

A Qualitative Research on Foreign Language Learners' Perceptions of Facebook as a Learning Environment

Selami Aydın 

İstanbul Medeniyet University, İstanbul, Turkey

Emrah Özdemir 

Balıkesir University, Balıkesir, Turkey

Abstract

Although the use of Facebook in EFL education is relatively new, it may bring a potential to promote communicative and productive skills. This study aims to explore Turkish EFL learners' perception of Facebook regarding their reasons to use it, perceived harmful effects and the utilization of Facebook as a language learning environment. The study was conducted with 30 preservice EFL teachers studying at the department of English Language Teaching (ELT) at Balıkesir University. The study followed a qualitative tradition. The data were gathered through reflections, essay papers and interviews. The findings showed that EFL learners use Facebook for communication and interaction even if they perceive several harmful effects. Moreover, EFL learners regarded Facebook as an educational environment and as a foreign language learning environment. Thus, EFL teachers are recommended to be trained in the use of social media in the foreign language teaching and learning processes. In addition, the curricula of the EFL teacher training programs should include a specific course focusing on topics to raise awareness of the use of Facebook as a language learning environment.

Keywords: English as a foreign language; English language teaching; Facebook; Perceptions; Web 2.0

Introduction

In the Turkish educational context, EFL classes are obligatory for the students from second grade of primary schools to university level. However, learners experience potential problems with oral and written production. Among those problems, two main concerns in relation to communication in the target language are exam-oriented education system and grammar-based language teaching. The first concern is that not only central exams but also the exams conducted by teachers in classrooms mainly focus on reading skills, grammar and vocabulary knowledge. The other concern is that EFL teachers in Turkey mainly use traditional teaching methods in their classes. This results in reading, grammar and vocabulary teaching, while communicative and productive skills are neglected in Turkish EFL classes (Aydın, 2010). However, in today's digital world, Facebook as a commonly used Web 2.0 tools among Turkish EFL learners (Aydın, 2014) may bring a potential to be used as a language learning environment to foster communicative and productive skills.

Although the use of Facebook as an interactive learning environment is relatively recent, there are several reasons to use it in language courses. First of all, with the help of Facebook, authentic knowledge can be provided. Thus, learners may easily utilize information free of time and place constraints (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Facebook also helps interaction, discussion and communication in the target language by stimulating a language learning environment in which authentic tools are used. Through its synchronous or asynchronous nature, language learners have a chance to contact with native speakers (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010). Second, Facebook is an effective tool for language learning as it improves cross-cultural relations with the target language speakers (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Learners who have similar interests communicate and develop favorable relationship with each

other (Razak & Saeed, 2015). Third, Facebook may be used to improve socio-pragmatic skills in language instruction (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). In addition to keeping engagement to communicative tasks, it also constitutes an appropriate environment to utilize information and develop linguistic awareness (Arnold & Paulus, 2010). Fourth, Facebook fosters the sense of belonging to a community (Lee & Ranta, 2014). Facebook may be utilized as an environment that enables opportunities to exchange information among group members (Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, & Abu-Melhim, 2014). Thus, it creates an entertaining and motivating environment and helps to improve learners' motivation and enables to develop better attitudes towards the target language. Fifth, Facebook improves proficiency and language learning process (Shafie, Yaacob, & Singh, 2016) Writing and reading proficiency can be developed through Facebook (DePew, 2011), as it eases the learning and teaching process and helps to reduce stress and anxiety levels (Tananuraksakul, 2015). To add, speaking skills can be improved through various Facebook activities (Razak, Saeed, & Ahmad, 2013). Since language learners can easily write, publish and get feedback from instructors and peers in the target language, it positively contributes to the writing skills (Razak & Saeed, 2015). Finally, Facebook increases the multi-dimensional relationship between learners and instructors (Razak et al., 2013). Given that English as a foreign language is a mandatory class during primary, secondary and higher education in Turkey, it is necessary to explore whether foreign language learners use Facebook as a language learning environment or not. Before answering this question, it should be clarified how Turkish EFL learners perceive Facebook as a language learning environment, as learners' perceptions may have an effect on their language learning process. For this purpose, a brief review of literature is presented regarding EFL learners' reasons to use Facebook, their perceptions of the harmful effects of Facebook and their perceptions of Facebook as an educational and language learning environments.

