Teaching experience in university students using social networks

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Abstract

Social networks, specifically Facebook and Twitter, are currently one of the most mainstream forms of media in the world. Yet, its educational use for the dissemination of knowledge is not significantly evident. Under this premise, this report is presented, considering an experience in which teachers and university-level students used these networks as mediators of educational practices; such mediation was implemented in order to promote mobile learning as an option to facilitate the process of construction and socialization of knowledge. In this sense, the research presented aims to identify the experience and opinion of students regarding the influence of this strategy in achieving their learning. The quantitative methodology was applied through the application of a survey of students who participated and realized the importance of socialization of knowledge. The results showed favourable opinions regarding the use of these networks, highlighting the benefits of mobile learning as a way to streamline the training process. This proposal is to continue this type of strategy to promote flexible teaching-learning options.

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1. Introduction

The information management and traffic flow data through social networks, as well as the downing of temporal and physical barriers to communication, are the main characteristics of the knowledge society. They have become a powerful tool to eliminate borders, as well as being an opportunity that has been little exploited in academic and pedagogical area.

In that sense, learning through mass media, such as social networking, has become an option that facilitates the interaction between students and teachers and, therefore, the construction of collaborative knowledge. However, we found few empirical studies that realize it. The intention of this research is to present the results of a training experience where social networks (Facebook and Twitter) were used as promoters of mobile learning.

Based on the understanding that knowledge is constructed through socialization and exchange of views, it proceeded to implement some classes under the assumptions of mobile learning so that the information obtained is a reference to know the impact it generates. Quantitative study will be part of the strategy applied to the education process.

2. Reference Framework

This section describes some reference documents used for this research and realizes the little existing evidence on the impacts that the use of social networking has had on teaching and learning processes.

3. Communicative action

In the last decade, various models of pedagogical practices focused on the student and presenting the teacher as a counsellor have been developed. These models are based on constructivist concepts; however, these pedagogies have been adjusted to the new demands represented include Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as part of the essential tools for the teaching-learning process. They have been based on the Theory of Communicative Action, an approach supported by Habermas (1981), who presented newly proposed elements as an alternative communication within the classroom in the context of a growing society.

Communicative action is defined as an interaction symbolically mediated, so that this theory can include classroom language through interaction with ICT. Plus, it is oriented according to current inter-subjectively rules that define reciprocal behavioural expectations and that they have to be understood and recognized by at least two agents (Hurtado, 2011). In this way, communication is a key element in teaching practices where ICT tools appear as mediation.

4. Social networks

The prevalence of the use of social networks, along with the weight of mobile connections, is the trend that marks the evolution. According to the "11th study habits of Internet users in Mexico", presented on 18th May 2015 by the AMIPCI, the percentage of use according to the activity performed is described; among the results presented, social networks are in first place with 85%, followed by the search for information and sending or receiving emails, with 78% and 73%, respectively.

One of the conclusions I came to this study is that 9 out of 10 Internet users use social networks mainly to communicate with their friends, followed by wanting to be informed (which increased significantly in 2015) (AMIPCI, 2015). Meanwhile, in the third quarter of 2015, Facebook reached one billion daily users worldwide, while Twitter, in the same period, recorded 320 million monthly active Internet users (Lopez, 2015).

This study reflects the importance of the fact that the social level represents the influence of social networks. Under this assumption, it is believed that its potential in the field of education are viable, promoting the democratization of education or narrowing the gap between institutions' educational and social environments due to the apparent horizontality of social networks (Buckingham & Martinez, 2013).

Continuing the positive idea that learning can be fostered through social networks, some teachers argue that online is precisely where these students' relationships their interests lie and, above, it is considered appropriate to join the formal and informal channels to make learning more attractive (Bugeja, 2006).

In opposition to this, other scholars argue that education should be withdrawn from social media, arguing that they produce alienation and critically analyse objective reality; they mention that the privacy and publicity without regulation are crucial to minimize the positive effect of the networks (Zaidieh, 2012).

From the above, it can be noted that the debate continues because of the lack of results that expose the positive or negative impacts of social networks in education. Under this idea, the methodology was carried out for this work, representing the experience of teachers and students and whose documentation as a basis for continuing this type of research is presented.

5. Mobile learning

According to UNESCO (2013), mobile learning refers to the use of mobile technology alone or in combination with any other type of ICT in order to facilitate learning anytime and anywhere. It can be done in different ways: some people use mobile devices to access educational resources, connect with other people, or create content both inside and outside the classroom (UNESCO, 2013).

One of the advantages that have been documented for the use of mobiles as learning support referred to the fact that the use of technology in education had been limited because expensive and heavy equipment was needed. However, with this new learning it is assumed that most students have access to this type of Internet technology.

