‘Close Your Book and Open Your Facebook’:
A Case for Extending Classroom Collaborative Activities Online

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This study investigated EFL language teachers’ and learners’ evaluation of classroom-based pair and group work activities during an intensive English language program and it sought their opinions on the potential of Facebook to extend such collaborative activities online. Data were collected from 26 teachers and 178 pre-intermediate students using surveys and semi-structured interviews at an international university in Cyprus. The data analysis revealed that despite acknowledging the benefits involved in using pair and group work tasks in their classes, more than half of the participants reported that students developed the feelings of boredom and demotivation toward participating in classroom-based collaborative activities, mostly due to their overuse, poor design, and failure to cater to students’ learning needs and beliefs and their educational and cultural backgrounds. The results also indicated that, under some conditions, Facebook could function as a learning environment to revamp students’ interest and facilitate their engagement in collaborative language learning activities. Both students and teachers suggested specific ideas with respect to the informal as well as formal integration of Facebook into language learning classes.

Keywords: Facebook, ELT textbooks, collaborative activities, EFL

Introduction

As a result of the rapid growth of technology in the new millennium, language educators are expected to assume new roles and responsibilities to support the integration of technology into their classes to better serve the learning needs and preferences of the new generation of language learners (Sawhill, 2008). Of these technological developments, social media tools such as Facebook allow language learners to post, share, and exchange multimedia materials such as audio, video, and texts online (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2008; Steel & Levy, 2013). In addition to facilitating learner-to-learner interaction and collaboration (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Tolosa, East, & Villers, 2013), the use of Facebook can enhance communication between teachers and learners (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008) and between learners and speakers of the target language (Horwitz, 2008). Given the flexibility it offers language learners to work at their own pace regardless of time and place constraints (Blattner & Fiori, 2009), Facebook can also promote independent learning or learner autonomy.

However, Facebook has yet to make inroads into language learning programs, as language learners may not necessarily want their social spaces to be invaded by teachers for more formal teaching and learning purposes, nor may they readily transfer the skills they use to bond in spaces such as Facebook to formal learning (Madge, Meekb, Wellensc, & Hooleyd, 2009; Scockt, 2013). Moreover, language schools and teachers have heavily relied on commercial ELT textbooks, leaving less space for the
integration of technological applications into these programs. Despite their popularity and availability, commercial ELT textbooks have been criticized for their theoretical and practical faults (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Thornbury & Meddings, 2001; Tomlinson, 2008; Ur, 1996). Textbooks can be replete with numerous activities whose likely negative effects on the classroom atmosphere, and consequently on students’ learning, may go unchecked (Leki, 2001; Murphy, 2003). Chief of these are pair and group work activities, developed as the result of a paradigm shift in language education during the 1970s that stressed the role of interaction and collaboration to facilitate the learning of other languages. There is ample evidence regarding the positive effects of pair and group work activities on different aspects of language learning (e.g., Dobao, 2012; Harmer, 2001; Swain, 2006; Ur, 1996; Walqui, 2006), but there seem to be conditions under which collaborative activities could lead to meaningful communication and learning. Although many factors have been found to influence the success or failure of pair and group work activities in language learning classes (Jacobs & Ball, 1996; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Storch, 1999; Watanabe & Swain, 2008), there is a scarcity of research on the quality and quantity of such collaborative activities in the era of online social media, when individuals are communicating in a more meaningful and authentic manner.

The current study – prompted by the following quote engraved on a student’s desk: “Be easy; be cool; everybody hates school; close your book and open your Facebook” – aims to evaluate teachers’ and students’ experience with pair and group work activities in an intensive English language program and to seek their perceptions of the potential of Facebook to extend these collaborative activities online. While collaborative activities might not have been solely responsible for students’ development of boredom and demotivation to the point of closing their book, these tasks have, since the emergence of communicative language teaching, formed the backbone of commercial ELT textbooks designed supposedly to fight students’ feelings of disheartenment while undertaking the challenging task of learning another language. It is then imperative to evaluate, or rethink, their use in the age of online social networks when language learners can collaborate and cooperate more efficiently beyond the time and space limitations of brick-and-mortar classrooms.