Literature Review

Given that learners' perceptions may affect their EFL learning processes, this sub-section reviews research on students' perceptions of Facebook. For this purpose, the sub-section first focuses on EFL learners' reasons to use Facebook. Then, after a brief synthesis of research is presented regarding their perceptions of the harmful effects of Facebook, studies on learners' perceptions of Facebook as an educational environment are reviewed. Finally, a brief research synthesis is noted in terms of students' perceptions of Facebook as an EFL learning environment.

Theories related to the use of Facebook

Constructivism is a learning theory in which reality is personally constructed. It states that individuals have their own unique interpretation of reality and there are various ways of knowing, which are all equally worthy (Brown, 2007). Constructivist philosophy is considered as favorable in contemporary language classes where technology use is crucial (Özdemir, 2015). Through Facebook use, learners have a chance to connect what they have already known and what they have come across (Resnick, 1989).

As well as constructivism, the role of social constructivism, in which context and social factors are central (Vygotsky, 1978), is also crucial in language learning. Vygotsky (1987) claims that meaningful interaction between peers forms a basis for acquiring new information. Casual socio-cultural experiences should be considered in language learning. Facebook may help the student to socially construct the information they acquired through interacting with others.

Autonomous learning, in which learners have responsibility for preferring suitable methods and techniques, check, monitor, and evaluate their own learning (Little, 1995) has gained importance with the growing use of technology in classrooms in recent years. Facebook can help learners to gain new information free from various constraints of traditional classrooms, which may considerably improve the commitment of students towards the course (Özdemir, 2015).

Reasons to use Facebook

Research shows that students use Facebook with a variety of reasons. Joinson (2008) lists seven uses of Facebook as "social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing, and status updating". As Ainin, Naqshbandi, Moghavvemi, and Jaafar, (2015) note, students also use social media to express themselves, get information and keep in touch with other people. According to Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2011), social presence is the most powerful motive to use Facebook. Additionally, it is used as "social glue" that facilitates the adaptation of college life (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009). Moreover, Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) state that students have two main motives in using Facebook as "being a part" and "presenting themselves". For example, in their empirical study conducted with 1165 university students in Malaysia, Kabilan et al. (2010) found that there was a positive correlation between students' perceptions of academic achievement and Facebook usage. They also found that students used it more often and stated that they performed better. In a study conducted by Baran (2010), more than 60% of university students stated that interacting with classmates through Facebook motivated them.

Harmful effects

Research demonstrates that students experience some harmful effects (Butler, 2010; Catanzaro, 2011; Couros, 2008). Users may complain about health problems due to sitting in front of the screen for long hours. In addition, some more harmful effects of Facebook can be listed as unacceptable behaviors, abuse, cyberbullying and privacy concerns (Aydın, 2012). Hew and Cheung (2012) report that Facebook has little educational use and students use it to communicate with other people not for education. For instance, Nkhoma, Cong, Au, Lam, Richardson, Smith, and El-Den (2015) found that most of the students were passive and only a few students started academic discussions. Additionally, Prescott, Wilson, and Becket (2013) noted that most of the students did not wish to use Facebook for formal learning. Moreover, students using English to communicate had negative perceptions of Facebook in their language learning process (Manan, Alias, & Pandian, 2012).

