Informal Distance Learning as an Aiding Tool in the Teaching-Learning Process at Times of Pandemics:

An Exploratory Study Investigating the Use and Effect of Social Media by Algerian EFL Teachers at the Level of Secondary Schools.

التعليم عن بعد غير الرسمي كأداة مساعدة في عمليتي التعليم و التعلم في زمن الجائحة

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Abstract

As of late 2019, the emergence of the high speed spreading Corona Virus (Covid-19) which later turned into a pandemic forced everyone to stay home in a seemingly unending quarantine. As a result, a lot of outdoor activities that represented our daily routine had to stop including going to school. However, soon after this new situation occurred, a lot of countries started coping with it by providing what is called distance learning at all educational levels. In the Algerian educational context, the use of the online platform offered by the Ministry of Education actively increased among students, but the lack of live interaction with teachers and the situation where the student is forced to sit and only receive posed many flaws on the process and made it difficult to proceed with this form of learning. To overcome this problem, the excessive use of social media among kids and teenagers was put to use by many teachers. It was an alternative and a way of non-formal learning to make the EFL teaching-learning process very much easier and more flexible and fun. This exploratory study aims at measuring the extent to which teachers in secondary schools use social media and interactive apps in the EFL teaching context during both regular and exceptional times, how they are used and what outcomes are expected, the goals that are achieved and the obstacles that are faced. A mixed method of data gathering and analysis was adopted through distributing a questionnaire to a number of secondary school teachers in El Meghaier, Algeria. The results show that social media platforms are not fully benefited from as informal teaching tools. The reason is not due to teachers' ignorance of how these tools work, but other concerns on the part of teachers.

Keywords: EFL learners, distance learning (DL), secondary schools, social networks (SN), social media (SM).

الملخص

اعتبارا من أواخر عام 2019 ، أدى ظهور فيروس كورونا سريع الانتشار (Covid-19) والذي تحول لاحقًا إلى جائحة إلى إجبار الجميع على البقاء في المنزل في حجر صحي يبدو غير منتهٍ. نتيجة لذلك ، كان على الكثير من الأنشطة الخارجية التي كانت تمثل روتيننا اليومي أن تتوقف بما في ذلك الذهاب إلى المدرسة. و مع ذلك، بعد فترة وجيزة من ظهور هذا الوضع الجديد، بدأت الكثير من البلدان في التعامل معه من خلال توفير ما يسمى بالتعلم عن بعد في جميع المستويات التعليمية. في السياق التربوي الجزائري، ازداد استخدام المنصة الإلكترونية التي تقدمها وزارة التربية والتعليم بشكل نشط بين الطلاب، لكن قلة التفاعل المباشر مع المعلمين والوضع الذي يضطر فيه الطالب إلى الجلوس والتلقي فقط شكل العديد من العيوب على العملية و جعل من الصعب المضي قدمًا في هذا النوع من التعلم. للتغلب على هذه المشكلة، تم وضع الاستخدام المفرط لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بين الأطفال والمراهقين من قبل العديد من المعلمين قيد الاستعمال. لقد كان بديلاً وطريقة للتعلم غير الرسمي لجعل عملية تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أسهل بكثير وأكثر مرونة ومتعة. تهدف هذه الدراسة الاستكشافية إلى قياس مدى استخدام المعلمين في المدارس الثانوية لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والتطبيقات التفاعلية في سياق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية خلال الأوقات العادية والاستثنائية، وكيفية استخدامها والنتائج المتوقعة والأهداف التي تم تحقيقها والعقبات التي تواجهها. تم اعتماد أسلوب مختلط لجمع البيانات وتحليلها من خلال توزيع استبيان على عدد من معلمي المرحلة الثانوية في المغير بالجزائر. تظهر النتائج أن منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لا يستفاد منها بشكل كامل كأداة تدريس غير رسمية وهذا ليس بسبب جهل المعلمين بكيفية عمل هذه الأدوات، ولكن بسبب مخاوف أخرى من جانب المعلمين.

الكلمات الدالة: متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، التعلم عن بعد ، المدارس الثانوية ، الشبكات الاجتماعية ، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.