**Literature Review**

**Collaborative Activities in Language Learning Classes**

Pair and group work activities mushroomed as a pedagogical strategy with the advent of communicative language teaching. Since their introduction, they have been used to foster learner-to-learner interaction and to add variety and excitement to learners’ classroom practice in a number of ways. Harmer (2001), for example, argued that pair and group work encourage learners to work together, address language learning problems, and work out complex tasks more successfully. This is true for both novice and expert learners: novices can gain more confidence by participating in small-scale rather than whole-class activities, whereas more knowledgeable learners can “learn by teaching” or have “an opportunity to verbalise, clarify and extend their own knowledge of the subject matter” (Walqui, 2006, p. 168). Collaborative activities also have the potential to boost more reticent language learners’ confidence to participate in classroom activities (Ur, 1996) and to help them maintain their self-esteem, overcome their shyness and lack of self-confidence, and learn interpersonal relationships.

Incorporating collaborative tasks such as pair and group work in language learning classes is supported by the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of learning, which places a special emphasis on the role of the social construction of knowledge, and by the idea that learning is situated in its social context and would be ideally conceived through interaction and scaffolding. From a sociocultural standpoint, learners can collaborate in completing language learning tasks through what Swain (2006) termed *langugaging*, that is, “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (p. 89). In other words, participating and collaborating in performing complex learning tasks engage more language-
mediated cognitive operations, which in turn could lead to enhancing language learning.

However, the success of implementing pair and group work activities as effective learning or teaching strategies depends on a number of factors such as learners’ willingness to communicate in the target language (Cao & Philp, 2006) and motivation to participate in these tasks. In addition, what pushes individuals to achieve a goal may vary across different cultural groups or learners. For example, Iyengar and Lepper (1999) observed that although individuals in collectivist cultures participate in an activity to sustain their social identity, individuals in individualistic cultures are more autonomous and, therefore, more personal rather than social forces seem to determine their engagement in an activity. The type and quality of instructional materials and pedagogical tasks can also augment or diminish the students’ level of engagement in pair and group work (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). Writing tasks, for instance, were reported to lend themselves better than reading or listening tasks to the mechanism of group work (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). As another factor, the design of learning tasks can affect the dynamics of interaction between peers or group members (Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Storch, 1999). According to Dörnyei and Murphey (2003), communicative language teaching tasks, which are based on small group activities, demand learners’ willingness and motivation for meaningful communication and interaction in the classroom.

Even if students are willing to work together, as Dobao (2012) maintained, “not all pair and group work is equally conducive to learning” (p. 41), nor will interaction result in learning unless learners are engaged in collaborative activities such as sharing and pooling their ideas and knowledge toward achieving a common goal. Working in pairs or groups could become counterproductive if group members involve in exchanging linguistically incorrect language or discuss topics that are irrelevant to the learning objective of the task at hand (Harmer, 2001). Other researchers (e.g., Leki, 2001; Murphy, 2003) have noted that collaborative tasks might not work as planned or expected. In some ELT textbooks, group work activities fail to promote learning because they “appear to have been created merely by putting the words ‘in groups’ or ‘in pairs’ in front of what were formerly individual activities, without making any changes to encourage learners to cooperate with one another” (Jacobs & Ball, 1996, p. 99). To overcome the contrived use of pair and group work tasks in language learning classes and at the same time encourage more student participation in these activities, teachers might extend collaborative language learning tasks to the online environment of social networking sites such as Facebook, where students can share their ideas and knowledge with the whole class.

**Collaborative Language Learning Activities on Facebook**

The use of online social media in education is aligned with a pedagogical approach known as heutagogy. Heutagogy supports self-determined learning, which considers the learner as the key player in their own learning (Hase & Kenyon, 2013). This also supports the notion of lifelong learning which has evolved with an aim to empower students to continue learning throughout their life and manage various complex problems in their future personal, educational, or professional life. As the most popular online social network, Facebook has recently attracted educators’ attention for educational and academic uses (Aydin, 2012; Jee, 2011), given that it has become an integral part of students’ identity and e-routines (Chen, 2013; Ushioda, 2011). Thanks to its growing multi-media applications and functions (walls, chats, discussion boards, tagging, etc.), Facebook offers teachers opportunities to design interactive tasks useful to develop students’ communicative skills (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Steel & Levy, 2013). More specifically, since the online space does not put restrictions on the number of participants in a discussion group and the amount of language they produce or exchange, teachers can channel collaborative activities to Facebook in order to help students work beyond the time and space limitations of the physical environment of the classroom (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). This would mainly benefit more reserved and shy students to express their ideas and communicate with others without much anxiety or stress (Sheldon, 2013). In addition to building a community of learners and cultivating a close rapport between students and teachers, Facebook can also promote language learners’ cross-cultural understanding when they work with learners from
different cultural contexts and their socio-pragmatic knowledge when they work with more competent
users or native speakers of the target language (Blattner & Fiori, 2009).