UNESCO has also stated that numerous projects are showing that "mobile technologies are an excellent means of expanding educational opportunities for students who may not have access to quality schooling. For example, the Bridge IT initiative, which applies in Latin America and Asia, leading to schools in isolated areas updated content that they support learning pedagogies based on experimentation, using mobile networks" (UNESCO, 2013).

So, the advent mobile learning has been seen as an opportunity to develop new research to understand the impact of this innovation in the teaching-learning process.

6. Method to promote mobile learning

To carry out the promotional experience of mobile learning in the theoretical course (Research Seminar I) for Law students, the activities described below were designed:

- Closed groups were created on Facebook, where the directions of the activities that students had to perform were shared.

- Work was distributed in groups of 4 members who conducted, among other things, research on issues of law in specialized databases and whose information was under the creative commons license, a fact that gave greater certainty about the quality of content that was distributed.

- The activities were promoted as background collaborative work so that, in addition to demonstrating quality content, students should use tools that dynamize the construction of knowledge and would be the evidence of collaboration, such as Touchcast, Vine, Animoto, Youtube, and Mindmaister; besides the collaborating, they could exhibit their products through links on social networks that teachers told them.

- Strategies, such as brainstorming through Hashtags on Twitter or discussions on specific topics via Facebook, were also applied.

- Students were encouraged to use their phones to capture images that will help them to generate video or allusive memes that addressed the issue, which allowed them to get more involved in class.

- Similarly, they were allowed to use mobile devices to search for information during the sessions.

These activities have given an important spin to classes, tools, and intervening more dynamic interaction among participants changing traditional structures.

7. Research Methodology

As a part of the methodology first applied to change the dynamics of the class, targeted students will use social networks pedagogically; after the above, it was established that understanding the experience and opinion of students regarding the promotion of mobile learning in their educational practices, where some means of construction and socialization of knowledge were the social networks.

In the end, it was necessary to apply, as a foundation specification dictates, a methodology for quantitative research (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2010). The views and perceptions of students were collected through a questionnaire that was used to obtain frequencies, averages and percentages; then, activity was qualitatively observed on social networks (Facebook and Twitter) with the intention of recognizing participation, and forms of expression and collaboration among students. This method was used to identify the level of appropriation of these tools as socialization environment and display knowledge.

100 per cent of the population of this survey were students studying the Research Seminar class I for the Major of Law from a Mexican Public University.

The instrument used was a survey that included questions with answers on a Likert scale and three open questions, through which students generally expressed their perceptions about their learning and made use of social networks.

8. Results

The participation of students through Facebook was observed. They presented the work (video) by sharing the link to their video on Facebook and Twitter with the hashtag "#seminv2015" and the rest of the teams knew their work, commenting or providing suggestions on the issue. For this activity, some received in upon publication more than 40 comments with suggestions, questions, or even sent information that could support their peers to complement the theme. The opposite situation to that was presented when students showed their video in class, because none of his companions made comments or recommendations. In this sense, this means asynchrony facilitated the expression of opinions.

The above survey was applied to the 45 students, who participated in the activity, with reference to how they consider teamwork technologies, more than 40 per cent said "very good" and 37% said "excellent", as shown chart 1:
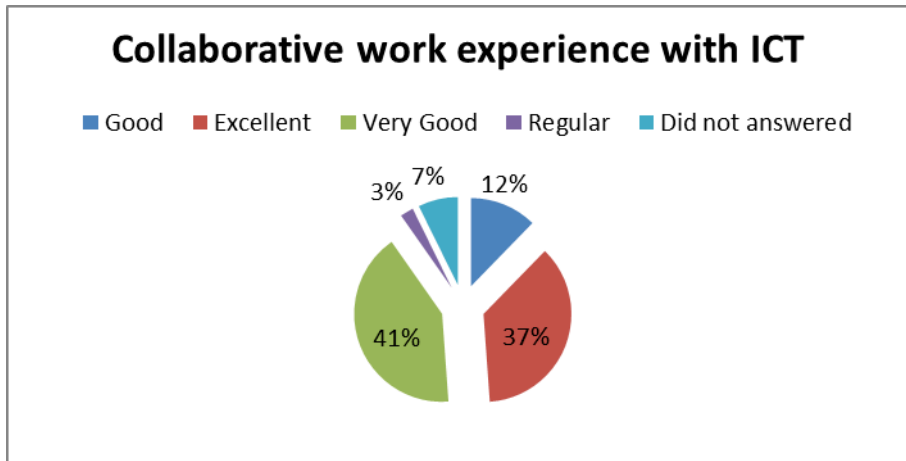

Graph 1. Opinion of students about their experience in technologically supported collaborative work.