Facebook as a learning environment

Even though Facebook was not initially created for educational purposes, research indicates that it offers a great potential to develop the learning experience (Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Prescott et al., 2013; Sánchez, 2014). For example, it can promote a feeling of comfort while interacting with other students and instructors (Ainin et al., 2015). In addition, compared to the traditional face-to-face communication directed by formal rules, its use can enhance openness among individuals (Cuesta, Eklund, Rydin, & Witt, 2015; Joinson, 2008), and improve student-teacher or teacher-student interaction such as making announcements, group discussions and resource sharing (Browning, Gerlich, & Westermann, 2011; Milošević, Živković, Arsić, & Manasijević, 2015). Moreover, instructors can contact with students easily and quickly (Bosch, 2009). Last, students' perceptions with regard to Facebook as an educational tool are favorable (Espinosa, 2015).

Facebook as a language learning environment

When language learning is considered, research shows that the use of Facebook may have facilitating effects. For instance, instructors can engage students outside classrooms, exchange valuable classroom resources and develop professional relationships with other colleagues (Godwin-Jones, 2008). According to Kabilan et al. (2010), Facebook enables EFL teachers to initiate online discussions, post articles for reading comprehension and have the opportunity to chat in the target language. Moreover, it can be used for distant online education and presentations, playing language learning games such as puzzles, reading summaries, broadcasting school news, writing workshops, creating

study groups, exam feedback. It also enables its users to convey messages synchronously or asynchronously to the speakers of different languages, which promotes socio-pragmatic awareness, cross-cultural understanding and linguistic competence via meaningful interaction (Espinosa, 2015), whereas, in a study conducted with university students from France and Germany, Ducate and Lomicka (2008) found that using Facebook in EFL classrooms had a positive effect on students' language learning. Finally, as Blattner and Lomicka (2012) found, intermediate French class students might enhance their reading, writing, and communicative skills.

Overview of the study

In conclusion, the present study was carried out under the guidance of two reasons. First, Facebook may have the potential to be used in the foreign language learning process. Thus, research on Facebook as a learning environment is necessary regarding its potential use in an educational context, raising awareness of target groups such as students, teachers, school administrators, and curriculum developers. Second, as the Turkish EFL learning context involves problems in terms of communicative and productive language skills in the target language, it may contribute to the development of their language skills. However, how Turkish EFL learners perceive Facebook remains an unanswered question. Thus, the current study aims to explore Turkish EFL learners' perception of Facebook regarding their reasons to use it, perceived harmful effects, the utilization of Facebook as a learning environment in a general sense and as a language learning environment. For this purpose, the study asks four research questions:

1. Why do Turkish EFL learners use Facebook?
2. How do Turkish EFL learners perceive the potential harmful effects of Facebook?
3. Do Turkish EFL learners perceive Facebook as a learning environment?
4. Do Turkish EFL learners perceive Facebook as a language learning environment?

Method

As the study seeks the answer of question how EFL learners perceive Facebook regarding their reasons to use it, perceived harmful effects and the utilization of Facebook as a language learning environment, a qualitative research design was preferred for a deeper understanding of above-mentioned issues. After the research proposal was presented to the head of the Department of English Language Teaching at a state university in Turkey, the participants were contacted. Next, the approval was sought through the faculty regarding the proposal. The proposal included information about research tools, the purpose, method, and significance of the study. Then, before locating the participants who received Special Issues in Language Teaching and Learning class that included topics related to the use of social media and Web 2.0 tools, approval was granted. As the study involved data collecting tools such as essay papers, reflections, and interviews, a claim for the exemptions was presented to the participants. In addition, each of the participants signed a consent form showing that they voluntarily participated in the study, after informing them about the tools, significance, purpose, method, research ethics, outputs and contributions of the study to the related field. It was also stated that their welfare and rights would be protected.

Participants

Participants in the study consisted of 30 EFL learners studying in the English Language Department of a state university in Turkey. As an important note, as all of the students at the fourth grade of the department were included in the study, the nature of the sample universe seemed appropriate to identify and describe the phenomenon. The rationale behind choosing participant was that the students had the course Special Issues in Language Teaching and Learning Class through which they studied theoretical issues and specific topics on the use of online environments in EFL teaching and

learning such as WebQuests, wikis, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Second Life. All of the participants were the fourth-year students in the department. Twenty four (80%) participants were female and six (20%) were male. The percentage of gender distribution was directly related to the gender distribution in the department. The mean for the participants' age was 20.97 in the range of 20 and 22. The participants were EFL learners with an advanced level of English. All of the participants also declared that they were active users of Facebook.