Studies conducted in various contexts (e.g., Chartrand, 2012; McBride, 2009; Mitchell, 2012;
Stevenson & Liu, 2010) have provided evidence that students do have a strong motivation and interest in
working together on social networking sites. The use of Facebook, in particular, has been found to
enhance language learners’ interaction and engagement in information sharing and knowledge
construction. Mills (2011), for example, reported that Facebook served as a complement to the face-to-
face learning environment when a group of college language learners established a self-directed learning
community to encourage collective reflection, resources sharing, and interaction. Shih (2011) also found
that blending Facebook with a classroom-based writing course promoted the use of peer feedback and
peer assessment strategies amongst students and helped them gain higher scores for different aspects of
their writing. Facebook was found to provide EFL students with a positive learning context to pool and
synthesize ideas from different sources of information (Al-Shehri, 2011), improve their vocabulary, boost
their confidence, and foster positive attitudes toward learning (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010). In
another study, Lai and Gu (2011) reported that EFL learners used Facebook more than any other Web 2.0
technology to connect with their classmates and native speakers to practice the newly learned vocabulary.

However, there is still a long way to go before Facebook is fully exploited for teaching and learning
purposes (Madge et al., 2009). Given the scarcity of studies carried out in this area and to contribute to
this line of research, the current study first investigates teachers’ and students’ evaluations of pair and
group work activities they experienced in an intensive English language program. It then seeks both
teachers’ and students’ opinions on the potential of using Facebook as a platform to extend these
classroom-based collaborative activities online. In particular, the design of this study intends to answer
the following three research questions:

1. What are the teachers’ and students’ evaluations of the classroom-based collaborative learning
activities they experienced in an intensive English language program?
2. What are the teachers’ and students’ opinions on the potential of Facebook to extend
collaborative learning activities beyond the classroom environment?
3. How can teachers integrate Facebook into language learning programs to promote student
collaboration online?

The Study

Context and Participants

The study was carried out at an international university in Cyprus. Because the medium of instruction
in this university is English, students are required to submit an English proficiency certificate or pass a
proficiency test (also functioning as a placement test) held at the beginning of each semester prior to their
enrolment in various academic programs. Students who fail to meet this requirement have to take
intensive English courses offered at three different proficiency levels (elementary, pre-intermediate, and
intermediate) based on their placement test score. At the time of this study, the main textbook used at this
school was the Language Leader series, with which students had 12 contact hours per week, covering one
8-page unit along with a corresponding unit from their workbook. This textbook contained a CD attached
at the back and a companion website. However, the website’s content was designed as an extension of the
content in the student book and predominantly included grammar exercises. Students also attended
English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (2 hours), listening (2 hours), and writing (4 hours) classes every
week, each taught by a different teacher. Teachers at this school follow the same syllabus, which obliges
them to cover certain pages each session, and the classroom activities generally mirror the textbook
materials. For example, teachers have to cover as many as eight tasks/parts and an extra reference to
grammatical exercises at the end of the book on page 49 of the Pre-Intermediate Student Book in less than 25 minutes.

The participants of this study included all 26 teachers at the university English preparatory school, 23 of whom had active Facebook accounts, and 178 pre-intermediate students from ten different classes who were using the textbook Language Leader Pre-Intermediate (Lebeau & Rees, 2008). Of the nearly 400 pre-intermediate students, 200 Turkish-speaking students (mostly from Turkey and North Cyprus) were randomly selected to participate in this study. However, 22 students who did not have a Facebook account were excluded later because the focus of the study was on investigating the account holders’ perceptions of integrating Facebook into language learning programs. Because the Turkish-speaking students formed the majority of the student population at the school, they were selected to keep the sample homogeneous in terms of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The pre-intermediate students were selected because they constituted more than half of the student population at the school, and they were assumed to have had sufficient exposure and experience with language learning activities.

