**Title:**

Preparatory Year Students' Perspectives on The Inclusion of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in Higher Education

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**Publication Date:** 4/15/2020

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## 1. Introduction

From the middle of the early 2000s to the present, social networking sites (SNS) have become a significant component of computer-assisted language learning conferences and second-language teaching. Learning assisted by SNS has been discussed in many notable journals (McBride, 2009; Lamy & Mangenot, 2013; Lin, Warschauer, & Blake, 2016).

The field of education is considered one of the most important areas in which information and communication technologies are used. This field has seen a number of changes and developments, particularly with the increased use of social networking sites, which have also changed considerably because of the flexible virtual environment that they provide. Throughout this process, the parties to the educational process communicate with the aims of sharing, interaction, inclusion, and flexibility (Griffith & Liyanage, 2008).

SNS are online tools that allow social communication and relations between individuals who share common interests and activities and exchange information by creating public or semi-public user accounts and pages to facilitate active interaction across a social network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn are examples of SNS, and the features offered by the site may differ from one site to another.

### 1.2 Study Purpose

The purpose of this research paper is to determine the importance of employing SNS in the educational process through effective use of its features and its feasibility and multiple benefits to keep up to date with technological developments, thereby enhancing the quality of education. Therefore, the present study proposes the following research questions:

1. To what extent are SNS used in higher education and what is their potential contribution from the perspective of preparatory-year students?

2. What is the role of SNS in the field of education?

3. What are the obstacles faced by students in using the educational capabilities of SNS?

## 2. Literature Review

Existing second-language teaching and learning research on social media has been guided by foundational research in computer-mediated communications and educational technology and rooted in social constructive research for Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL), which was introduced in the 1990s as the use of synchronous (chat) and asynchronous tools (discussion boards and emails) for teaching and learning second languages and for cultural exchange (McBride, 2009; Lamy & Mangenot, 2013).

An important number of studies have realized that social media sites are apt spaces for cultural learning and cross-culturalism exchange, though they pose several challenges (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Elola & Oskoz, 2008).

Ducate and Lomika (2008) asked 9 American college students learning French and 20 German learners to follow specific bloggers who would introduce them to the target culture, from which they would interact and develop via personal blogs. When analysing student work, the researchers found that some students communicated their thoughts and opinions readily in blogs than in classroom discussions or different kinds of assignments. The findings revealed many challenges, including those students reported on not reading each other's comments, their complaints on reading blogs that were not always linked to the content of their course and wished for more liberty in the choice of their writing on their own blogs.

Elola and Oskoz (2008) do not report any significant challenges in their tele-cooperation project, in which Spanish as second language learners in the US communicated interchangeably with learners of Spanish as second language studying overseas in Spain on small group blogs, where students overseas acted as cultural informants. The researchers also found several important differences across the groups, before and after the experiment, in terms of both intercultural competence and attitudes toward blogging as a learning tool.

Another area of research in social media and foreign language learning and teaching that argues that using social media sites for academic purposes should support and develop the learner's independence. In the context of learning a foreign language, (Holec, 1981, as cited in Little & Dam, 1998) defines learner autonomy as the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning. Therefore, when learners set their own agenda, learning is purposeful, more focused, and more effective both in terms of its long-term effectiveness and authenticity (Little, 1998).

For example, Guth (2009) described a blog-based 'personal learning environment' for undergraduate English language learners as a foreign language that can be modified by individual learners. This approach increased learner independence and acted as a space to access and participate in authentic language resources, thereby promoting independent informal and lifelong learning.

Another focus of social media sites in second-language learning and teaching research is on public awareness. Chen (2015) asked 33 Taiwanese university learners of English as a foreign language to maintain personal blogs with the liberty to select their own topics and comment on one another's blogs. The post-teaching analysis revealed that learners were more pleased with cognitive activities (focused on knowledge) that included the correction of grammar and syntax than social activities (focused on social contact) that included interaction. However, a deeper

analysis showed that the results may have been skewed because more satisfied learners showed more experience on their posts and were more invested in presenting themselves to an abstract viewer, no matter if their posts had gotten a small number of comments. On the other hand, displeased learners felt less invested or less competent in writing on their blogs as they were either negatively affected by public awareness or were convinced that they had no audience since they were just course works. Concisely, tasks that give emphasis to an external audience seem to have both advantages and disadvantages because the audience can empower or intimidate learners.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Participants

The research population consisted of 31 preparatory-year female students studying at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) at the English Language Institute (ELI) in the second semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. The research sample was chosen randomly, and each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire anonymously. The participants were expected to be between the ages of 18-22 and on lower and pre-intermediate level of English language proficiency. Therefore, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic to accommodate students' individual differences.