On the other hand, 57.1% of students stated that the use of technology greatly contributed to their learning, 38.1% said sometimes and sometimes not, showing that almost 100% are convinced that the use of ICT can help improve the teaching and learning process (figure 2).
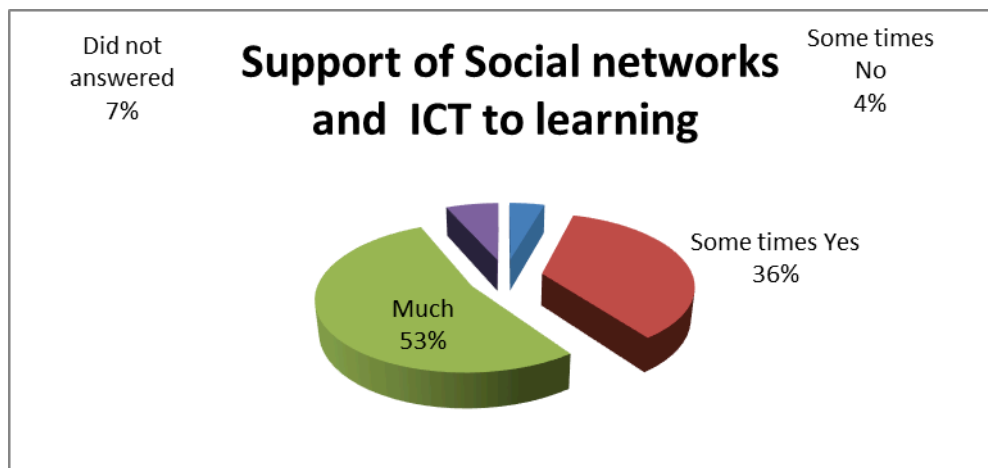
Graph 2.Student feedback whether they consider social networks and ICT to support their learning.

Meanwhile, 28.6% of students said they like to study or work as a team, while the rest of the group noted that they only occasionally do; in this respect, it is necessary to say that none of them said they did not like to work as a team, as shown in Figure 3.
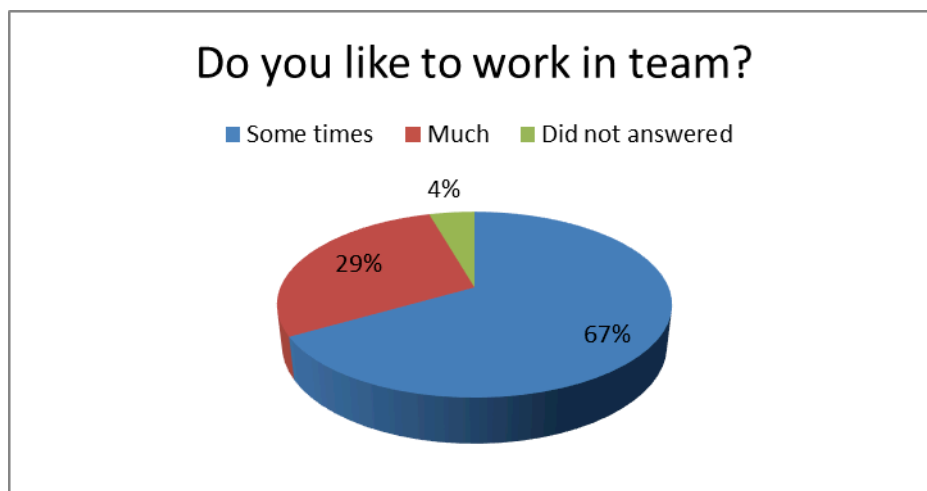
Graph 3.Student´s opinion on working in teams.

Of the 45 respondents, only two said they would not like to work with technology in the classroom; one said that the only sometimes do and the rest said they do want to work with ICT and also consider it profitable. The results showed that the social network can support more considered learning and also that the most used is Facebook, followed by Whatsapp, and Twitter. When asked whether they would like to work with technology, students said mostly yes because the class becomes more dynamic and they can share knowledge with peers. They also suggested continuing to work through technologies and some showed interest in continuing to work as a team.

9. Conclusions

From the results shown, it can be concluded that the experience was successful because the students participated in all activities, giving their opinions and feeding back together, causing collaborative learning and self-management; perhaps this is because today, social networks are considered part of the daily lives of students, which facilitates the student in context and this allows them to express their thoughts more easily.

In particular, it can be said that the objectives set for the class were achieved. However, it is considered important to perform planning using, in particular, necessary tools for each of the activities developed in classes, which can achieve increased motivation and participation.

The implementation of such plans may be considered part of the activities and teaching strategies that teachers implement in their practice using various tools to corroborate student learning. On the other hand, it should be noted that the results presented here correspond to a descriptive study. Therefore, it is necessary to unveil in-depth research academic achievement that students achieve when they use social networks in their learning processes.

It is suggested to continue this type of study that gives knowledge of the conditions under which the use of social networking in education in order to contribute to the state of knowledge in this area. Finally, it should be noted that it is necessary to correctly check technologies are used pedagogically to increase the options mediation in the learning process.

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