Introduction

Teaching approaches and methods as well as teaching techniques and materials used by teachers to deliver content along with teacher roles themselves have drastically changed across history. They were always and still are subject to ongoing refinement and improvement to make the teaching-learning process more effective and interesting. Such improvements also take into consideration learners' attitudes towards learning in addition to their mindset and interests which are known to constantly change with every generation.

Educational enhancements were represented by the huge increase of ICT tools in the last few decades. These tools exceeded the use of TVs, radios and audio tapes to computers, laptops and later on tablets, smart phones and all different types of touch screen devices. These ICT tools, being interactive in nature, allowed learners to actively take part and indulge in the learning process. They also added features that were not available before giving birth to a new form of education known as distance learning. This term mainly refers to the ability of learners to engage in the learning process with their teachers without being actually present in the classroom.

Since it was first implemented, distance learning has always been a topic of hot debate among researchers and educationalists. Its supporters claim that it is the beginning of a new era in education while others see that its outcomes are no different from traditional learning if not worse. However, the spread of Corona Virus (Covid-19) around the world by the end of 2019 left schools and governments with no choice but to apply it as an alternative to traditional education. The latter which required both teachers and students to be physically present within a certain setting and time frame in order for the teaching-learning process to take place was not a healthy practice during times where physical and social distancing were a must.

Many distance learning platforms were offered by schools and ministries in many countries to keep the progress of lessons going. In the Algerian educational context, a national distance learning platform was offered by the Algerian ministry of Education. However, such a platform alone was not enough and teachers as well as students looked for other alternatives that allowed for flexibility, practicality, ease of use and most importantly live interaction as their main features. Social media provided all that, besides, it is widespread in all domains of life and has a heavy presence among people of all ages, genders and backgrounds. Many teachers, being well-aware of this fact, started using it as a learning tool especially during the recent two years and the shutdown period.

There is a moderate amount of research done on the Algerian educational context concerning the use of social media and its effects on learners and teachers as well as their attitudes towards it. However, research that focuses its time span on the recent two years of the pandemic and narrows its milieu on secondary education is rather limited. Therefore, this study is an attempt to provide a glimpse into how teachers used social media in the recent quarantine as well as before and after. It is necessary to measure the extent to which EFL teachers use these networks as a tool that helps teaching the target language, especially after some unforeseen circumstances emerged and forced the educational activity as we know it to stop for over a whole trimester. Such circumstances maybe the beginning of a radical change in the educational methods and may open new doors for new alternatives to take place among teachers and learners either formally or informally.

Literature Review

The last two decades were characterized by the creation and launching of many interactive platforms such as Facebook (2004), Instagram (2010), Twitter (2006), WhatsApp (2011), YouTube (2005), Skype (2003) and many others which are now collectively called social media or social networks. As soon as social media platforms appeared in the world, they have gone viral and

nowadays one can hardly ever meet people with no access to or no knowledge of such websites and apps. They invaded every domain of life and their use is no longer limited to people's personal lives, but also professional lives.

These networks belong to what is known as web 2.0 which is the second stage of internet development that allows users to create, change and share information and focuses on user generated content (Oxford Learners' Dictionaries, 2021). Based on the characteristics these networks share, we can say that social media is the name given to all the platforms and applications which main purpose is to connect people together and ease the process of communication and information exchange (Crisp, 2011). They include Viber, TikTok, LinkedIn, Telegram, WeChat, Pinterest, Snapchat, etc. As for their use, one merely needs a device that can provide access to internet such as computers, laptops, smart phones, etc and then create a profile on the desired platform.

Social media is described by Obar & Wildman (2015) as 'interactive technologies' that allow the creation and sharing of content and information via virtual communities and networks. It has features such as internet-based, user generated content (texts, videos, photos, etc.), profile-specific (profiles are created and designed according to the designated social media organization) and social network based (profiles are matched with and connected to other individuals and groups). According to the same source, social media differs from traditional media for operating in a dialogic transmission system instead of a monologic one (Cited in Wikipedia, 2021). It means that the former depends on introducing interactively many sources to many receivers while the latter introduces one source to many receivers with no interaction. Boyd and Ellison (2007: 2) explain this process when they define social networking sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Trottier & Fuchs (2014) see social networks as a mergence between ICT tools and media while others deconstruct the term into two words. 'Social' refers to something that is related to society and relationships among people (Eren, 2012) and 'networks' is related to communicating, connecting and informing. Hence, the ability to create and share content is the main feature for social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This constant process of creation and sharing allows the connection to happen between people who share similar interests leading to discussions and information exchange including data, thoughts and opinions, view, beliefs, news and so on. All are manifested in texts, pictures and videos. As a result, one can expand their online social circle and grow their community (Ellison, 2007).