### 3.2 Research Method and Procedure

The researcher used a questionnaire on the reality of using social media sites in the educational processes of higher education on a random sample of preparatory-year female students studying at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in the English Language Institute (ELI).

The research tool was adapted from Ahmed (2017) and was used to collect data from the research sample. It consisted of three sections, namely the employment of social sites in education

and the benefits expected from their use, the role of social media in the field of education, and the obstacles faced by students in using the educational capabilities of SNS in the field of education. The data were collected online using Google Forms, a web-based survey tool for data collection and analysis. The participants were asked to answer the questions on a three-point Likert scale from 'agree', 'neutral', to 'disagree'.

In order to ensure the validity of the instrument within the study context, the study tool was presented to a professor at the Faculty of English Graduate Studies at the University of King Abdulaziz. After the study tool was deemed to be acceptable, it was piloted to a group of students from the university to foresee any possible problems in the administration process and to verify the reliability of the questionnaire. A consent form was provided to students willing to take part in the study to make them aware of the purpose of the research before deciding to become respondents.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics and analytical approaches were used to compute the percentage of each item for each section.

### Section 1. Potential contribution of SNS in education

Table 1 (See Appendix) shows that the answers of the sample of students for the items of the first section were as follows. For the first item, social networking sites are inexpensive, fast and easy to use, with which 23 (74.2%) agreed, 7 (22.6%) individuals answered neutral, and 1 (3.2%) disagreed. As for the second item, social networking sites are an instant educational tool and offer quicker feedback, with which 15 (48.4%) individuals answered agreed, 15 (48.4%) individuals answered neutral, and 1 (3.2%) did not agree. For the third item, social networking

sites are effective for open academic communication channels with professors, with which 20 (64.5%) individuals agreed, 9 (29%) individuals answered neutral, and 3 (9.7%) did not agree. For the fourth item, enable students to ask questions, participate and cooperate in solving problems, which make the learning process constructive through communication and discussions, 19 (61.3%) individuals agreed, 10 (32.3%), individuals answered neutrally and 2 (6.5%) individuals disagreed. These findings seem to be in line with those of Elola and Oskoz (2008).

For the fifth item, enable students to search and share ideas for educational practices and new methods, 21 (67.7%) individuals agreed, 8 (25.8%) individuals answered neutrally, and 2 (6.5%) individuals did not agree. For the sixth item, help students to participate in choosing learning resources and view the latest developments in their field, with which 21 (67.7%) individuals agreed, 10 (32.3%) individuals answered neutral, and none (0%) disagreed.

In response to Research Question 1, "To what extent are SNS used in higher education and what is their potential contribution from the perspective of preparatory-year students?", the findings suggest that the majority of the responses of the students were positive towards the employment of SNS in higher education in a manner compatible with academic and scientific goals and trends. The students also agreed on the various advantages that the sites offered and the possibility to benefit from their interactive features and services in their learning.

**Section 2. The role of SNS in education**

Based on the findings illustrated in Table 2 (See Appendix), students' responses to the second section items were as follows. For the first item, students are encouraged to use new applications to support educational sources, with which 22 (71%) individuals agreed, 8 (25.8%) individuals

answered neutral, and 2 (6.5%) disagreed. For the second item, students are encouraged to share information on different educational subjects, with which 20 (64.5%) individuals answered agreed, 9 (29%) individuals answered neutrally, and 3 (9.7%) individuals did not agree. For the third item, spread technical culture (Information Technology), 23 (74.2%) individuals agreed, (8) individuals answered neutral (25.8%), and (0) none answered disagree (0%). For the fourth item, transfer students from a passive role as a recipient of information to the role of participant in providing the information, it was found that 17 (54.8%) individuals agreed, 15 (48.4%) individuals answered neutrally, and 1 (3.2%) individual disagreed. These findings seem to be in line with those of Guth (2009).

