. This means that users must not believe everything they read online, but they must check for the authenticity of any information before reacting.

Conclusion

Social networking sites are a good way to create and maintain relationships and communication. They are starting to attract the attention of academic researchers, pointing on the advantages and negatives of their usage in informal contexts as well as in formal settings of learning. In fact, they are currently being used by students to discuss and communicate educational subjects at every academic level. However, these students should be aware of the risks of using such sites. Thus the present part of the study aims at spotting the light on the main importance of SNSs' integration in academic contexts and the main role that these social networks play in order to help students (mainly shy students) improve their communicative ability.

Chapter III

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

After presenting the literature review in the two previous chapters about the role of social networks in improving students' communicative competence, it is high time to shift to something more practical. Thus, this chapter is devoted to the presentation and the analysis of the data obtained through the implementation of the present research. In this research we have chosen to work on third-year students because at this level learners are able to determine the best ways to develop their communicative competence. Therefore, in the present chapter two sections are provided. The first one deals with the analysis of students' questionnaire, and the second deals with the analysis of teachers answers of the interviews, which, in turn will help us confirm or disconfirm our hypotheses. Moreover, the research findings are presented in order to investigate on whether the teachers and the learners are aware of the positive side that social networks have in creating a relaxing environment for shy students and developing their communicative competence, and to open the discussion about SNSs integration in formal settings as well. Since the main focus of language teaching and learning is communication, we try to spot the light on the importance of SNSs to achieve this goal and to adapt with the developmental alterations in ways of teaching the new generations.

3.1. Students' questionnaire

3.1.2. Description of the students' questionnaire

In the present study, a questionnaire is given to third-year students in order to gather information about their opinions concerning the role of social networks use in improving students' communicative competence. The questionnaire is composed of (29) questions divided into three parts; the first part deals with background information

about the students while the second part involves questions about students' communicative competence. Finally, the third part includes questions about social networks. Participants are asked to answer by ' Yes' or 'No' with brief justification whenever necessary. Sometimes, they choose the right answer from different options.

3.1.3. Administration of the questionnaire

As it was mentioned before, the present study works on third-year students. The questionnaire was administered to one group making up (32) students, and to (9) students selected randomly from other groups (the total number is 41 students).

Students from the group were given some instructions thanks to the help of their teacher (of written expression module) before they completed answering the questionnaire. The issue of communicative competence was explained first, and then they were informed that: a) it is an important component in our study, b) their participation is going to be really appreciated, c) what matters is their opinions (no true or false answers), and d) their answers would remain completely confidential (even though they were not asked to write their names).

3.1.4. The analysis of the questionnaire

3.1.4.1. Part One: General information about the students

Q1: Students' age

Options	N	%
20	2	4.87
21	16	39.02
22	12	29.27
23	6	14.63
24	4	9.76
26	1	2.44
Total	41	100

Table 3.1: Students' age

The table above shows that there are six (6) age groups in the selected sample. Students' ages vary from 20 to 26 years old out of the total number of the sample (41). We have only 2 subjects 4.87% who are 20 years old. 16 students (21 years old) represent a numerical majority (39.02%). Moreover, 22 years old make the number of 12 students (29.27), and 23 years old (14.63%). Besides, 24 years old (9.76%) and 26 years old (2.44%) are the older students who either have repeated years or not having started early their primary education.

Q2: The gender

Options	N	%
Males	6	14.63
Females	35	85.37

Table 3.2: Students' gender

Depending on the table, female students are more numerous than male students. We have recorded only six (6) males (14.63%) out of a total of 41 students. However,

female students represent a number of 35 making (85.37%). This may be because females are more interested in the field of learning a foreign language than males do.

Q3: How long have you been studying English?

Options	N	%
3	35	85.37
4	6	14.63
Total	41	100

Table 3.3: Years of studying English

The table above reveals that our participants studied English for different periods. The majority of students (85.37%) making up our sample have been studying English for three (3) years at university. Whereas, only 6 members (14.63%) who have been studying it for four (4) years at university. This means that these students have repeated one year, but this would not influence the results of our research.

Q4: Was English your first choice?

Options	N	%
Yes	28	68.29
No	13	31.71
Total	41	100

Table 3.4: Students' English language learning first choice

According to this table, 13 students (31.71%) revealed that they did not choose to study English as their first choice. In contrast, the majority of students (68.29%)

declared that choosing to study English was their first option. Students' reasons for studying English were various; some said that it is an easy language in comparison to other languages such as French. Other students declared that they like it because it is important and international, and most of them said that they want to get a job.

Q5: Have you ever been in an English speaking country?

Options	N	%
Yes	1	2.44
No	40	97.56
Total	41	100

Table 3.5: Number of students who visited an English speaking country

Unsurprisingly, only one respondent (2.44%) who answered “yes”, and the majority (97.56%) said that they have never visited an English speaking country, and that is because it is not easy to travel to such countries (it is so far, very expensive, and culture barriers,...). This question inquires whether these students have ever been put in an authentic context of using the English language.

3.1.4.2. Part Two: Students' communicative competence:

Q6: which aspect do you prefer in learning the English language?

- a- Learning the grammatical aspect
- b- Learning how to communicate.