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social media appeared for the first time in 1997 with the launch of sixdegrees.com. Following that, many others were created between 1998 and 2000. However, it was not until Friendster, MySpace and Facebook were introduced that these sites started to gain popularity worldwide (comScore, 2007. Cited in Boumaarafi, 2015). Since their emergence, these networks went viral among both adults and youngsters. Their use exceeded people's personal life to professional workplaces in all domains of life from business, political and health sectors to education of course. Education was never far from the all the fuss of social media. Actually, it was at the heart of it all. And the fact that Facebook was created inside university walls is a proof. This is also a reason for the educational environment to keep up with this rapid technological development.

The presence and use of social media in the educational context is increasing rapidly as it goes well with students' interests (Greenhow, Menzer & Gibbins, 2015), brings more diversity to the learning process and introduces a wider learning space than the traditional classroom-setting context. It brings a new teaching-learning perspective where students and teachers are not obliged to gather in the same learning physical space (Maney, 2009. Cited in Cox, 2004) for a designated time frame. Social media platforms are also claimed to increase learners' autonomy, independence, centeredness since learners have more chance to actively take part in the content creation, interaction and sharing processes. Kerwin (2012) also claims that social networks also contributes to developing students' creativity and critical thinking skills and improving their language skills through posting and sharing texts, videos and images. Such practices serve under the category of informal learning and can have a great and positive effect on students' language performance.

Many studies reveal that informal distance learning that occur through social media and other interactive platforms is much more effective than traditional learning. They also show that students who engage on online second/ foreign language learning exhibit higher performance and lower levels of anxiety (Pichette, 2009). It is reported that they are more comfortable to learn through social media since they use them daily and are already familiar with them (Kitchakarn, 2016). Similarly, Dudeney and Hockly (2007) declare that young generations no longer prefer traditional learning and teachers have no choice but cope with the recent technologies by creating and sharing materials and activities which are social media friendly (Cited in Laborda & Royo, 2007). The reason, according to Harrison and Thomas (2009), is that EFL learning is not limited to the classroom and can happen virtually thanks to today's technology. They believe that learners are more motivated to learn

through social networks since most of their users are university students and adolescents.

However, a study conducted by Li (2017) in Hong Kong shows that students prefer to use these platforms with other students rather than teachers. Other studies also show that students may not welcome the use of social networks by their teachers and may not agree on using it as learning/ teaching tool with them. A study by Malesky and Peters (2012) on 459 university students and 159 university faculty members on the United States shows that 40% of students and 30% of faculty members believe that it is inappropriate for professors to use SNs (Cited in Boumaarafi, 2015).

On the other hand, Paliktzoglou, Stylianou, & Sohenen (2014) found that Google educational apps support pedagogical activities by increasing students' engagement and team work (Cited in Boumaarafi, 2015). This is referred to by Baker (1999) as learning communities which are considered to be essential for student education.

Such communities are well provided, maintained and mostly facilitated by Facebook. And this may be one of the reasons why students are more attracted to it than other platforms. Kitchakarn (2016) supports this claim when stating that Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms among learners because it makes communication easier and facilitates the process of learning independently or within groups gaining with that students' positive attitudes towards it and their favor when it comes to using it as a learning tool among other platforms. Similarly, Petosky (2014: 1) states that "teachers have to find out where the students are, and work from there. Well, the students are on Facebook" (Cited in Espinosa, 2015). Schroeder and Greenbowe (2009) also confirm this view by reporting that EFL students show positive attitudes toward the use of Facebook in learning the English language.
According to Statista (2021), Facebook is still on top of the list concerning the most used social media around the world with more than 2.8 billion users followed by YouTube then Whatsapp ranked in the third place.