Tools

The study used three data collection tools. A background questionnaire asked the participants about their age and gender. Among the data collection tools, first, a group of students wrote their reflections about their personal reasons to use Facebook, their perceived harmful effects of Facebook, their personal use of Facebook as an educational and language learning environment. Second, another group of participants wrote essay papers about the above-mentioned issues. Third, the researchers carried out interviews with the participants in the last group. As a final point, it should be clarified that each of the tools was administered to different groups. The rationale behind the use of only one research tool for collecting data from each group was to compare the data collected from each group by one tool regarding examining the validity and trustworthiness of the data. As a note, it should be stated that though the background questionnaire aimed to collect demographic information on gender and age. Reflections, essay papers, and interviews were used for obtaining data from the participants' perspective. In other words, their personal opinions were used to elicit data qualitatively as it was not possible to obtain data about the issues mentioned above in an experimental and descriptive study in a natural setting.

Procedure

The research used a three-step procedure: discussion, data collection, and data analysis.

Step 1: Discussion

As one of the topics in Special Issues in Language Teaching and Learning class in the Fall semester of the academic year 2014-2015, Facebook was discussed in terms of the reasons to use, its harmful effects and its utilization as an educational and language learning environment in one-hour sessions. For this purpose, in the first session, students who were organized into three groups each consisted of ten members discussed the above-mentioned issues and presented their conclusions to their classmates. In the second session, the researchers made a presentation on the issue through a review paper entitled "A review of research on Facebook as an educational environment" (Aydın, 2012). In the last session, members in each group compared their conclusions to the findings in the review paper mentioned and presented their results to their classmates.

Step 2: Data collection

As underlined above, three sources of data, reflections, essay papers, and reflections were used to triangulate the data in terms of trustworthiness and validity. First, the researchers asked the students in the first group to write their reflections about their personal reasons to use Facebook, whether they perceive any harmful effects and their use of Facebook as an educational and language learning environment after the last session of the class. Each of the participants in the second group prepared their essays. Last, the researchers interviewed the members of the third group after one week. As mentioned before, the reason to use three tools to collect data was to compare the data from three sources in terms of validity and trustworthiness. All the data were used for triangulation in the order of reflections, essays, and interviews. The participants answered the following questions:

1. What are your personal reasons to use Facebook?
2. Do you perceive any harmful effect through the use of Facebook?
3. Do you use Facebook for educational purposes? If yes, how?
4. Do you use Facebook as a foreign language learning environment? If yes, how?

Step 3: Data analysis

The data collected from each source were analyzed separately. As the focus was the four fields mentioned above, only the statements related to personal reasons to use Facebook, whether they perceive any harmful effects and their use of Facebook as an educational and language learning environment were noted, examined in details from each data source, determined and underlined. As a note, it should be stated that the data collection process was performed in English, as the participants who were fourth-grade students enrolled at the department of English Language Teaching were at the advanced level of English proficiency. Thus, the translation or back-translation process did not seem necessary. This process was repeated for each of the data sources. The reason why three sources for data collection were used was to elucidate the complementary aspect of the same phenomenon and to provide more insights into participants' perceptions (Denzin, 1978). Another reason was that it seemed necessary to explore data regarding consistency, validity, and trustworthiness of different data sources (Patton, 1999) and interpretation of the data (Patton, 2001). During the coding process, the researchers marked similar passages with a code label to retrieve the data for further analysis. Codes were based on topics, themes, ideas, concepts, terms, phrases, and keywords. For this purpose, all passages and recordings were analyzed to give similar labels. Each code was given a name that provided an indication of the concept or idea that underpinned the above-mentioned categories. Next, the topics, themes, ideas, concepts, terms, phrases and keywords obtained from each source were numbered, listed and transferred into three concept maps (See Figure 1).