Data Collection and Analysis

A survey was administered to students to investigate their perception of the pair and group work activities they experienced throughout one academic semester and to seek their perceptions of the potential as well as the specifics of extending or transferring of classroom activities to Facebook. The first section of this survey included two questions asking students whether they had a Facebook account, and if so, how often they checked it. The second section consisted of 10 closed items investigating the students’ perceptions of Facebook to function as a platform in order to improve their English and enhance their collaboration online. These items were designed on a Likert scale, with 5 representing a strong agreement and 1 representing a strong disagreement. The third part of the survey included three open-ended questions addressing students’ evaluation of in-class pair and group work activities and their opinions about using Facebook to extend collaborative activities online (see Appendix A). In addition, all teachers were interviewed to follow up on the findings from students’ responses to the survey. This semi-structured interview comprised three core questions with several follow-up questions, asking the teachers’ evaluation of their students’ hands-on experience with pair and group work activities and their opinions on the potential and practicalities of integrating Facebook into their classes to promote students’ engagement in collaborative tasks online (see Appendix B).

The data were collected at the end of the semester. After securing students’ informed consent, the teacher-researcher administered the survey to students in several randomly selected pre-intermediate classes. A descriptive analysis was performed to analyze students’ responses to the first two questions of the survey and to calculate the mean scores of their responses to the scaled items. However, approximately a quarter (n = 44) of the surveys were randomly selected to report on the students’ comments on the open-ended questions. In addition, the teacher-researcher conducted interviews in a friendly and casual manner to ensure that the teachers expressed their opinions freely. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and along with the students’ responses to the open-ended questions, subjected to content analysis. The teacher-researcher read the transcripts for each question to identify initial codes and recurring patterns. During another round of analysis, these codes were reorganized several times to merge them into more inclusive codes. Finally, the most inclusive themes and their representative quotes were selected, edited to ensure accuracy and clarity, and reported to respond to the research questions.

Results and Discussion

RQ1) What Are the Teachers’ and Students’ Evaluations of the Collaborative Learning Activities They Experienced in an Intensive English Language Program?
In response to the first open-ended question on the survey, students mentioned several advantages and disadvantages of engaging in the pair and group work activities in their classes. As the first major theme in support of pair and group work activities, students pointed to peer learning and improvement of their English. However, they preferred to work together mainly to address grammatical problems using their first language. As one student commented, “Working in pair and group helped me understand new lessons better. We could speak our first language to discuss new grammar and words.” Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) also suggested that students perceived working together as opportunities for discussing grammatical problems and working out new vocabulary using their first language. Adding variety to the classroom activities or functioning as a break away from the traditional teacher-centered instruction was mentioned as another advantage of the collaborative learning activities. This is best echoed in one student’s comment, “Group work was a time to move around, talk with others, and relax a little bit. I also talked with the teacher and discussed with her my problems.” This resonates with Walqui’s (2006) finding on the potential of group work to offer students an opportunity to sort out their problems and improve their own understanding of the lesson. Additionally, students commented on the affective impacts of pair and group activities. In particular, they referred to the shy and more reserved students’ communication with their peers while preparing to have a say in the follow-up activities such as speaking or role-playing tasks. As one student acknowledged, “I like working with others as I am shy and don’t have courage to volunteer for speaking tasks. Students in my group shared their ideas with me and helped me to be able to talk in the class.” This finding is also consistent with the results from previous research on the role of collaborative activities in boosting reticent language learners’ confidence to participate in classroom activities (Ur, 1996).