The aspect	N	%
A	5	12.19
B	35	85.37
Both	1	2.44
Total	41	100

Table 3.6: Students' preference in learning the English language

The table above shows three (3) different opinions. In learning a language, most of the students (85.37%) prefer to learn how to communicate. In real life, communicative interaction requires knowing how to use the language in different situations. Learners need first to think of the meaning they want to express. In addition, 12.9% of the students choose to learn the grammatical aspect of the language because they do not like interaction and discussion with others. Moreover, one student (2.44%) chose both options (learning the grammatical as well as the communicative aspects). This student considers language learning as a matter of knowing the features of grammar and how to use these features in real communication. Learning a language is about learning how to communicate. Thus, in order to communicate effectively one needs to be aware of the grammar rules of a language as well as how to use them appropriately within different contexts (Hymes, 1972).

Q7: How often do you talk in English outside the classroom?

Options	N	%
Often	1	2.44
Sometimes	19	46.34
Rarely	20	48.78
Never	1	2.44

Total	41	100
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Table 3.7: Students' frequency of talking in English outside the classroom

Students who use the language outside the classroom are believed to be intrinsically motivated. Only (2.44%) of these participants stated that they “often” use the language outside the classroom and (46.34%) of them stated that they “sometimes” do so. In contrast to the majority of (48.78%) of the students who affirmed that English is “rarely” used by them outside the classroom, only one respondent (2.44%) who opted for “never” as an answer to this question.

Q8: Do you think you are able to communicate?

Options	N	%
Very well	1	2.44
Well	19	46.34
Average	21	51.22
Poor	0	0
Total	41	100

Table 3.8: students' ability to communicate

By this question, students are asked to say how well is their ability to communicate. As far as we notice from this table, all the participants affirm that they are able to communicate, but in different levels. Only one student (2.44%) who is able to communicate “very well” because the rest of the students have not yet built a strong communicative skill or they are not yet very satisfied with their own communicative ability. Indeed, (46.34%) of them believe that they have a “well” communicative ability. However, more than the half (51.22%) of the total number of participants answered that

they have an “average” level of communication because they find some difficulties while interacting.

Q9: which module (s) you are studying do you think is (are) the most useful to help you communicate in English?

Students’ responses to this question indicated that the vast majority of them answered that oral expression was the module the most useful in helping them to develop their communication skill because:

- It is the only session that allows them to speak freely, express themselves and practice the English language.
- They have the chance to discuss and to interact with the teacher and classmates.
- It encourages them to communicate in English even with mistakes.
- To learn how to listen and speak.

On the other hand, only two students chose written expression module, though they find it difficult and they face many problems in writing in English. They argued that this module helps them to:

- Learn how to read and write.
- Learn types of sentences and formality.
- Get the basics of the English language through writing.

Furthermore, the rest of the students stated phonetics (to pronounce words correctly), Themes and Versions (to learn how to translate from one language to another), French (because the French and English languages share a great number of vocabularies). Moreover, other students chose Grammar module claiming that in order to be able to

communicate, we have to master all the levels of the language (i.e., form, meaning, pronunciation).

Q10: Which skill (s) do you think is (are) the most important to achieve communicative ability?

a- Listening/ b- Speaking/ c- Reading/ d- Writing

The skills	N	%
a	5	12.2
b	17	41.46
c	3	7.31
d	0	0
a+b	4	9.76
a+c	3	7.31
b+c	2	4.89
c+d	1	2.44
b+d	3	7.31
a+b+c	1	2.44
b+c+d	1	2.44
All of them	1	2.44
Total	41	100

Table 3.9: Needed skills for communicative competence

According to the table 10 above, most of the students often associate the speaking skill to communicative competence, that is to say, they relate their ability to speak fluently or accurately to their ability to communicate. Thus, it is perceived to be the main needed skill. Findings show that 41.46%, of the whole number of participants, chose the speaking skill to be the most important to achieve communicative competence. Others chose the listening skill (12.2%) because it is impossible to produce

the language without being exposed to it. Furthermore, we notice that many students opted for more than one choice. They think that those skills are related to each other and none of them can be developed without the other (i.e., in order to speak and write, they have to listen and read respectively).

Q11: How often do you participate in the oral expression class?

Options	N	%
Often	9	21.95
Sometimes	23	56.1
Rarely	9	21.95
Never	0	0
Total	41	100

Table 3.10: Frequency of participation in oral classes

By this question, we intend to know the frequency of participation of students in the oral expression class and their ability to communicate in English. Nine (9) students (21.95%) asserted that they “often” participated in class, and the same number revealed they “rarely” did so. However, most of the students (56.1%) answered that they “sometimes” participated. In the meanwhile, none of them opted for “never”. This draws the attention to students’ motivation and ability to interact in the classroom, i.e. students’ participation in the classroom is often related to when they are motivated and able to produce the target language.

Q12: Does your teacher of oral expression use authentic materials that help you develop your communicative competence?

Options	N	%
Yes	18	43.9
No	23	56.1
Total	41	100

Table 3.11: Teacher's use of authentic materials

43.9% of students asserted that their teachers of oral expression used authentic materials in order to help them develop their communicative competence. However, 56.1% of them denied. Those who answered “yes” were then asked to state what these activities were. The students stated approximately similar answers. That is to say, their teachers used various materials such as: audio-visual materials (videos), role plays, audio tapes, discussions, debates, and handouts including exercises.

Q13: What do you think students have to do in or outside the classroom in order to be able to communicate effectively?

According to the obtained results, students affirmed that in order to be able to communicate effectively, they need to practice the following suggested activities:

- To interact and speak in English language
- To watch videos and English TV programmes
- To use social networks
- Listening activities
- To read a lot and to write always
- Making group-works

Q14: Do you consider talking to English native speakers beneficial to improve one's communicative competence?