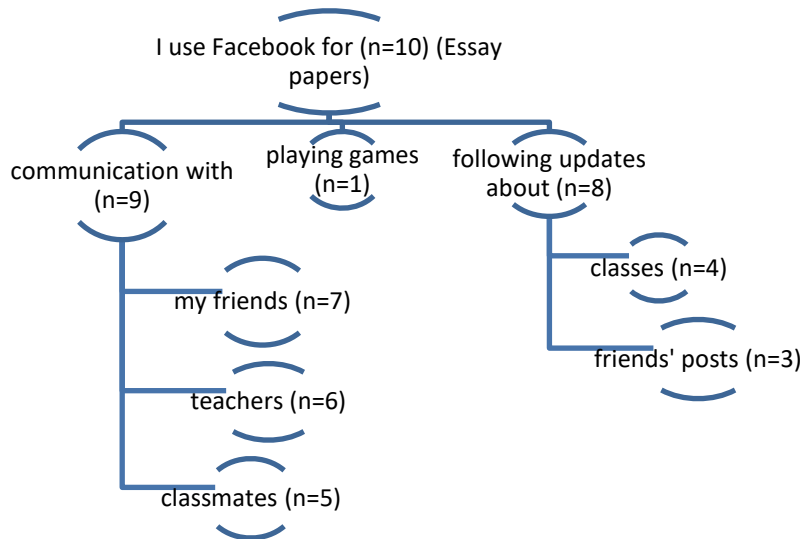


Figure 1. Sample concept map

Results

Results reached in the study show that EFL learners use Facebook as an interaction and communication environment. Findings also indicate that they perceive some harmful effects of Facebook regarding privacy concerns, cyberbullying, inappropriate and disturbing content. In addition, results demonstrate that Facebook could be used as an educational environment and a foreign language learning tool. Below, EFL learners' reasons to use Facebook, perceived harmful effects, its utilization as an educational environment and foreign language learning tool were given in details.

Reasons to Use Facebook

Table 1 shows EFL learners' personal reasons to use Facebook. According to the findings demonstrated in the table, there exist four main reasons to use Facebook. Those reasons can be listed as interaction and communication, following and sharing updates, making and maintaining friendships and relationships and playing games. First of all, the participants seemed that they use Facebook as an interaction and communication tool and environment. They stated that they mainly communicate and interact with their friends, classmates, family members, and teachers, as one of the participants stated below. What is more, they stated that they use Facebook for communication and interaction with their relatives and neighbors. Second, the participants use it for following and sharing updates about their classes, friends' posts, daily news, classmates' posts, interests, and hobbies. In addition, they seemed that they use Facebook to follow and share about social and recreational activities, cultural interactions, and public figures such as politicians, movie stars and singers. It seemed that Facebook constituted an environment that is used for making new friends and relationships and for maintaining them. Finally, EFL learners stated that Facebook might be used as an environment to play online and offline games.

I created a Facebook account when I started university. That was because I wanted to be in connection with my friends at the high school I graduated and to be in touch with my family and relatives. I can say that I have only one reason to use Facebook; it is for communication.

Table 1. Reasons to use Facebook

Statements	F	
Interacting and communicating with	friends	28
	classmates	23
	family members	21
	teachers	18
	relatives	4
	neighbors	1
Following and sharing updates about	classes	16
	friends' posts	11
	and daily news	11
	classmates' posts	9
	interests and hobbies	9
	social activities	7
	cultural interactions	6
	celebrities	3
	recreational activities	2
political issues	2	
Making and maintaining friendships and relationships	14	
Playing games	6	
Total	191	