However, more than half (54%) of the students expressed dissatisfaction with pair and group work activities in their classes. The students’ comments, however, were rarely against the nature or philosophy behind collaborative learning activities. They rather believed that the insufficient attention paid to the design of pair and group work tasks, in terms of their quantity and quality, was the main reason mentioned for their failure in the classroom. Students mainly pointed to the overuse or disproportionate use of working together. One student, for example, complained, “The book had many ‘work together’ tasks, and it was sometimes boring to work with others several times a day.” In addition, students referred to the teachers’ challenging job of successfully organizing and monitoring group work activities in the classroom. This difficulty, as they commented, stemmed partly from the teachers’ inability to effectively assign groups in a class of students with different learning styles, preferences, capabilities, and levels of motivation. “I learn better when I work with others, but this semester the teacher could not group students fairly. I mean some groups were very strong, while some others were very weak,” one student noted. The third emerging concern addressed the students’ difficulty in relating to group work activities because they lacked sufficient experience with such tasks, were unaware of their benefits, and were less competent learners who did not trust others’ knowledge or were more competent learners who did not have faith in learning from ‘teaching’ others. As one student wrote, “I don’t trust other students’ knowledge. I prefer to learn new things from the teacher.”

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Ur, 1996), the results indicated that although students viewed pair and group work as an effective learning strategy that added diversity to the instructional tasks and helped more reserved students build confidence in speaking, more than half of them complained about the overuse of these tasks and were reluctant to frequently work with the same group members every session. This disproportionate use of pair and group work activities in ELT textbooks or in the classrooms could, in the long run, become even counterproductive in EFL contexts where, in many cases, learners from one linguistic background form the majority. In other words, the philosophy behind incorporating such activities, which is developing students’ communicative competence, may be compromised by the students’ use of their first language while working together mainly to address grammatical issues.

The teachers’ evaluation of pair or group work dynamics in their classes reflected the students’ opinions to a large extent. The results from the interviews revealed that 40% of the teachers found these
activities to be beneficial for their students. These teachers indicated that collaborative activities catered to students with varying learning styles, personality types, and learning needs. Given that students differ in terms of the ways they learn and the conditions under which the learning itself takes place, one teacher stated, “I tried group work to allow students to catch up with their peers when they fell behind. Some students were good at working together to deal with their problems, but there were others who needed more one-to-one support.” In addition, the teachers reported that working together enhanced students’ engagement and participation in their own learning. For example, one teacher who incorporated collaborative activities as the main component of the conventional presentation-practice-production instructional model said, “After presenting each new lesson, I gave my students some time to practice and discuss their problems with their classmates to be able to speak or write at the end.” The teachers also set up group work as a strategy to assess their students’ learning. As one teacher explained, “I could find out if students were struggling with any part of the lesson. Since students rarely ask questions, even when they do not understand the lesson, group work was a time to know whether learning happened.” Many scholars (e.g., Harmer, 2001; Swain, 2006) also observed that pair and group work activities offer language learners opportunities to work collaboratively and address their learning problems more successfully. For teachers, on the other hand, students’ collaborative work could function as an assessment tool to see whether their instruction was effective or needs further revision.

However, 60% of the teachers reported that students were reluctant to participate in pair and group work activities in the classroom. As a result, they decided to skip these activities or exercise discretion in using them. As one teacher noted,

Some speaking topics were boring, and students were not interested or probably their information did not suffice to talk about them. So, I changed or modified them and wrote several new prompts on the board. Then, I allowed students to work in groups and prepare in any language they wished but to present their ideas in English.

The teachers also referred to contextual or cultural factors to justify the reasons for their students’ reluctance to participate in collaborative activities wholeheartedly. One teacher, for example, viewed classroom-based factors as the main obstacle: “I think if the physical space of classrooms in terms of the seat arrangements and facilities were suitable, students would be happy to work together.” Another teacher believed that her students were not familiar enough with the idea of working together:

It is something cultural. Majority of these students come from the contexts where they are not encouraged or trained to work together. The stress of passing and failing at the lower levels of education did not give them the luxury of learning from one another. Even if they did so, the quality and mechanism were different.

Moreover, teachers believed that the students’ degree of participation in pair and group work activities depended on the type of the task. For instance, they reported that students were more willing to work together on grammar exercises rather than on other skills or sub-skills such as speaking. “Students liked working together mainly to deal with grammar. They were more focused on grammar exercises, and nearly everybody was leaning forward to listen or contribute,” one teacher noted.