Options	N	%
Yes	40	97.56
No	1	2.44
Total	41	100

Table 3.12: Students' attitude towards talking to English native speakers

As it was expected, all the students considered talking to English native speakers beneficial to improve one's communicative competence, except one student who did not. This student might not have understood the question.

Q15: Do you think you are able to communicate with an English native speaker?

Options	N	%
Yes	26	63.41
No	15	36.59
Total	41	100

Table 3.13: Students' ability to communicate with native speakers

The majority of students (63.41%) declared that they are able to communicate with an English native speaker. However, (36.59%) of them revealed they are not.

- If no, please say why

The students who said they are not able to communicate with English native speakers were required to explain why. Their answers were common, such as the lack of vocabulary background, feeling shy, inability to understand when native speakers talk quickly, and others said they are afraid of making mistakes.

Q16: Do you correspond with people from an English speaking country?

Options	N	%
Yes	28	68.29
No	13	31.71
Total	41	100

Table 3.14: Students' correspondence with English people

The results of the survey questionnaire indicated that 28 students (68.29%) of the whole sample admitted that they correspond with people from an English speaking country. These were greatly more interested to be in direct contact with the authentic source of English. While, (31.71%) of the students answered "No". This category of students showed lack of interest and motivation and/or to inhibition. Developing communicative competence requires an authentic context of using the language.

Q17: What do you use to communicate with them?

- a- Face-to-face conversations
- b- Letters
- c- Phones
- d- Internet.

Options	N	%
a	1	3.57
b	4	14.29
c	2	7.14
d	18	64.29
b+d	2	7.14
All of them	1	3.57

Total	28	100
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Table 3.15: Students' means of communication

This question was directed to students who communicate with people from an English speaking country. They made the total of 28 students. Thus, a quick glimpse at the table above, we noticed that “Internet” is the most used means of communication (64.29%). Then, “letters” take the second place (14.29%). One student preferred face-to-face conversations, and only a single student who used all of these means to communicate with his/her English penfriends. Similarly, Baym, Zhang, and Lin (2004) studied social interactions of college students across all media. Their results indicated that 64% still prefer face-to-face interaction, 18.4% prefer the telephone, and only 16.1% prefer the internet for making social contacts.

3.1.4.3. Part Three: Social Networks

Q18: Do you have any social networking account?

Options	N	%
Yes	36	85.37
No	5	14.63
Total	41	100

Table 3.16: Students' use of social networks

By this question, we aimed to determine the extent of social network usage among University students. According to the results shown in the table above, 85.37% of participants affirmed that they have at least one social networking account. Whereas, 14.63% of them have not.

Q19: Which type of social networks do you use?

a- Facebook/ b- Skype/ c- Twitter/d- linkedIn

Options	N	%
a	12	33.33
b	0	0
c	0	0
d	0	0
a+b	14	38.89
a+b+c	8	22.22
a+c	1	2.78
All of them	1	2.78
Total	36	100

Table 3.17: Types of social networks used by students

The table above includes the most common types of social networking sites (SNSs) “Facebook, Skype, Twitter, and LinkedIn” which are used by students. The total number of students using SNSs is 36. Therefore, we notice that Facebook is used by all the students. 12 students use only Facebook as a means of communication. The rest of participants have more than one account; they all have Facebook account in addition to other accounts. That is to say, 38.89% have Facebook and Twitter, 22.22% have Facebook, Skype and Twitter. One student uses all of them. They stated other social networks that they use such as “Instagram, Viber, What’s up, as well as emails”.

Q20: why do you use social networks?

- a- To meet new people
- b- To practice the language/c- to learn new things.

Options	N	%
a	4	11.11
b	8	22.22
c	12	33.33
a+c	3	8.33
b+c	2	5.56
a+b	2	5.56
All of them	5	13.89
Total	36	100

Table 3.18: The reasons of social networking use

The reasons for SNSs usage differ from one student to another. 11.11% of students tend to use them in order to meet new people and create friendly relationship. 22.22% want to practice the language by talking and interacting with people they may know or not. Moreover, the majority of participants (33.33%) attempt to learn new things by using such SNSs. In addition to that, some students mentioned that they use SNSs for time passing and entertainment, whereas others said to communicate with friends as well as to maintain relationships with members of family. Thus, we notice that students' use of these SNSs depends upon their own purposes.

Q21: How often do you check your social networking account(s)?

- a- Twice or more a day
- b- Once a day
- c- Weekly
- d- Monthly

Options	N	%
a	11	30.56
b	8	22.22
c	15	41.66
d	2	5.56
Total	36	100

Table 3.19: Students' frequency of checking their social networking accounts

The findings were analyzed as indicated on the table above, and we found that out of 36 students, (30.56%) connect to SNSs several times a day. This is in agreement to an opinion made by Rouis et al., (2007) who stated that users make several visits a day, therefore they can be considered as active users. This can be due to the intention of finding latest updates and the availability of internet connection. (22.22%) check their accounts only once a day. The majority of students (41.66%) opted for “weekly” and (5.56%) for “monthly”. This indicates that these students are seen not to be so actively involved in SNSs activities.

Q22: How much time do you spend on your social networking account per day?

a- Less than 30 minutes/ b- From 1 to 3 hours/ c- More than 3 hours.