The Most Used Social Media Platforms in the World (In Millions)
Source: Statista 2021

Surprisingly enough, Facebook was not created for socializing purposes, but rather educational ones. It was intended for university students to use it as a learning tool and was not possible to get access to unless with a university email address that only belongs to one of the universities Facebook supported (Ellison, 2007). Not long after though, it turned into a social interaction network and the most used one at that with hundreds of millions of users around the globe.
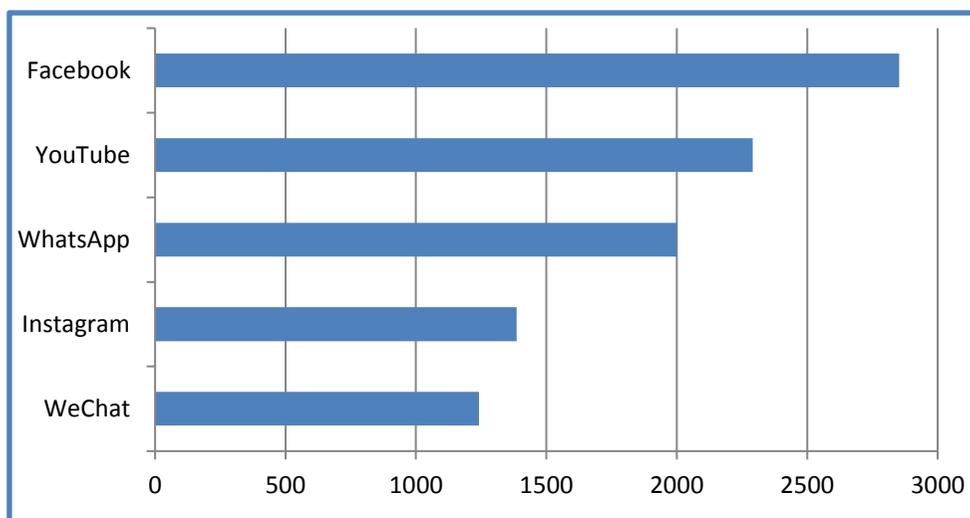
Godwin-Jones (2008), Garrison and Kanuka (2004), and Wenger (1998) maintained that Facebook provides a social space where people from different cultures, languages, and ethnicities can meet and communicate allowing for cultural awareness and cross cultural understanding (Espinosa, 2015). Therefore, Espinosa (2015) suggests that teachers should benefit from students' excessive use of Facebook and their positive attitudes towards it by directing them to turn the practices and experiences that occur in this network for social purposes into ones that would happen for educational purposes and use them to enhance learning. Teachers' attitudes towards using social media as a teaching-learning tool greatly affect learners' attitudes towards using them with learning objectives in mind as well (Gorg, 2014). In other words, if teachers have negative attitudes towards integrating social media in the learning process, they cannot expect learners to use them for the same reason.

In the Algerian context, it is observed that students are not different from the rest of young people in other parts of the world in terms of their presence on different social media platforms and their use for them.

> Battouche (2012) conducted a seminal study to investigate the use of social networks by Algerian youth aged 8 to 24. He found that 84% of the surveyed population used Facebook, 8% used twitter and only 4% used MySpace. 37% of respondents indicated that making new friends was the main reason for using social networks, 40% cited their usefulness in acquiring new knowledge, 11% mentioned effective communication and 18% networking. The results of the study also show that 65% of the surveyed population benefited from social networks in improving their foreign language skills, 25% in strengthening national identity and belongingness and 11% in acquiring the ability to convince in debates. (Cited in Boumaarafi 2015: 35)

These numbers must have definitely increased dramatically since 2012, especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic and the quarantine period when all schools and educational institutions were fully closed. And since social media may have not been primarily intended to be used for studying by students or even teachers, the circumstances that the world has witnessed made it necessary to use it as an educational tool and to apply it even as an informal way of teaching.

Aim of the Study

This is an exploratory study that aims at investigating the use of social media by Algerian EFL teachers in secondary schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic including the shutdown period as well as before and after. In addition to measuring the extent to which these platforms are used and the way they were implemented, it attempts to shed light on teachers' perceptions on them and their opinions concerning future use.

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent was social media used by Algerian EFL teachers as an alternative educational tool and a means of distance learning during the full shut down of schools a year and a half ago?
2. Are teachers currently implementing social media platforms as an aiding tool in the teaching-learning process inside or outside the classroom?
3. How ready are they to include them in the teaching-learning process in the future? And how do they intend to use them?

Methodology

In this part, we shall discuss the procedure through which this study was carried out including a description of the participants and the method used for data gathering and analysis.

