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**USING SOCIAL NETWORKING IN EFL CLASSROOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Abstract:** *University students in Turkey face a lot of problems while learning a second language. One of the most significant problems is that the students lack motivation and urge to study a foreign language, especially using traditional learning techniques. This study included a group of Turkish university-level pre-intermediate students that have started to utilise a social networking website (Edmodo.com) as a language learning device beside their regular classes. A tailor-made supplementary program was developed to adapt the present curriculum. During the study, the students were asked to do assignments and received teacher feedback on Edmodo.com. After a brief of overview of social networking and language learning opportunities, this paper discusses motivational benefits, the changing role of teachers and adaptation issues being faced during the research, while presenting a case study and an analysis of the feedback taken from the questionnaires.*

**Keywords:** *Web-based learning environments – Motivation – Teaching English As A Foreign Language*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

As an indispensable mediator of autonomous study and innovative language education, the Internet provides adult learners with brand new opportunities to learn and practice a foreign language. Day by day, more institutions of higher education are adopting systems that make use of online interaction tools, learnware, online language labs, and assesment software. Recent studies have proven many benefits of using the Internet for providing stronger motivation for learning and practicing the target language (Madrid, D. et al, 1993) How to achieve these benefits in compliance with present curriculum that is already adopted at an educational organisation has become a crucial question. Benefits of using the Internet have widely accepted. However, how to achieve these benefits has not been clear for every classroom scenerio (Day, R., 1998). To examine possible answers to this question, three topics, such as motivation, teacher's role and learner autonomy were highlighted. A major and creative Internet attraction for adult learners, social networking could provide new opportunities for a more motivated and learner oriented language classroom. To examine the possibilities of an effective use of social networking concept as a solution has become an agenda for our study.

For the past three decades, motivation has been a central area for empirical research and theoretical work within the context of learning a language other than one's mother tongue, in other words in the context of second language learning (L2). Motivation is “one of the most appealing, complex variables used to explain individual differences in language learning” (Vaezi, 2008). Motivation in language learning has been explored by significant scholars like Krashen and Gardner and a wide range of researches have revealed that motivated students “has favorable attitude toward the language situation” (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Krashen's monitor model considers attitudes and motivation most influential in unconscious language acquisition. Motivational level of learners become a significant aspect of their language intake (Krashen, 1981).

In Turkey, adult learners have a common problem of low motivation which depends on many factors. To achieve international standards of language learning, it is necessary to adopt new techniques and create a learner oriented environment with an extent of student autonomy and increase motivation. Students obtain a second world with a second language. Nonetheless, they do not usually know how to enjoy it or make it a part of their daily lives. Since the Internet and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are a huge part of their lives, a second language learning process could be a part of it, hence turning English into a real part of the students lives, not just an mandatory lesson to study to get higher exam grades. Due to the fact that learning process is very much related to motivational process and its principles (Kundu & Tutoo, 1988), new elements to increase motivation could bring various new opportunities to a language classroom.

The aims of this study were investigated through the following research questions:

1-) Could using a social networking site increase the students motivation for learning English?

2-) In what ways would combining the Internet social networking options with the curriculum help the students while learning a second language?

In this study 84 prep students (34 females & 50 males) were randomly selected from the total populations of one university's English Preparatory School. 52% were from Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and 48 % were from Faculty of Engineering and Architecture. The fact that all participants pursue studies in different departments was an advantage to see different perspectives about language learning process. 50 participants were B2 level and they were included in the first step of the research in 2011. 34 participants became active users of Edmodo.com and joined the second step of the research in 2012.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The first research conducted in the same institution in 2011 revealed that the adult learners face specific problems such as lack of motivation, lack of integration the foreign language being learned with the current cultural environment and daily life, and they reported that they found traditional methods of teaching “unappealing”. The 2011 research included 50 prep class students of intermediate level who expressed that they were exposed to English mostly on the Internet, especially on social networking web sites. In consequence of these findings, it was decided that a social networking web site would be used to analyze motivational process. Some concerns were raised while determining which web platform was the most suitable for a study of these aims.