Options	N	%
a	9	25
b	17	47.22
c	10	27.78
Total	36	100

Table 3.20: Students' time spend in SNSs

Respondents were asked to report on time spent each day in different SNSs. We notice that the amount of time spent daily on SNSs varies greatly. In fact, (25%) of students spend less than 30 minutes a day socializing, while most of them (47.22%) take from 1 to 3 hours. This corresponds to the findings by Ahmed and Qazi (2011) who found that 75.3% of students spend 1 to 3 hours a day in SNSs. Furthermore, many students (27.78%) said they spend more than three hours per day. This category of students can be termed as sample of heavy users, which might be due to the availability of internet connection for long periods. This reflects that the majority of student users spend reasonable time on these SNSs.

Q23: Concerning Facebook, how many people do you have in your friend list?

a- 1__100/ b- 101__500/ c- More than 500 friends

Options	N	%
a	26	72.22
b	8	22.22
c	2	5.56
Total	36	100

Table 3.21: Students' number of friends in Facebook

The table 23 above indicates that the majority of students have 100 friends or less in their accounts. This category might be new users or least active users. However, the rest of students revealed that they have more than 100 members in their friend list.

Q24: Do you use social networks to chat with your teachers?

Options	N	%
Yes	10	27.78
No	26	72.22
Total	36	100

Table 3.22: Students' chat with their teachers

This question is asked to see whether there is an interaction between students and teachers on these SNSs. Unfortunately, findings show that only 27.22% of students who chat with their teachers, but 72.22% do not.

- If yes, please write how (by writing or orally) and about what do you chat?

All students who answered that they use SNSs with their teachers affirm that they correspond by writing. They asserted that they talk only about educative subjects, for instance; they connect with each other for more explanation of the lessons and clear instructions and pieces of advice, checking homework, talking about the marks and sharing knowledge.

- If no, please say why?

In asking this question, students' responses were different; they are grouped and listed as follows:

- Students do not have teachers' social networking addresses.
- Students prefer face-to-face interaction better.
- Teachers do not accept friend requests sent by the students.
- Students consider it as a lack of respect for their teachers and prefer to make boundaries between them.

Olin-Scheller and Wikström (2010) stated another reason why some teachers are not fascinated with this recent technology. They discussed the problem of the generation gap that exists between students and teachers nowadays. They claimed: “Young people have been brought up in the digital era, whereas adults have gained their skills in ICT later in life. Consequently, there is generally a 'digital knowledge gap' between a teacher and his/her students”.

Q25: Do you take initiations in conversations?

Options	N	%
Often	3	8.33
Sometimes	23	63.89
Rarely	9	25
Never	1	2.44
Total	36	100

Table 3.23: The frequency of students' initiations in conversations

This question aims to detect how often students start conversations. It is raised to test the students' proficiency and willingness to take initiations in communication regardless of the risks they may encounter. Therefore, most of the students (63.89%) asserted that they “sometimes” take initiations and 3 students out of 36 said they “often” do so. Unsurprisingly, 25% of students “rarely” start conversations, and only one who opted for “never”.

Q26: Do you participate as a member of groups in Facebook?

Options	N	%
Yes	21	58.33
No	15	41.67
Total	36	100

Table 3.24: Students' participation in groups in Facebook

As it was already mentioned before, students use of SNSs differs from one student to another, depending on their own purposes. By this question we aim to check what kind of activities or groups they are involved in. The number of students who participate as members of groups in Facebook is 21 (58.33%). They clearly tend to create new relationships and to strengthen their communicative skill. Whereas, 15 students (41.67%) do not participate. These students are introverts and are not interested in group activities, or do not have time to join such groups.

- If yes, say which kind of groups

The students' responses were nearly similar. All the mentioned groups are educational. That is to say, out of 26 students, all of them join groups on Facebook in order to learn the English language. For example, some common groups are entitled "English spoken here, Master 2 Science of the Language, Culture and literature coaching, English writing club, Group of 3rd year students, Learning English, University groups"

Q27: Do you agree that Facebook facilitates English language learning?

Options	N	%
Often	3	8.33
Sometimes	23	63.89
Rarely	9	25
Never	1	2.78
Total	41	100

Table 3.25: Students opinions about the role of Facebook in facilitating language learning

According to the results stated in the table above, we found that the majority of the respondents have a positive attitude towards Facebook. 48.79% of them “agreed” that Facebook facilitates language learning. In the meantime, 21.95% “strongly agreed”. 19.51% were neutral, but only 9.76% of the students who “disagreed” with this fact. Paying attention that none of the students opted for “strongly disagree”.

Q28: Do you think that using social networks strengthen students’

- a- English writing ability.
- b- learn new English vocabularies.
- c- Speaking fluency in English.
- d- Motivation to read in English.

Options	N	%
A	6	14.63
B	10	21.95
C	8	19.51
D	3	7.32

a+b	2	4.88
a+c	1	2.44
a+d	1	2.44
b+c	1	2.44
b+d	3	7.32
c+d	1	2.44
a+b+d	3	7.32
All of them	2	4.89
Total	41	100

Table 3.26: Students' attitudes towards social networks

This question investigates learners' opinions about the use of SNSs. The table above indicated that the majority of students (10) affirm that SNSs enrich their vocabulary backgrounds.

Out of 41, 12 students responded by choosing more than one choice, and two (2) students choose all of them. They consider that SNSs play a crucial role in strengthening their English writing ability, learning new English vocabularies, speaking fluency in English, and motivation to read in the target language.

Q29: Do you agree that students' use of social networks helps them improve their communication skill?

Options	N	%
Agree	39	95.12
Disagree	2	4.88
Total	41	100

Table 3.27: Students opinion about using SNSs to improve their communicative skill

As it was expected, almost all the students (95.12%) agreed that the use of SNSs enhances their communicative competence. This explains the reasons why they spend long periods of time surfing or paging on these websites, and trying to communicate with different people. However, students who disagree, represent a very small number (only two students).