1. Participants

This study was conducted through delivering a questionnaire to thirteen (N=13) out of fourteen (N=14) English language teachers in all five (N=05) secondary schools in the city of El Meghaier, Algeria at the beginning of the academic year 2021/2022. Two (N=02) questionnaires were not returned and four (N=04) were not fully answered, thus excluded for not being valid. This reduces the number of participants to seven (N=07). Since the number is small, percentage will not be used in the discussion and analysis, but numbers instead.

All teachers happened to be females with ages that range between twenty-six (26) and thirty-six (36) years old and a teaching experience ranging between four (04) and twelve (12) years. Four (N=04) of these teachers hold a Masters degree while one (N=01) has a Bachelor degree and another one (N=01) who graduated of the ENS Training School. Their teaching grades range from First (1st) Grade to a Principal Teacher.

2. Data Gathering Tools

A questionnaire was designed to carry out this study. It contained an overall of eighteen (N=18) questions divided into three (N=03) sections that were entitled as "Social Media Use and Pandemics", "Social Media Use on Regular Times" and "Teachers' Perceptions" respectively. It started with closed-ended questions followed by open-ended ones. In the former, participants had to tick '✓' or cross 'x' their answers and in the latter they were asked to give brief explanations or express their thoughts, opinions or tell their experiences. The last question was optional; it was devoted for teachers to further state their own opinions and perspectives concerning the matter.

3. Data Description and Analysis

In this section, we shall give a more detailed description to the questionnaire along with analysis. A mixed approach to data analysis was adopted since they were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.1. Social Media Use and Pandemics

In the first question, teachers were asked if they used social media in their daily lives. All of them (N=07) answered 'Yes'. In response to the second question

'how often?' six (N=06) of them answered 'daily' and one revealed it was few times a week.

In the third question concerning the platforms that were used the most, all seven (N=07) of them used Facebook/ Messenger (Kitchakarn, 2016; Petosky, 2014; Statista, 2021; Espinosa 2015; Battouche, 2012). Five (N=05) also used YouTube; three (N=03) also used Instagram and two (N=02) also used WhatsApp along with Facebook/ Messenger (Statista, 2021).

In the fourth question, teachers were asked if they had ever used SM as a means of distance learning during the shutdown period. Four (N=04) of them answered 'Yes' and three (N=03) answered 'No'. Out of the four (N=04) who used SM for distance learning, two (N=02) used it weekly and two (N=02) used it monthly. Three (N=03) teachers used Facebook/ Messenger; one of them (N=01) also used YouTube and WhatsApp along with Facebook/ Messenger. One (N=01) only used WhatsApp.

In response to the seventh question concerning how SM was used during the shutdown or what those platforms were used for, the four (N=04) teachers gave various answers that can be put under these categories:

- Online sessions and explaining lessons.
- Asking and answering questions, sending inquiries and doing more tasks.
- Sending and receiving handouts and worksheets.
- Evaluation.
- Completing the programme.

In the eighth questions, when asked whether the use of SM helped in the progress of lessons, all four (N=04) teachers answered 'Yes'. And when asked, in the ninth question, whether they had noticed any changes in students' performance when SM platforms were used one (N=01) answered 'No' and explained that physical contact was necessary while three (N=03) answered 'Yes' and further explained that SM use helped in:

- Enhancing some students' vocabulary since they had to write in English in order to communicate (Kerwin, 2012; Pichette, 2009).
- Self-evaluation and correcting their own mistakes (Kitchakarn, 2016).
- Doing more tasks.

3.2. Social Media Use on Regular Times

In the eleventh question, when asked if SM was used to keep contact with students outside the classroom apart from the quarantine period, four (N=04) teachers answered 'Yes' while three (N=03) answered 'No'. Among the four (N=04) teachers who answered 'Yes' to this question, three (N=03) were the

same ones who used SM during the shutdown. This means that we have a case of one (N=01) teacher who used social media during the shutdown, but did not use it outside this period and one teacher who did the opposite.

Out of the four (N=04) teachers who used SM during regular times, three (N=03) used Facebook/ Messenger; one of these three (N=03) also used YouTube and WhatsApp. One (N=01) teacher used WhatsApp. Those teachers used SM in regular times to:

- Set online sessions.
- Use videos and pictures related to the lessons.
- Make more explanation.
- Send, receive and correct activities and homework.
- Make evaluations.
- Discuss difficulties and solve problems.