Overall, teachers reported setting up pair and group work to mainly help students catch up with a new lesson, enhance their participation, and offer them more individual feedback. Despite acknowledging these benefits, however, they observed that a majority of students were unwilling to work with their peers when the focus of the task was not on grammar and vocabulary. Having recognized the poor design of collaborative tasks in the textbook (e.g., dull or difficult topics for speaking tasks), some teachers (as recommended by Dobao, 2012 and Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006), opted to skip or modify these tasks to increase their quality and, consequently, to enhance students’ participation and interaction. This is consistent with findings from previous research (e.g., Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Storch, 1999) on the
interface between the design of learning tasks and the dynamics of interaction between group members. Although it is neither advisable nor pedagogically sound for teachers to abandon or skip the practice of setting up collaborative activities in their classes, they can at least come up with more innovative strategies to arouse students’ interest and motivation to engage in these activities. Most notable among these strategies is the possibility of integrating technological applications such as Facebook into language learning classes to allow students to not only connect with their classmates and teachers, but also to reach the world outside the class wherever and whenever they wish in order to, for instance, practice the newly learned language, complete their assignments, share their ideas, or comment on different speaking or writing topics posted online by their peers or teachers. Nevertheless, teachers’ and students’ openness and attitudes toward the integration of Facebook as an extension of classroom activities need to be examined before undertaking this initiative. The following section presents the findings and discussion of the participants’ perceptions of incorporating Facebook into their classes.

RQ2) What Are the Teachers’ and Students’ Opinions on the Potential of Facebook to Extend Collaborative Learning Activities beyond the Classroom Environment?

The analysis of the students’ responses to the first two questions on the survey indicated that 89% held a Facebook account. Of these account holders, a majority (64%) reported checking their profile on a daily basis, whereas the remainder (36%) reported visiting their wall on an hourly basis. Regarding the potential of integrating Facebook into language learning classes, the results of students’ responses to the second part of the survey in Table 1 show that well over 90% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the ideas of using Facebook to improve their English (Item 1) and to connect with their classmates (Item 3). An overwhelming majority of them also agreed or strongly agreed with Items 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. In other words, they were in favor of joining others on Facebook and perceived learning English on Facebook as an easy and interesting experience, which would benefit not only shy but also all other types of language learners. Additionally, over 60% of students were eager to use English, friend their teachers, and discuss lessons with their friends on Facebook. With an overall mean score of 4.1, the results indicated that students perceived Facebook as a useful language learning platform, particularly as an environment to engage in collaborative language learning activities.

**TABLE 1**

*Students’ Perceptions of Facebook as a Language Learning Platform*

| Item                                                                 | SD (1)% | D (2)% | U (3)% | A (4)% | SA (5)% | M    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------|
| 1. I would like to use Facebook to improve my English.               | 0       | 0      | 0      | 68     | 32      | 4.3  |
| 2. I would like to use English on Facebook.                         | 12      | 14     | 11     | 23     | 42      | 3.6  |
| 3. I would like to friend my classmates on Facebook.                | 0       | 4      | 2      | 38     | 56      | 4.4  |
| 4. I would like to friend my teachers on Facebook.                  | 2       | 6      | 24     | 23     | 46      | 4.0  |
| 5. I would like to discuss new lessons with others on Facebook.     | 0       | 4      | 26     | 32     | 39      | 4.0  |
| 6. I would like to join a private group on Facebook.                | 0       | 4      | 8      | 47     | 41      | 4.2  |
| 7. The use of Facebook makes learning English easy.                 | 0       | 3      | 19     | 71     | 8       | 3.8  |
| 8. The use of Facebook makes learning English interesting.          | 4       | 8      | 10     | 42     | 37      | 3.9  |
| 9. The use of Facebook benefits shy language learners.              | 0       | 5      | 8      | 11     | 77      | 4.6  |
| 10. The use of Facebook benefits all language learners.             | 3       | 11     | 7      | 32     | 49      | 4.1  |

**Notes:** SD, strongly disagree; D, disagree; U, undecided; A, agree; SA, strongly agree; M, mean scores

Students also endorsed the use of Facebook for both formal and informal or incidental learning. Not surprisingly, students commented on their personal experiences practicing English on Facebook. As one student indicated, “My friends and I bet to communicate only in English on Facebook. I like their
comments, and for me it doesn’t matter if they write accurate sentences or not; I just feel excited about the whole thing.” Another student gave an account of her experience of incidental vocabulary learning on Facebook and the effort she made to understand her friends’ comments in English: “Even when I play games on Facebook, I learn new words. When my friends comment on my posts, I try to understand what they mean. I always focus on their use of the daily language to improve my English.” However, students felt that the potential of Facebook for formal learning opportunities depends on teachers’ abilities and creativity in using technology. “Not all teachers can use Facebook to teach English. It depends on their creativity. If they design interesting and funny activities, students would like to work together,” one student commented.