At the end, students who either answered that they agreed or disagreed in the previous question were asked to justify their answers. The two students who answered that the use of SNSs does not improve communicative competence argued that users of these websites rely on translation and do not make efforts to use their own words, and they spend most of time talking about irrelevant subjects far from educational issues. Another argument is that students use freestyles in writings and there is no one to correct grammar, or spelling mistakes.

On the other hand, students who agreed with the use of SNSs to develop their communicative competence argued:

- SNSs give us the chance to practice the language.
- SNSs are motivational factors for improving our speaking and writing skills, enriching our vocabulary background and making conversations.

- SNSs expose us to the real use of the language through communicating with native speakers. So we learn their language and culture.
- These websites are appropriate environments for shy students to feel at ease and not to be afraid of making mistakes.

3.1.5. Discussion of findings of the students' questionnaire

The analysis of the students' questionnaire indicated that there is an evidence which proves that the majority of students were using some forms of social networking websites. Some participants are perceived to be addicted to them, others use them occasionally, but very few do not use them at all. The most common reason that was given as to why some university students were not using social networks is the unavailability of such means.

Moreover, the current study showed that Facebook was the most predominant social network that is used among students. This finding coincided with research conducted by Lenhart et al. (2010) which found that Facebook is the most popular form of social media. Furthermore, several reasons were given as to why students use these websites. The most significant one is that they aim at learning new things. Besides, meeting new people, practicing the language, entertaining and communicating with family were also prominent reasons for social networks usage.

Ultimately, it is also noticed that SNSs made it much easier for students to interact with each other as well as with their teachers. The particular interesting findings were that the majority of students believe that the use of SNSs may facilitate their language learning process and that such websites have a beneficial role on improving their communicative competence.

3.2. The teachers' interviews

3.2.2. Description of the teachers' interview

After collecting and analyzing students' opinions and attitudes towards the use of social networks, it is time to discover other viewpoints from another perspective. Moreover, since the teacher plays the main role in building students' communicative competence and assessing it, it is very important to consider the teachers' opinions towards students' use of social networks in order to improve their communicative performance (in or outside the classroom).

As it was already mentioned, the interviews were administered to six teachers of oral expression module. Moreover, because of time constraints, the interviews were printed and given to four teachers; whereas, two interviews were sent to teachers by Internet; one by Facebook and the second in an email. The aim of these interviews is to determine the role of social networks in improving students' communicative competence and to collect teachers' attitudes towards using these websites as a teaching method, why not, in the classroom in order to provide a comfortable atmosphere for shy students to interact within the course. The teachers were asked nine (9) questions divided into two sections. The first section is about communicative competence which involves three questions, and the second one deals with social networks.

3.2.3. Analysis of teachers' interviews

3.2.3.1. Section one: Communicative competence

Item one: As a teacher of oral expression module, are your language activities based on structural activities or communicative ones?

The teachers' responses were categorized into two parts. Half of teachers (three teachers) answered that the language activities they tend to use in the classroom are based on the communicative aspect. However, the rest of the teachers prefer to diversify their classroom activities depending on the objective of the lesson. That is to say, they use both strategies. However, by experience one teacher claimed that communication is much more biased to be assimilated by students.

Item two: Do you communicate with your students outside the classroom?

- **If yes, what do you use?**
- **If not, why?**

The majority of teachers affirmed that they sometimes do communicate with their students outside the classroom using different means of communication (such as phone calls, Facebook, or emails). One teacher added that he communicates with his students only when the situation requires it, in order to motivate them and encourage students/teacher interaction. Whereas, only one teacher who answered that because of time constraints she cannot communicate with her students outside the classroom.

Item three: As far as third year students are concerned, what do you think about their level of communicative competence?

In asking this question we have recorded various opinions. One teacher said that the level of communication of third year students is "below the average". Another teacher answered that it is "poor". Whereas, the rest of the teachers stated that most of 3rd year students' communicative competence is considered to be of an average level and there is still a lot of work to be done because they need more practice in this aspect as near future graduates. Indeed, two teachers added that even though several students have not

a strong ability to communicate, there are some cases of a very good communicative competence.

3.2.3.2. Section two: Social networks

Item one: In your opinion, do social networks (such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter...) facilitate English language learning?

Results show that there are two teachers who absolutely confirmed that social networks have a great role in facilitating the language learning process because they represent authenticity, and they open rooms for more contact and improving their language. On the other hand, one teacher also agreed upon the beneficial role of social networks, but he added that students must be aware of the appropriate way of using these websites.

Furthermore, two teachers declared that social networks can develop students' ability to communicate, however; it is not the case with language learning in terms of writing. They claimed that SNSs have negative effects on students' accuracy and formal writing because these devices encourage them to use abbreviations, acronyms, and the spelling of words are often modified. By time students will get the habit of using such forms, even in academic writing, which would be considered as mistakes. Finally, one teacher did not completely agree that social networks help developing language learning process.

Item two: Do you use such social networks as a means of communication with your students?

As a response to this question, the majority of teachers revealed that they tend to communicate with their students using Facebook, emails, and another teacher added

Skype. Via these websites, one teacher revealed that she chats with her students to allow them asking questions concerning their courses and the difficulties they may encounter, also she provides them with useful videos, books, and sometimes they receive feedback about their classroom performances. In fact, she added that she still wishes to ameliorate her SNSs usage in order be opened to the new technologies.