This supports Downes' (2004) statement that social media platforms are used to fulfill informal academic purposes such as revision, arranging group or project work. (Cited in Boumaarafi, 2015).

In the fourteenth question, teachers were asked how much they were available if students needed to reach them outside class hours. One (N=01) teacher answered 'All the time' and she is one of the teachers who used SM both during and outside the shutdown. Five (N=05) teachers answered 'Sometimes' with one's (N=01) answer ranging from 'Sometimes' to 'Rarely'. They attributed the reason of such frequency to:
- Home, children and social responsibilities.
- The huge time spent on lesson preparation.

One (N=01) teacher answered 'Not available' and is one of the teachers who never used SM neither during nor outside the shutdown period. She explained such frequency by stating that she does not share any means of communication with her learners.

3.3. Teachers' Perceptions

Five (N=05) teachers intend to use SM as an aiding tool in the future. This includes one (N=01) who have never used it before and two (N=02) who used it on one of the two situations (either the shutdown or otherwise). They explained this by stating that:
- SM is an effective communication tool that changes learners from being passive consumers of content to active autonomous participants.
- SM Proved to be necessary in special circumstances such as pandemics.

- SM use is increasing everyday (In other words, it will soon be inevitable to incorporate it into teaching).
- SM brings innovation represented in new tools, ideas, strategies that help in dealing with lessons.
- Advanced learners, who it is unfair for them to be subjected to just the syllabus, can find more communicative tasks. And weak students, who are ashamed to ask or discuss their difficulties in the classroom, find it helpful to send a message. This supports the previous view that SM reduces anxiety among EFL learners (Pichette, 2009).

The two (N=02) cases where teachers do not intend to use SM as an aiding tool in the future include the case of one (N=01) teacher who used SM before on both situations and one (N=01) who never used SM before. They claim that students lack interest to study via SM platforms and they are still not ready for such development and see it as an entertainment tool only.

So far, we have three (N=03) teachers who used media both during the shutdown and on regular times. However, two (N=02) intend to use it in the future and one (N=01) does not intend to. One (N=01) who neither used SM on quarantine nor on regular times, but intends to use it in the future. One (N=01) who neither used SNS on quarantine nor on regular times nor does she intend to use them in the future. One (N=01) who did not use them during the shutdown, but used it apart from this period and intends to use them in the future. And one (N=01) who used them only during the shutdown and thinks of using them in the future.

Three (N=03) teachers answered the last optional question, when asked to add any further thoughts on the use of social media platforms as a form of distance learning, two (N=02) teachers who had experience in using them on both situations declared that it can be disturbing and distracts one from doing their daily responsibilities. They hoped that there would be distance learning tools, applications and services that would be effective, reliable, secure and would enable collaboration between teachers and learners. They also expressed their concern about privacy and the ''dishonest and immoral actions'' that exist on SM in reference to cyber bullying. This was addressed by Livingston and Brake (2010) when they state that, when using SM, one can risk losing their privacy, getting bullied and being exposed to harming contact. Offensive and insulting content is one of the teachers' greatest concerns, especially when it is usually posted under pseudo names. As a result, they emphasized that the teacher who intends to use these platforms must set clear rules/ limits with learners. The one (N=01) teacher that never used social media and does not intend to use it in the future claimed that she noticed that teachers were complaining about the use of social media as a means of teaching since learners

did not attend most online sessions due to the absence of internet in their homes. This raises another issue concerning students' financial ability to afford devices and internet connection that enable them to have access to social media platforms.

Evaluation of the Results

From the data analysis, we were able to know that all teachers (100%) have access to social media for personal use and all of them use more than just one platform. In addition, their use of these platforms happens daily for the majority of them (86%). This indicates that they do not seem to have any sort of technophobia and that they are well acquainted with today's interactive technology.

However, when it comes to applying these platforms to the learning process during the shutdown period, the number decreases to almost half (57%). And even fewer teachers use it weekly (29%) to keep up with the curriculum and the progress of lessons. This proves that teachers do not lack awareness of SM platforms and how they function, but there are other reasons why, even though they use SM in their personal lives for a good amount of time, they decided not to use it with their students as a means of informal distance learning.