Perceived Harmful Effects of Facebook

Table 2 demonstrates that there are eight factors in relation to the participants' perceptions of the harmful effects of Facebook. These factors can be listed as privacy concerns, cyberbullying, inappropriate and disturbing content, disinformation, addiction, harmful content, problems related to personal relationships and disengagement in real life. To begin with, the participants complained about privacy concerns and cyberbullying, as one of the participants said below. They also seemed that they felt disturbed because of inappropriate messages, comments, and posts. The participants complained that the information about public and political figures, political issues, health, and commercial products seemed specious. In addition, they implied that they consumed too much time on and felt addicted to Facebook due to playing games, chatting and stalking. The participants also complained that they were exposed to the content that included sexting, violence and terror, computer viruses and posts from illegal groups and organizations. Last, the participants stated that Facebook might harm their personal and emotional relationships and disengage them in real life.

Once, my Facebook password was stolen. One who I don't know read all of my private messages. This was really disturbing. I had never thought someone would know all about my private life. The person also sent messages to my friends and requested friendship. Most dangerously, that person shared something that I can never approve. All happened in a couple of hours. It was a real nightmare.

Table 2. Perceived harmful effects of Facebook

Statements	F	
Privacy concerns	11	
Cyberbullying	10	
Inappropriate and disturbing content via	messages	10
	comments	5
	posts	3
Disinformation and specious information about	Public/political figures	2
	political issues	1
	health	1
Time-consuming for and addiction to	commercial products	3
	games	4
	chatting	3
Being exposed to the content containing	stalking	1
	sexting	9
	violence and terror	4
Damaging interpersonal / emotional relationship	computer viruses	3
	posts from illegal organizations/groups	1
Disengagement in real life	2	
Total	76	

Facebook as an Educational Environment

According to the findings shown in Table 3, EFL learners use Facebook as an educational environment due to three reasons. First, they implied that they followed posts about central examinations that were administered for teachers' nominations and M.A. student selections after graduation, as one of the participants mentioned. Moreover, the participants stated that they followed posts about mid-term and final examinations administered in the department and mobility programs such as Erasmus and

Mevlana. They also stated that they followed posts about national and international research and mobility projects, their lectures' scientific publications, lectures, and books. Second, the participants seemed that they used Facebook for collaboration and interactions with their teachers, group members, peers and the academicians working at other universities about educational issues. Third and last, the participants saw Facebook as a download tool for lecture notes, research papers, articles, and PowerPoint presentations.

Next year, I am going to enter a placement test to be a teacher. Thus, I started studying this year. When I study, I encounter many questions that I cannot solve alone. I joined a few Facebook groups to get help from professionals, teachers and other students. By this way, I can study more efficiently. I can find out new things, have discussions about questions and share my experiences with other students who get prepared for the examination.

Table 3. The use of Facebook as an educational environment

Statements	F	
	central examinations	8
	mid-term and final examinations	3
	mobility programs	3
Following posts about	projects	3
	publications by the academic staff in the department	2
	lectures	3
	books	1
	teachers	4
Collaborating and interacting with	group members	2
	peers	2
	academicians	1
Downloading	lecture notes	4
	articles	3
	PowerPoint presentations	1
	Total	40

Facebook as a Foreign Language Learning Environment

Table 4 demonstrates the findings in relation to the use of Facebook as a foreign language learning environment. According to the findings given in the table, EFL learners mainly preferred Facebook as an environment for communication and interaction with native and foreign speakers of English, their teachers and classmates and the academicians at other universities in a foreign language context. They also stated that they might use Facebook to read authentic texts, articles, and stories in English. The participants also stated that Facebook might be an environment through which they watched videos and listened to songs in English, posted in the target language and participated in discussions in the target language. Last, they implied that they could use Facebook to play grammar and vocabulary games designed for EFL learners, as one of the students said:

I don't like wasting time on Facebook. But sometimes I play games. I see that these games improve my grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Some of the games are competitive. I like winning games, learning new words and practice my grammar knowledge.