Moreover, two teachers stated that they use social networks to search for some relevant websites and propose them to students, and give them the freedom to either using them or choosing others, mainly to enhance their listening and speaking skills.

On the other hand, teachers who answered that they did not use social networks with their students admitted that they wish to start using them in the near future. Indeed, they find it a very interesting idea to better develop the teaching process.

Item three: Do you think that the online environment may provide a comfortable atmosphere for shy students to interact with others and to improve their communicative performance? Please explain.

All the teachers absolutely agreed upon the fact that the online environment may help shy students to improve their communicative performance. They declared that the online environment is considered to be very helpful for introverted (anxious) students to get rid of their hindrances and inhibitions, as well as to overcome the barriers of communication. Hence, their responses confirm students' answers of the last question (29) in their questionnaire.

These teachers provided different, but somehow related arguments for their answers: they argued that in the online environment all the students are acting behind the screen; the constraints that they fear are not present as they act in isolation. That is to say, there

is no critical judgments and negative comments on them whether by the teacher or by mates. Thus, this will increase their self-confidence, self-esteem and will reduce anxiety and fear of using the language or making mistakes. Consequently, they break the ice to integrate the group.

Item four: Do you think that students who use these social networks regularly are more able to communicate than those who do not?

One out of six teachers answered that the frequency of social networking usage cannot determine students' ability to communicate. He argued that most of them use social websites for entertainment only. Another teacher said that social networks may enhance students' communicative competence, but depending on their usage. However, the other interviewees (4 out of 6 teachers) answered that students who use social networking sites regularly became a sort of experts in selecting the appropriate words and expressions because these students are accustomed to communicate with different people, as they exchange ideas and experiences. In other words, it is for the mere reason that students would be less shy, and in constant contact with the language through various means provided in the Net.

Item five: What do you think of bringing social networking tools into the classroom experience?

By asking this question, all the interviewed teachers found that bringing social networks into a formal academic setting as a good idea, and an appropriate strategy for language learning. They claimed that the administrative decision, readiness of teachers besides a good training in using these websites must be taken into consideration. On the other hand, teachers need to be cautious not to overuse the means on the detriment of the goal. Another teacher added that bringing social networks into the classroom may

result with a very successful experience for learners as they put them in an authentic context of language use. For example, in oral classes, students would have the opportunity to practice the language and to interact with other students from different parts of the world. They can contact native speakers and learn some of their culture and ways of communication (use of idioms, specific vocabulary).

Item six: Anything else that you would like to add?

By asking this final question, we tend to open the scope for the interviewees to comment or add any comments and opinions about the subject of our present study, and to encourage them to raise other issues they felt relevant to the research. Two teachers did not add any comments. Whereas, the others commented as follows:

Teacher 1 considered social networking in education as the “future” of learning, but it needs a special practice, familiarity with technology and applications as well as a good preparation for both of the learners and teachers. Moreover, teacher 2 admitted that since we are living in the new millennium, we must adapt ourselves to the new technology era; otherwise we would be real backwards. Furthermore, teacher 3 stated her opinion about the issue of the present study. She declared that she really appreciated our subject matter, and found it very interesting and a worthy topic to research.

Furthermore, the teacher 4 added that she found the topic as an original one and it is closely related to our present time which is characterized by technology and social interactions. She views the use of social networks from two different angles. Firstly, she believes that students’ usage of social networks makes them closer to the target language and its culture. Learners feel free when using them, and push them to practice the language as often as possible. Secondly, she added that using such tools do not require a correct use of grammar, punctuation, and spelling which in turn becomes a

non organized writing with no correction feedback, which is opposite to what academic writing requires.

3.2.4. Discussion of the findings of the teachers' interviews

The analysis of the teachers' interviews revealed that social networks have a potential role on students' communicative competence. The first section of the interviews sought teachers' opinions towards students' communicative ability. Almost all the teachers declared that their students are not good enough in communicating in English, which is opposite to what it should be; they said that students need a lot of work and practice in order to reach the required level of communicative competence. However, another teacher stated a quite different point of view; he admitted that there are some students with a very good communicative competence.

The second section was about the use of social networks. In this part of the interviews we aim to spot the lights on teachers' attitudes towards the use of social networking sites as a language teaching method (mainly in oral classes) and as a means of developing students' communicative achievement. That is to say, to help all the students in general, and shy elements in particular to interact in the classroom, and to break the ice of all the constraints that hinder them from developing their language learning as well as their communicative achievement. However, some teachers claimed that SNSs usage has a negative side for students' writing performance, as they often tend to use informal forms of writing, abbreviations, and acronyms, and so on.

As a result, we found that there are many teachers who tend to utilize social networks as an instructional tool that aids students construct their own language learning and communication ability. However, these teachers also stated other challenges, such as, the administrative decisions, readiness of teachers, and the good

training in using these websites for the teachers as well as the learners. In addition to that, teachers must encourage students to use these tools for learning, rather than entertainment or personal interactions.

Conclusion

Our research revealed that students are believed to be clearly affected by social networks. The analysis of the questionnaire as well as the interviews indicated that most of the teachers and students share the same attitudes towards the use of social networks. Several teachers interact with their learners using such websites as an informal environment to learn and communicate using the target language. The obtained results showed that social networks facilitate the academic experience with the majority of the students but need to control and manage their time and activities. However, few teachers perceived that students' use of social networks may enhance their oral proficiency, but it is not the case with their ability to write. In general, the acquired results confirmed our first hypothesis which stated: "Students' use of social networks would have a positive impact on their communicative competence".