The majority (75%) of those who used social media during the shutdown agree that the use of social media helped with the progress of lessons and with students overall performance. They claim it enhanced their vocabulary and writing and helped them to be more autonomous.

The majority (75%) of those who used social media during the shutdown are the same teachers who were already adapted to using it with their students on regular times. This means that only 25% actually took the initiative and decided to apply SM when the circumstances imposed its use.

On regular basis, social media was mainly used to back up the lessons introduced in the classroom with extra explanation or activities, or to do the things that would reduce the time dedicated for lessons if done inside the classroom such as evaluation, homework and corrections. However, 71% of the teachers declared that they are not available all the time in case students tried to reach them outside class hours, but rather sometimes due to their commitments and responsibilities. This somehow contradicts with their statements concerning the use of SM to provide more explanation, tasks, evaluation and so on which automatically requires being available outside work hours more frequently than ''sometimes''.

The majority of teachers (71%) stated that they would use SM in the future including the ones who have not used it during the pandemic period.

This indicates that teachers do have a certain degree of acceptance of SM and tolerance towards its use informally in the teaching process. And from their last remarks, we can assume that their problem is not these platforms themselves, but the way they are used as well as the issues related security and privacy. They also raise the concern of students' ability to afford online learning that requires a certain financial situation.

Conclusion

We have learned, in the light of the recent unusual events which affected the whole world that the image of education as we know it might change toward a more virtual path in the future leading to a new era in this field. As a result, distance learning including social media use is no longer a privilege or a personal preference for teachers, but rather a necessity that would impose itself even stronger in the future. On such basis, this study was carried out to examine the use of social media by Algerian EFL teachers during this time of pandemic. The results indicate that SM platforms were not and still are not fully taken advantage from by teachers as they should be. They also show that such platforms were not opted for by almost half of the sample even when the situation required that they should be used. And the reason does not seem to be the teachers' lack of knowledge or ignorance of such platforms, but other causes and concerns. This gives rise to further questions concerning the reasons why social media platforms are shyly used as a means of distance learning despite their heavy presence in both teachers and learners' personal lives. It also requires more in-depth studies to bridge the gap between social media use and the concept of distance learning.

Recommendations

These recent and unforeseen circumstances revealed the many limitations of traditional in-class education. Therefore, it needs to be supported by the use of innovative methods and tools that peek students' interests. There is nothing that serves such goal as social media which use is widely spread among students and which heavy presence made it feel almost like today's youngsters have a 'second virtual life' inside these platforms and apps.

Indeed, we are still far from discussing the possibility of changing the form of education in Algeria to be entirely virtual. In addition, it is still not certain whether online and distance education is more effective to our students and our environment. Nevertheless, we can still make use of it or partially apply it to back up classroom learning as Schmidt (2002) suggests when considering that teachers should combine both traditional and online teaching and learning tools. Or when Dalsgaard (2005) argues that they can be used to support learning.

Even if the sudden preventative measures such as confinement and quarantine periods are not permanent, it is still a fact that the EFL curricula in secondary education are heavily loaded and students need more than few sessions a week in order to catch up or improve their language skills. Not to mention the problems related to motivation, concentration and boredom inside the classroom that often lead to behavior issues and waste a lot of valuable time for both teachers and students. Therefore, there is an urgent need for policy makers to start considering the implementation of social media in education as it may no longer be related to teachers' personal preference in the future.

Harrison and Thomas (2009) believe that researchers should study the possibilities for integrating SNs in the foreign language learning process. They claim that there is little research on Computer-Mediated Social Networks (CMSN) and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in the classroom. Therefore, this study is a step in this endeavor. It can be used to raise further questions about the use of social media by both Algerian teachers and students in the pre-tertiary levels and carry out more in-depth studies in this matter.

An example of such studies is a further thorough investigation concerning what aspects of ELT or language skills can be best taught through traditional methods and what is best taught using SM. Based on the results, teachers and policy makers can design and develop teaching materials which target the latter. Such developed materials would have the social media-friendly as an essential feature.

Limitations

This study was carried out with a very small number of teachers within one small geographic area. Therefore the results may not be adequate enough to be generalized. For more solid results, it is highly recommended that the study is applied on a larger scale to include more teachers in different parts of the country. Moreover, the questionnaire alone was not enough to get all the data needed for this study. However, due to time restrictions and teachers responsibilities, we could not initiate interviews with them.

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