For the fifth item, the use of social networking sites in education has an effective and valuable role, 19 (61.3%) individuals agreed, 5 (16.1%) individuals answered neutrally, and 7 (22.6%) individuals disagreed. For the sixth item, help instil the aspiration in students and encourage them to spread the use of technical culture (information technology) to serve the educational process, 19 (61.3%) agreed, 7 (22.6%) individuals answered neutrally, and 5 (16.1%) individuals disagreed. For the seventh item, turn the role of the professor from information presenter into supervisor of the educational process, with which 14 (45.2%) agreed, 13 (41.9%) individuals answered neutral, and 4 (12.9%) did not agree.

In response to Research Question 2, "What is the role of social media in the field of education?", the results indicate that the majority of the students agreed that the use of SNS played an important, influential role in the education process if their application was adequate.

**Section 3. Obstacles to the use of SNS in higher education**

As seen in Table 3 (See Appendix), the answers from students were as follows. For the first item, which deals with the inadequate handling of social media sites and the tendency of some students to resist modern technology, it was found that 16 (51.6%) individuals answered agreed, 11 (35.5%) answered neutral, and 6 (19.4%) did not agree. For the second item, some discourses may deviate from mutual respect, lack of acceptance of other opinions, and not being able to discern between what is academic and what is personal; 23 (74.2%) agreed, 6 (19.4%) individuals answered neutral, and 3 (9.7%) did not agree. For the third item, the use of social sites for a long time may cause internet addiction and social isolation, with which 20 (64.5%) agreed, 5 (16.1%) individuals answered neutral, and 6 (19.4%) individuals disagreed. For the fourth item, the academic environment does not encourage the use of social sites in education, with which 7 (22.6%) individuals agreed, 17 (54.8%) individuals agreed, and 9 (29%) individuals did not agree. For the fifth item, students may be irritated by the presence of professors on their personal pages because it violates their right to individual privacy, with which 19 (61.3%) individuals agreed, 8 (25.8%) answered neutral, and 16 (19.4%) individuals did not agree at all. These findings seem to be in line with those of Chen (2015).

In response to Research Question 3, "What are the obstacles and challenges faced by students in using the educational capabilities of social media sites in the field of education?", the findings indicate that the majority of students in the sample believed that there were some obstacles in the process of using SNS in university education. These obstacles are largely due to the inadequate handling of these sites, deviation from mutual respect during online discourse, internet addiction and social isolation caused by prolonged use of social sites, and the potential violation of students' privacy. These obstacles may discourage students from using these sites in the education process.

## 5. Conclusion

SNS have had a significant influence on many levels of political, economic, media, social and cultural education, and the steady increase of their users around the world has made them valuable for purposes other than social interactions, including its purposes in the field of education. Accordingly, education through social networks works to achieve effective communication between the elements of the teaching and learning process through a system that provides an educational environment that does not restrict itself to a specific place or time.

Due to the current circumstances of COVID-19 virus pandemic, the Saudi Ministry of Education has implemented the mechanisms of distance education and decided to suspend studies throughout the Kingdom including university education to prevent the spread of the Corona virus.

In that regard, this study used an online data collection tool and the results were limited to only thirty-one students in their preparatory year at King Abdulaziz University at the English Language Institute, which means that the results cannot be generalized about Saudi female university students' perspectives on the use of SNS in higher education.

A more comprehensive study should investigate the impact of SNS, the extent to which they can be employed, and their contribution to higher education from a university faculty perspective.

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# Appendix

| The possibility of utilizing social media in higher education and the benefits of this implementation: امكانية توظيف مواقع التواصل الاجتماعية في عملية التعليم الجامعي والفوائد المترتبة من هذا التوظيف | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social networking sites are inexpensive, fast and easy to use. مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي ذات تكلفة قليلة وسريعة وسهلة الاستعمال. | (74.2%) | (22.6%) | (3.2%) |
| 2. Social networking sites are an instant educational tool and they are faster in getting feedback. مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وسيلة تعليمية فورية وسريعة في تقديم التغذية الراجعة. | 15 (48.4%) | 15 (48.4%) | (3.2%) |
| 3. Social networking sites are effective for open academic communication channels with professors. مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي فعالة للتواصل الأكاديمي مع الاساتذة وفتح قنوات للحوار بين الاساتذة والطلاب | 20 (64.5%) | 9 (29%) | 3 (9.7%) |
| 4. Enable students to ask questions, participate and cooperate in solving problems, which make the learning process constructive through communication and discussions. تمكن الطلاب من طرح التساؤلات والمشاركة والتعاون في حل المشكلات مما يجعل عملية التعلم إيجابية حيث تدار بواسطة الحوارات والنقاشات | 19 (61.3%) | 10 (32.3%) | 2 (6.5%) |
| 5. Enable students to search and share ideas for educational practices and new methods. تمكن الطلاب من البحث ومشاركة الافكار والممارسات التعليمية الجيدة، وتمكن من ادخال اساليب جديدة في التعليم | 21 (67.7%) | 8 (25.8%) | 2 (6.5%) |
| 6. Help students to participate in choosing learning resources and view the latest developments in their field. تساعد الطلاب على المشاركة في اختيار المصادر التعليمية والاطلاع على أحدث المستجدات في مجال دراستهم | 21 (67.7%) | 10 (32.3%) | 0 (0%) |