First problem waiting to be solved was how to match the present curriculum with an Internet resource. There are various professional web sites that aim to teach English as a foreign language to adult learners from different cultural backgrounds and these web sites are getting more and more popular everyday. However, for university students who already attend a preparatory program to learn English as a foreign language, the Internet resources can not always be a ready-to-use solution. Primarily, preparatory schools of universities such as the ones in Turkey follow their own curriculum and systems that prepare students to facilitate their adaptation to a second language environment and fulfill the needs of English – curriculum department, students need to find tailor made solutions on the Internet which could comply with their present training programs. Secondly, students express their negative views towards studying at home and a typical English teaching website could discourage them.

Second question was how an English teaching platform could appeal students and convince them that English could become a part of their lives. To decide on a suitable platform that would conform with their online identities, a profile survey was out. The survey consisted of multiple choice questions and open ended questions. 34 students from pre intermediate level attended. The results were as follows:

41% the students spend more than 2 hours on the Internet whereas only 11% spend less than 1 hour or none and 29% spend 1 or 2 hours a day. 65% of the students defined themselves as active

Internet users for 5 - 10 years. Only 11 % defined themselves as active users for 1 to 2 years and one of these students were from Somali. 65 % of the students state that they used various equipment such as laptops or mobile phones to go online. This implies that they can access the Internet almost everywhere anytime they need. 78% of the students state that they usually visit social networking sites such as Facebook on the Internet. 13 % of the students express that torrent sites are their favorites. The percentages of the students who use only English and who use various languages are the same: 41%. Only 8% of the students state they only use Turkish when they are online. Regarding the data, it is possible to say that majority of the group consists of active Internet users that spend more than 2 hours on the Internet, mainly on social networking websites and are able to go online both by laptops and mobile phones and state that they have used the Internet for 5 - 10 years. Knowing that they belong to an age group of 17 - 19, they present a profile of young starters since the Internet was introduced to them when they were younger than 10 years old and their Internet identities were mostly related to social networking sites.

As a consequence, an educational website that resembled popular social networking sites and enabled social networking features would be the right choice for our research. Claiming that it is being used by 5700000 teachers and students globally, Edmodo.com provides a user friendly platform to connect, collaborate, share content, give and assess assignments, access homework, grades and teacher notices. Edmodo.com allows teachers to post messages, start polls, discuss classroom topics, assign and grade classwork, share content and materials, and network and exchange ideas with their peers. Students are allowed to build their own profiles, upload their photos and send messages to their teacher. In this study, three different classes formed their own groups and two of the classes used Edmodo.com actively. 84 students participated in total and 17 of them were from the lowest scoring classes of the prep school. The reason why the lowest scoring classes were included in this study is it is assumed that low scoring students usually have low motivation (Wise & DeMars, 2003).

The first group to use Edmodo.com started their prep-education in September 2011 within the first module which lasted for 8 weeks. These participants were in a randomly chosen class. The general success rate of this group was unrated since they were A1 level. Since they were beginners, they quickly embraced Edmodo.com as one of the new educational tools in their lives. Soon, the students expressed how pleased they were to use new methods and “Education Facebook” at school in oral surveys in person. Being renamed by the students as “Education Facebook”, Edmodo.com became a significant part of main course lessons and it was used to post additional vocabulary tests and writing assignments. The first group of participants passed A1 level with high scores and the relation between Edmodo.com and their success was questioned by a brief survey.