Table 4. The use of Facebook as a foreign language learning environment

Statements	F	
Communicating and interacting with	native speakers of English	9
	foreign speakers of English	5
	teachers	2
	academicians	1
	classmates	1
Reading	authentic texts	1
	articles	1
	stories	1
Watching videos in the target language	1	
Listening to songs in English	1	
Posting in the target language	1	
Participating in discussions in English	1	
Playing	grammar games	1
	vocabulary games	1
Total	27	

In summary, findings demonstrated that EFL learners might use Facebook for interaction and communication, following and sharing updates, making and maintaining friendships and relationships and playing games. In addition, they perceive some harmful effects of Facebook such as privacy concerns, cyberbullying, inappropriate and disturbing content, disinformation, addiction, harmful content, damage to personal relationships and disengagement in real life. The findings also showed that EFL learners might use Facebook as an educational environment in a general sense and foreign language learning tool in the narrowest perspective.

Conclusions and Discussion

Four main conclusions were found in the research that aimed to explore EFL learners' perception of Facebook as a learning environment. First, it is a communicational and interactional tool and environment, as EFL learners use it for communication and interaction with friends, classmates, family members, relatives, and neighbors. It is also useful for EFL learners, as they follow and share updates about their classes, friends' posts, actuality, daily news, classmates' posts, interests, hobbies, social and recreational activities, cultural interactions and public figures. In addition, Facebook has positive effects on EFL learners' relationships with their friends. EFL learners also see Facebook as an environment for playing games. Second, the study concludes that EFL learners perceive some harmful effects of Facebook. Those harmful effects can be summarized as concerns with private life, cyberbullying, inappropriate content, disinformation, addiction, the problems distorting personal and emotional relationships and disengagement in real life. The third conclusion is that EFL learners use it as an educational environment to get prepared for their examinations, to have information about projects, mobility programs, and lectures, to interact with their teachers, classmates and academicians about professional issues and to find learning materials. The last conclusion is that Facebook can be used for language learning, as EFL learners have positive perceptions of communication with native and foreign speakers of English, their classmates, and teachers. What is more, it is also a database for finding listening and reading materials such as authentic texts, articles, and stories, videos and songs in English. In brief, though EFL learners perceive some harmful effects, Facebook can be used as an educational and language learning environment in the EFL context. Additionally, the research can help researchers to investigate the factors that affect EFL learners' perceptions of Facebook as a language learning environment, as the study obtains the variables for quantitative research. In other words, the factors reached in the study can be used to design a questionnaire to measure EFL learners'

perceptions of Facebook as an educational and language learning environment.

A summary of the findings obtained from the study is provided below. First, the findings of this study demonstrate that EFL learners utilize Facebook for keeping in touch with friends, classmates, family members, relatives, and neighbors. In this sense, it can be stated that the findings in relation to the use of Facebook for communicational purposes seem similar to the results reached by Ainin et al. (2015). The findings of the study also show that learners mainly prefer using Facebook cultural and social interactions. This result is similar to the findings noted by Cheung et al. (2011) who suggest that social presence is the most powerful motive to use Facebook. The findings that Facebook is used as "social glue" that facilitates the adaptation of college life (Madge et al., 2009) are supported by the findings indicating Facebook is a socialization environment that is stated as "being a part" and "presenting themselves" by Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) and a tool for getting information and keeping in touch with others (Ainin et al. (2015). Second, the results in relation to the perceived harmful effects of Facebook demonstrate similarities to the conclusions reached in prior research. That is, whereas it is concluded that Facebook may be a source of concerns with private life, cyberbullying, inappropriate content, disinformation, addiction, the problems distorting personal and emotional relationships and disengagement in real life, Aydin (2012) notes several concerns regarding unacceptable behaviors, abuse, cyberbullying and privacy concerns. Third, the study concludes that EFL learners may use Facebook as an educational environment with a variety of academic purposes. This finding is similar to prior results, as Mazman and Usluel (2010) states that Facebook offers a great potential to develop the learning experience, it is suggested that it can be used for preparation for examinations, having information about projects, mobility programs and lectures, interacting about professional issues and finding learning materials. Furthermore, as emphasized by Espinosa (2015), Facebook as an educational tool is favorable among students, as found in the current study. However, the findings reached in the current study contradict with the results obtained by Hew and Cheung (2012) and Nkhoma et al. (2015) that claim Facebook had little educational use. Last of all, the results of the study support that Facebook can be used for language learning as found in prior research. In other words, whereas the study suggests that EFL learners perceive Facebook as a useful environment for foreign language learning, Kabilan et al. (2010) state that it enhances interaction, discussion, and communication in the target language. In addition, similar to the findings obtained from the study, Blattner and Fiori (2009) emphasize that Facebook is an effective tool for language learning in terms of improvement of socio-pragmatic skills, linguistic awareness (Arnold & Paulus, 2010), spoken language (Bani-Hani et al., 2014), motivation (Tananuraksakul, 2015) and writing and reading proficiency (DePew, 2011).