On the other hand, these kinds of websites attract students not only to construct relationships but also to release pressure. According to the students' questionnaire and the interviews to the teachers of oral expression module, we noticed that SNSs encourage the social and active learning process. Both of the students and teachers' responses supported the fact that the online environment provides an anxiety free atmosphere that enable shy students to get rid of their inhibitions so they interact easily. Moreover, teachers claimed that in this environment all the students are acting in isolation and there is an absence of critical judgments and negative comments on them whether by the teacher or by mates. Thus, this will increase their self-confidence, self-

esteem and will reduce anxiety and fear of using the language or making mistakes. Hence, the research hypothesis which declares: “The online environment may provide a comfortable atmosphere for shy students to interact with others and to improve their communicative competence” had been successfully proved. Thus, both of our hypotheses have been verified and confirmed by the students’ questionnaire as well as the interviews with the teachers.

Pedagogical Implications

Using social networking sites such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter, etc have become part of students' daily life activities. According to our research findings, we learned that the majority of students are using various types of websites in different extents. Several learners use social networks to correspond with English native speakers as well as their teachers for the sake of language learning and developing their communicative ability. Thus, the current study proposes the following recommendations:

- The syllabus designers should create an approach to balance the relationship between social networks and academic language learning/teaching.
- University officials should regard adapting to the educational changes and integrating social media activities into formal academic settings.
- EFL teachers should creatively think of the various ways in which technology (social networks) can be used to reach students' interests and needs of using the language appropriately within different situations.
- When using these SNSs, EFL teachers should limit the learners' use of any type of non-standard writing in academic setting, mainly those errors and mistakes which are related to e-language.
- Teachers should use these SNSs mainly with introverted learner, to encourage their involvement and interaction in the classroom.
- Teachers as well as learners should be trained for the positive outcomes of using these websites.
- Students should be aware of the difference between the academic and informal settings as well as of the serious results against mixing between them.

General conclusion

Developing a strong communicative competence has always been the main concern of the modern foreign language research. Hence, the present study dealt with the connection that exists between social networks and students' communicative competence and tried to encourage students as well as teachers to use these websites for academic purposes.

However, teachers declared that several students have not reached the required level of communicative proficiency; they said that students need a lot of practice in interaction using the English language. As a result, many teachers tend to contact their students outside the classroom using various means (such as phone mobiles, emailing, and other social networks) and encourage them to interact with English native speakers. The majority of the students revealed that they spend considerable periods of time using social networks and have more than one account to communicate with people from all around the world and most importantly with their teachers.

The findings of the students' questionnaire indicated that almost all the learners concurred that social networks may facilitate English language learning and help them improve their communicative competence. Whereas, the findings of the teachers' interviews revealed that although such websites develop communicative ability and assist the language learning process, they also have negative effects on students' writing accuracy. However, this latter did not affect the findings of our study because data collected from the questionnaire, showed that most of the students associate their ability to communicate with their oral proficiency more than their writing accuracy.

An interesting conclusion had been drawn on the basis of the interviews that all the teachers supported the idea of bringing social networks into a formal academic setting. They confirmed that bringing social networks into the classroom may result with a very

successful experience for learners because they put them in an authentic context of language use. Furthermore, they suggested that the administrative decision, readiness of teachers and a good training in using these websites must be taken into consideration, and teachers need to be cautious not to overuse the means on the detriment of the goal.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

-Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed for a dissertation of a master degree. It aims at investigating "The Role of Social Networks in Improving Students' Communicative Competence". Your participation will be of a great help and interest for this research.

You are expected to read carefully the questions and to provide as much honest and straightforward answers as possible.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely yours,

Miss A. Ben hannachi.

Please put a tick () in the right box and write full statements whenever necessary.

Section One: General information

1/- Age?

2/- Gender?

a- Male

b- Female

3/- How long have you been studying English? years.

4/- Was English your first choice?

a- Yes

b- No

If yes, why have you chosen to learn English?

.....

.....

5/- Have you ever been in an English speaking country?

a- Yes

b- No

Section Two: students' Communicative Competence

6/- Which aspect do you prefer in learning the English language?

a- Learning the grammatical aspect

b- Learning how to communicate.

7/- How often do you talk in English outside the classroom?

a- Often b- Sometimes c- Rarely d- Never

8/- Do you think you are able to communicate in English?

a- Very well b- Well c- Average d- Poor

If it is poor, is it because of:

a- Your lack of grammar rules

b- Your lack of appropriate use of specific vocabulary

c- Your lack of pronunciation

d- Other(s).....

9/- Which module (s) you are studying do you think is (are) the most useful to help you communicate in English?

Please explain why?

.....

10/- Which skill (s) do you think is (are) the most important to achieve communicative ability?

- a- Listening.
- b- Speaking.
- c- Reading.
- d- Writing.

11/- How often do you participate in the Oral expression class?

- a- Often
- b- Sometimes
- c- Rarely
- d- Never

12/- Does your teacher of oral expression use authentic materials that help you develop your communicative competence?

- a- Yes
- b- No

If yes, say how?

.....

If no, would you please state suggestions that you may think teachers have to do to develop students' communicative ability

.....
.....

13/- What do you think students have to do in or outside the classroom in order to be able to communicate effectively

.....
.....

14/- Do you consider talking to English native speakers beneficial to improve one's communicative competence?

a- Yes

b- No

15/- Do you think you are able to communicate with an English native speaker?

a- Yes

b- No

If no, please say why?

.....
.....