In the same vein, all but two teachers were of the opinion that this virtual space could help students reach their teachers, peers, and other users or English native speakers to improve their communicative skills, writing, vocabulary, and other areas of language learning. As one teacher said, “Students can connect and communicate with people from all walks of life to access the contextualized use of language.” A quarter of teachers, however, believed that although less proficient students may benefit from using Facebook to improve their English, it would be premature to extend classroom activities to this online environment. One of these teachers commented, “Despite its potential to help students improve their English, I still have doubt about including Facebook in my teaching. Though it can have some unknown merits, students may use it just to avoid studying.”

Similar to students in other EFL contexts (e.g., Kabilan et al., 2010; Lai & Gu, 2011), the students in this study perceived Facebook as a useful language learning environment, as they had already explored some of the benefits involved, including vocabulary learning. They also suggested that teachers can employ strategies such as assigning appealing discussion topics and launching interesting learning materials to augment students’ participation on Facebook. However, consistent with Sockett’s (2013) observation, students predominantly focused on the informal language learning aspect of Facebook, which was in marked contrast with the classroom type of learning. The results also revealed that while students’ need for their teachers’ constant feedback pushed them to the point of losing trust in their peers’ knowledge during collaborative activities in the classroom, they preferred to communicate and work with the same peers online. One explanation for the shift in students’ preference could refer to the potential of the online environment to offer them opportunities to access different sources of information and feedback, ranging from their teachers and classmates to other knowledgeable individuals (Al-Shehri, 2011; Shih, 2011). In spite of these benefits, teachers were still hesitant to incorporate Facebook into their teaching routines. The main reasons for this reservation, as indicated by previous research (e.g., An & Williams, 2010; Coryell & Chlup, 2007), could stem from an absence of institutional support, heavy workload, and, as teachers in this study commented, a lack of awareness of its pedagogical merits.

**RQ3) How Can Teachers Integrate Facebook into Language Learning Programs to Promote Students’ Collaboration Online?**

As with the specifics of integrating Facebook into language learning classes, while most of the students suggested that teachers can create a page and invite everybody to join and participate in learning activities, they believed that the teachers’ abilities to craft suitable instructional tasks, the type of lessons or skills they intend to emphasize or teach, and the type of activities they want to launch online could affect this integration. These variables are perhaps best summarised in the following extract:

> Teachers can open a page and set up a group. They can send requests for their students to join. Then they can put up nice quotations, sayings, and proverbs in English. They can also assign projects and ask students to read and discuss their ideas on the page. I am sure they will enjoy it.

Concerning the incorporation of Facebook into their classes, however, the teachers held different views.
While most teachers suggested creating a page that should be separate from their personal page and accessible to everybody, a few teachers recommended opening a closed/private page for the class members only so that students could work with their classmates and use their public page to reach others such as their friends and family. Four teachers also drew on their personal experiences of integrating Facebook into their classes, albeit employed as a voluntary work rather than as a syllabus requirement. One of these teachers reported, “This semester, I advised my students to find international friends on Facebook to practice English. I came to know that those students who added more friends and exchanged more posts online improved their speaking and confidence to talk.” Another teacher gave an account of connecting his students with students from another country on Facebook:

A friend of mine was teaching English in Taiwan. We introduced our students to each other on Facebook. They communicated and shared English idioms, proverbs, jokes, and funny pictures. They responded to different posts as a whole class. At the end of each week, I required my students to report on the activities and the most important points they learned from their friends online. I found it an invaluable experience.

In general, both students and teachers recommended insightful approaches and strategies of using Facebook as an aid to the textbook or classroom activities. However, while students preferred to engage with appealing instructional materials, teachers were mostly concerned about separating their personal life from their professional life on Facebook and suggested designing a separate page from their personal page. In other words, students expected to see the threads and materials that would encourage informal or incidental learning, as pointed out by Sockett (2013), such as reading interesting quotations and sayings, whereas teachers preferred to engage students in more formal activities that could be guided and supervised, just the way classroom activities were.