The second group of participants was from the lowest scoring classes. This time, it was an A2 level group. They used Edmodo.com as a supplementary system to their main course lessons. They formed an online community on Edmodo.com and the main course instructor directed them. Numerous exercises and worksheets were posted on Edmodo.com. Writing assignments were delivered and assessed on the community, as well. Since writing grades were crucial to pass the level, the students started to follow the website more often. In pre-survey, all of the students admitted they had a habit of submitting their writing assignments late in the previous level. In the first week of A2 level, the writing assignment of the week was written on the white board and explained by the instructor in person. However, 92% of the students failed to submit their assignments on time and 76% of the students failed to understand the task properly. When Edmodo.com was introduced, the students did not want to sign up. Some of them told it was another “homework website”. Nonetheless, when they were informed by the first group, they wanted to participate in this “Education Facebook”. After 8 weeks of application, their motivational levels were assessed via survey. The Integrative and instrumental motivation scale of Likert Scale format of Gardner's Attitude / Motivation Test Battery was adapted to a 5-point scale. The open-ended questions were analyzed to provide an in-depth understanding of the reasons of the positive outcome / high motivation when Edmodo.com was used. The majority of the students (77.2%) stated that they had eventually become more motivated to learn English when they used the Internet. The majority of the students (81.5%) reported that they were primarily motivated by using new things which reminded them their favorite websites. Consequently, they believe that if they can express themselves more on the Internet while learning English, they will feel “motivated” and “encouraged”. 62% of the participants defined Edmodo.com as “motivating”.

and “entertaining” and 71% of them mentioned the importance of studying English on a website where they could build their profiles with photos. Both the A1 group which was the randomly selected and the A2 group which was selected from the low scoring classes attended final written and oral surveys and 97% of the students reported Edmodo.com provided them a perfect environment to do assignments and further study.

### III. DISCUSSION

The result of the study showed that the prep students participated in the study benefited from using Edmodo.com in their English classes. Although all statistics have not been analyzed yet, since they will be compared with the next years results and all the written and oral survey results will constitute a complete research on Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL). As mentioned, teacher's role has been changed while using Edmodo.com. The instructor's research diary proved that the preparation time reduced as well the interference amount. The instructor defined her new role as “a guide” instead of “an ultimate leader” in the classroom. Her posts were responded rapidly by the students and she has become a “moderator” in that communal environment. This finding is meaningful for the aims of TELL in general because the role of an ESL/EFL teacher is changing worldwide while “teaching” is being replaced by “learning”, providing a more active role for language students. ESL/EFL teachers are the ones to process information and transform into knowledge through new technologies and initiate a process of rethinking educational and training procedures in today's ‘Knowledge Society’ (Rüschhoff & Ritter, 2001).

According to responses collected in the final questionnaire, Edmodo.com was an appealing website for the participants mainly because it reminded them of “Facebook”. None of the participants wanted to use Facebook instead of Edmodo.com because they did not want to use all their personal information for educational purposes. Therefore, Edmodo.com provided them a “perfect” environment giving them an opportunity to learn and enjoy. There is also a modest implication on learner autonomy due to the fact that the participants reported that they enjoyed studying on Edmodo.com on their own and could use its features to test their own skills at home.

Two main research questions could be answered basically. A social networking site could increase students' motivation for learning English. Combining the Internet social networking options with the curriculum helps the students while learning a second language in various ways, including increasing participation, as well as motivation while decreasing teacher's preparation time. Still, more data have to be collected and thoroughly analyzed. Since the research will take more years to measure the responses of a wide range of language students, new findings might come up, not to change these two answers completely, but to extend and transform them according to new needs and new horizons.

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research indicate that if applied properly with certain aims, a social networking site that reminds students of their daily life can provide learners with a frame to assist them in structuring and coordinating acts of knowledge construction. The attributes of a successful technology-enhanced language learning environment (TELE) are that it should provide interaction and communicative skills, be student-centered and promote student autonomy, use multiple modalities and provide appropriate feedback and assessment ( Warschauer, 1996). Edmodo.com offers various services for language classes that are able to meet some of these attributes.

It is clear that learning motivation in an EFL classroom is determined by many different aspects of the process (Dornyei, 1990). The conclusion is that a further research and a detailed quantitative research need to be carried out. Effectiveness of using social networking should be researched more, analyzing more results collected for a larger number of students in different language schools. There is a lot of work to do to fully evaluate the benefits of social networking in EFL classrooms.

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