16/- Do you correspond (Chat) with people from an English speaking country?

a- Yes

b- No

17/- What do you use to communicate with them?

a- Face to face conversations

b- Letters

c- Phones

d- Internet

e- Others(s).....

Section Two: Social Networks

18/- Do you have any social networking account?

a- Yes

b- No

19/- Which type of social networks do you use? (You can choose more than one answer)

a- Facebook

b- Skype

c- Twitter

d- LinkedIn

e- Other(s).....

20/- Why do you use social networks?

a- To meet new people

b- To practice the language

c- To learn new things

d- Others.....

21/- How often do you check your social networking account(s):

a- Twice or more a day

b- Once a day

c- Weekly

d- Monthly

22/- How much time do you spend on your social networking account per day?

a- Less than 30 mins

b- From 1 to 3 hours

c- More than 3 hours

23/- Concerning Facebook, how many people do you have in your friend list?

a- 1__100

b- 101__500

c- More than 500 friends

24/- Do you use social networks to chat with your teachers?

a- Yes

b- No

If yes, please write how (by writing or orally) and about what do you chat?

.....

If no, please say why

.....

25/- Do you take initiations in conversations?

a- Often b- Sometimes c- Rarely d- Never

26/- Do you participate as a member of groups in Facebook?

a- Yes

b- No

If yes, say which kind of groups (you can mention their names)

.....
.....

27/- Do you agree that Facebook facilitates English language learning?

- a- Strongly agree b- Agree c- Neutral d- Disagree
Strongly disagree

28/- Do you think that using social networks strengthen students’

- a- English writing ability
b- Learn new English vocabularies
c- Speaking fluency in English
d- Motivation to read in English
e- Other(s).....

29/- Do you agree that students’ use of social networks helps them improve their communication skill?

Agree

Disagree

In both cases, please mention why

.....
.....
.....

Appendix 2: The teachers' interviews

Dear teachers,

We would be very grateful if you could answer the following questions for the sake of gathering information about **The Role of Social Networks in Improving Students' Communicative Competence.**

Thank you in advance.

Section one: Communicative competence

Q1/- As a teacher of oral expression module, are your language activities based on structural activities (practicing the form) or communicative ones (interaction and communication with learners)?

.....
.....

Q2/- Do you communicate with your students outside the classroom?

- If yes: What do you use?

.....
.....

- If no, why?

.....
.....

Q3/- As far as 3rd year students are concerned, what do you think about their level of communicative competence?

.....
.....

Section two: Social networks

Q4/- In your opinion, do social networks (such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter...) facilitate English language learning?

.....
.....

Q5/- Do you use such social networks as a means of communication with your students (i. e., for educative purposes)?

- If yes

1- What are these social networks?

.....
.....

2- How do you use these websites in order to help students learn the English language?

.....
.....

- In case you do not, would you like to start using these social networks in your teaching process?

.....
.....

Q6/- Do you think that the online environment may provide a comfortable atmosphere for shy students to interact with others and to improve their communicative performance? Please explain.

.....
.....

Q7/- Do you think that students who use these social networks regularly are more able to communicate than those who do not?

.....
.....

Q8/- what do you think of bringing social networking tools into the classroom experience? (i. e., social networks integration into the classroom for language learning and communicating)

.....
.....

* Anything else that you would like to add?

.....
.....
.....

Thank you

الملخص

الهدف من وراء الأطروحة الحالية هو التحقيق في دور الشبكات الاجتماعية في تحسين الكفاءة التواصلية لدى الطلاب. المشكلة الرئيسية الكامنة وراء هذا المسعى تكمن في عدم قدرة معظم الطلاب على الاستمرار في التفاعل العفوي، سواء في الفصول الدراسية أو في أي بيئة طبيعية. كنتيجة لذلك، معظمهم يقضون فترات طويلة من الزمن في الشبكات الاجتماعية معتبرا أن هذه الوسائل قد تساعدهم على تطوير قدراتهم التواصلية. في هذا البحث، تنص الفرضية بأن استخدام الطلاب للشبكات الاجتماعية سيكون له أثر إيجابي على اختصاصها التواصلية وأن بيئة الإنترنت قد توفر جو مريح للطلبة الانطوائيين و ذلك للتفاعل مع الآخرين و كذلك تحسين أدائهم التواصلية. تنقسم الأطروحة الحالية إلى ثلاثة فصول رئيسية، الفصل الأول والثاني يضم الإطار النظري أما الفصل الثالث فيخص العمل الميداني. علاوة على ذلك، فقد استندت الدراسة الحالية على التصميم النوعي كنهج لجمع وتحليل البيانات. من خلال استبيان تدار على 41 طالبا في السنة الثالثة، والمقابلات التي أجريت مع 6 معلمين من وحدة التعبير الشفوي، بحيث نهدف إلى استكشاف آراء كل من المتعلمين والمعلمين حول طبيعة تعلم اللغة واليات الكفاءة التواصلية الطلابية النامية فضلا عن توفير أجواء مريحة للطلاب الانطوائيين من خلال استخدام الشبكات الاجتماعية. ولذلك، أظهرت النتائج أن معظم المعلمين يعتقدون بقوة أنه من خلال التدريب والاستخدام المناسب لهذه الشبكات الاجتماعية و كذا دمج هذه الأجهزة في الإعداد الأكاديمي بوصفه استراتيجية فعالة لبناء قدراتهم التواصلية في استخدام اللغة المستهدفة و لتحقيق الأهداف التواصلية. وبالتالي، تم اثبات كل من الفرضيات بنجاح.