Limitations

In this study, only students possessing a Facebook account were consulted to give their opinions on the potential of integrating Facebook into language learning classes. While it was assumed that these students were in a better position to express their ideas about the use of Facebook as a language learning environment, possessing an account did not guarantee that students would use it to improve their English or engage in collaborative language learning activities online. The survey statements then sought to gauge students’ tendency or their perceptions on whether Facebook could be exploited as a context for language learning purposes, mainly to carry out collaborative activities online. It is, therefore, imperative that more experimental research in the future address this limitation by examining students’ actual engagement in language learning activities on this online social network. As another limitation, collaborative activities in ELT textbooks and classroom-based pair and group work activities were used interchangeably in this study because it is still believed that commercial ELT textbooks are published for classroom-based instruction. Since this study included action research aiming to examine what might have contributed to the students’ feelings of boredom and demotivation, as represented by the “close your books and open your Facebook” quote, the participants evaluated the dynamics and mechanism of the collaborative activities they experienced with the main textbook used in this intensive language program. However, the scope was limited because there was only one textbook being investigated. Thus, the findings from the study cannot be generalized to other textbooks and similar learning contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although the success of pair and group work activities in language learning classes
depends on many factors, the quantity and quality of these tasks in ELT textbooks or in language learning classrooms should not be overlooked. The overuse of pair or group work tasks in language learning classes may have a negative impact on students’ attitudes toward teachers and programs (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). That is to say, because students’ attitudes toward a program and their development of linguistic competence are interconnected, the existence of repetitive tasks with similar instructions in ELT textbooks can negatively affect students’ motivation to participate in these activities in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2008). Therefore, while it is difficult to exactly pinpoint what may ignite motivation in students, it seems sensible to identify and minimize the sources of demotivation in pedagogical materials and tasks. This also suggests that language educators, especially in EFL contexts, should encourage and facilitate students’ participation in collaborative learning activities during pre-university schooling to inculcate in them the spirit and importance of working together at higher levels of education.

To enhance the effectiveness of pair and group work activities in commercial ELT textbooks, the findings suggest that not only can teachers modify these instructional materials for the classroom use, but they can also supplement them with social media sites, such as Facebook, that provide learners with opportunities to share information, communicate, and collaborate with each other on a daily or an hourly basis (Ushioda, 2011). Unlike the traditional classroom-based collaborative activities in which students share their work with only a partner or a small group, the online environment can function as a visible synchronous context at a larger scale, allowing every group member to participate and contribute simultaneously (Peterson, 2009). It could be argued that learners might feel their needs, preferences, and abilities to use technological applications for language learning are compromised if language educators and textbook authors keep on underestimating this potential (Conole, 2008). However, making the most of this opportunity depends on the teachers’ adoption of new roles and responsibilities to teach online (Compton, 2009), and on their skills and creativity to launch appealing posts and assignments online, as indicated by students’ in the present study. In addition to adding diversity to the teachers’ delivery of instruction, the use of more innovative technological applications in language learning programs could open a new window of opportunity for students to keep both their books and Facebook open.

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Appendix A

Student Survey

Section I:
1. Do you have a Facebook account?
   a) Yes                                     b) No
2. How often do you check your Facebook?
   a) Hourly    b) Daily     c) Weekly       d) Monthly

Section II:
1. I would like to use Facebook to improve my English.
2. I would like to use English on Facebook.
3. I would like to friend my classmates on Facebook.
4. I would like to friend my teachers on Facebook.
5. I would like to discuss new lessons with others on Facebook.
6. I would like to join a private group on Facebook.
7. The use of Facebook makes learning English easy.
8. The use of Facebook makes learning English interesting.
9. The use of Facebook benefits the shy language learners.
10. The use of Facebook benefits all language learners.

Section III:
1. What is your evaluation of the collaborative learning activities (pair and group work) you experienced in Language Leader classes this semester?
2. What is your opinion on the potential of Facebook to help students work together online?
3. How can teachers integrate Facebook into their classes to help students work together?

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. What is your evaluation of students’ engagement in collaborative learning activities in Language Leader classes this semester?
2. What is your opinion on the potential of Facebook to extend classroom-based collaborative activities online?
3. How can you integrate Facebook into your classes?