**Table 1. Students' answers to first section items**

| The role of social media in education: دور مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي في التعليم | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. Encourage students to use new applications to support educational sources. تشجع الطلاب على استعمال تطبيقات جديدة تخدم المواد التعليمية المقررة | 22 (71%) | 8 (25.8%) | 2 (6.5%) |
| 8. Encourage students to share various information on different educational subjects. تشجع على مشاركة الطلاب لمختلف المعلومات والموضوعات المهمة | 20 (64.5%) | 9 (29%) | 3 (9.7%) |
| 9. Help spread technical cultural (Information Technology). تساعد على نشر الثقافية التقنية (تكنولوجيا المعلومات) | 23 (74.2%) | 8 (25.8%) | 0 (0%) |
| 10. Turning students from the role of the recipient of information to the role of participant in providing the information. تحويل الطلاب من دور المتلقي للمعلومات الى دور المشارك في تقديم المعلومة والمتفاعل معها | 17 (54.8%) | 15 (48.4%) | 1 (3.2%) |
| 11. Using social media sites in education will have an effective and valuable role. استعمال مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي في التعليم سيكون له دور فعال ومؤثر | 19 (61.3%) | 5 (16.1%) | 7 (22.6%) |
| 12. Instil the aspiration in students and encourages them to spread the use of technical culture (information technology) to serve the educational process. تساعد على غرس الطموح لدى الطلاب وتشجيعهم على نشر استعمال الثقافة والتقنية (تكنولوجيا المعلومات) تخدم المواد التعليمية. | 19 (61.3%) | 7 (22.6%) | 5 (16.1%) |
| 13. Transform the role of the professor from the presenter of the information into the role of supervisor of the educational process and interacting with it. تحويل دور الاستاذ من الملقن للمعلومات الى دور المشرف على العملية التعليمية والمتفاعل معها | 14 (45.2%) | 13 (41.9%) | 4 (12.9%) |

**Table 2. Students' responses to second section items**

| Obstacles to the use of social sites in the educational process: معوقات استعمال مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي في التعليم الجامعي | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Negative handling of social media sites and the tendency of some students to resist modern technology. سلبية التعامل مع مواقع التواصل في العملية التعليمية وميول بعض الطلاب لمقاومة التكنولوجيا الحديثة | 16 (51.6%) | 11 (35.5%) | 6 (19.4%) |
| 15. Some discourses may deviate from mutual respect, not accepting of other opinions, and not discerning between what is academic and what is personal. بعض الحوارات قد تبتعد عن الاحترام المتبادل وعدم تقبل الراي الاخر وعدم التمييز بين ما هو أكاديمي وما هو شخصي | 23 (74.2%) | 6 (19.4%) | 3 (9.7%) |
| 16. The prolonged use of social sites may cause internet addiction and social isolation. قد يسبب استعمال المواقع الاجتماعية بكثرة ولوقت طويل الى ما يسمى ادمان الانترنت ومن ثم العزلة الاجتماعية | 20 (64.5%) | 5 (16.1%) | 6 (19.4%) |
| 17. The academic environment does not encourage the use of social spaces in education. البيئة الاكاديمية لا تشجع على استعمال المواقع الاجتماعية في عملية التعليم | 7 (22.6%) | 17 (54.8%) | 9 (29%) |
| 18. Students may get bothered by the presence of professors on their personal pages. It may result in a violation of personal rights and individual privacy. قد يتضايق الطلاب من تواجد الاساتذة في صفحاتهم الشخصية مما يؤدي إلى انتهاك للحقوق الشخصية والخصوصيات الفردية | 19 (61.3%) | 8 (25.8%) | 6 (19.4%) |

**Table 3. Students' responses to third section items**