Some practical recommendations can be noted. In a general sense, the curricula of the EFL teacher training programs should include topics to raise awareness of the use of Facebook as a language learning tool and environment (Aydin, 2013). That is, EFL teachers need to be trained in the use of social media in foreign language teaching and learning processes (Aydin, 2014). Given that communication in the target language is the core of teaching and learning, EFL learners considerably have positive perceptions of Facebook as an interaction and communication tool and environment. Thus, it can be effectively used in the foreign language teaching and learning processes. In the scope of the results found in the study, EFL teachers should create groups and pages to facilitate learners' communication and interaction with not only native and foreign speakers of English but also their teachers and classmates (Aydin, 2012). Those pages and groups should contain updates and shares about classroom activities, actual and authentic materials, and learners' interests, hobbies, needs and expectations. Additionally, online games via Facebook should be used to foster EFL learners' basic language skills, grammar and vocabulary knowledge. EFL teachers should also raise their awareness of the harmful effects of Facebook on students. In other words, teachers should inform students about how to protect privacy, block inappropriate content and cope with cyberbullying. What is more, teachers should actively help their students to distinguish misinformation and disinformation in relation to their course content. As students are intensively interested in examinations, teachers

should also create an environment through which learners are fully and comprehensively informed about examinations. In this sense, teachers should act as a guide and counselor for their students to provide realistic and professional help with not only examinations but also their lectures, classes, mobility programs, and projects. Last, EFL teachers should develop activities to develop learners' basic language skills. For this purpose, they should plan and organize sessions to develop listening skills via movies and reading skills by using authentic texts, articles, and stories in English through Facebook and create online activities for speaking and writing skills. Most importantly, when the significance of communication in the foreign language context is considered, teachers should assign time to communicate and interact with their students in the target language via Facebook.

This research was limited to 30 EFL learners studying at a state university in Turkey. In addition, the scope of the study was restricted to the qualitative data obtained from reflections, essay papers, and interviews. The data included Turkish EFL learners' perceptions of Facebook in terms of reasons to use Facebook, its harmful effects and its utilization as an educational and language learning environment. Further research should focus on the factors that may affect learners' perceptions of Facebook by using quantitative, descriptive, experimental and correlational research designs. Relatively, it is also obvious that more research is warranted to contextualize how the factors found in this study may affect learners' perceptions of Facebook and the relationships between the variables reached in the study and demographic factors such as age, gender, and grade.

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Selami Aydın (Ph.D.) is a professor in the Department of English Language Teaching at Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey. His research has been mainly in EFL writing, language testing, affective factors and technology in EFL learning and teaching. His articles appeared in national and international journals. Aydın teaches ELT courses for pre-service English teachers. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to selami.aydin@medeniyet.edu.tr.

Emrah Özdemir has an MA degree in the field of English language teaching. He is currently doing a Ph.D. in the field of English language teaching. He also teaches English at the School of Foreign Languages at Balıkesir University, Turkey. His main research interests are computer-assisted language learning, writing skills, affective factors, and intercultural communication. He is an English teacher currently teaching at a state university in Balıkesir, Turkey.

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