Foreign language learners' interactions with their teachers on Facebook

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A B S T R A C T

There is a need to explore English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' interactions with their teachers in social networking media, as interactions that directly relate to the linguistic, social, and cognitive development of learners have not been examined within the EFL learning process. Thus, in the context of Turkish EFL learners' perceptions, this study aims to examine the level of EFL learners' interactions with their teachers on the social networking service Facebook and to determine the relationship between the level of their interaction and the variables of age, gender, and year of study. The sample group of the study consisted of 121 EFL learners at a Turkish state university. Before the frequencies, mean scores, standard deviations, *t*-test and analysis of variance were computed, a background questionnaire was administered that assessed the degree of their perception of these interactions. The results indicated that Turkish EFL students prefer passive behaviors regarding their interactions with their teachers and that age, gender and year of study are significantly correlated with some of the items in the scale. It is recommended that further research focus on factors that may impact the level of interaction between teachers and learners and on the perceptions of student–teacher interaction on Facebook from the teachers' perspectives.

1. Introduction

This study aims to investigate the level of EFL learners' interactions with their teachers on social media and the relationship between the level of interaction and factors such as age, gender, and year of study. Several concerns motivated the research. First, there is a general lack of research on how social media contributes to education (Aydin, 2012). Second, no research was found on the level of interaction between EFL learners and teachers, while studies were found regarding both negative and positive effects of student–teacher interaction on social media in a general educational context. Moreover, research has mainly focused on peer interaction on social media rather than EFL student–teacher interaction. Third, there is a lack of research on age and gender effects on student–teacher interactions on social media in EFL contexts, including the Turkish EFL context. As student-teacher interaction is a significant issue with profound influence on the linguistic, social, and cognitive development of learners, this study will contribute to the field of EFL teaching and learning.

As Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) highlight, Web 2.0 technologies change the ways in which individuals interact and have the potential to impact education significantly. Facebook, a registered trademark of Facebook Inc., is an online social networking service and a Web 2.0 technology that has over 845 million active users (Protalinski, 2012). It not only allows

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individuals to create personal profiles, add friends, exchange messages, and chat online (Aydin, 2012) but also has the potential to positively impact education (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). In a broad review of the literature on Facebook usage within educational contexts, Aydin (2012) reports that research has mainly focused on the characteristics of Facebook users, the reasons people use it, its harmful effects, Facebook as an educational environment, its effects on culture and language, and the effects of individual variables on the use of Facebook. Aydin (2012) concludes that Facebook may be readily utilized as an educational environment. However, he emphasizes that there is a serious lack of research on its use as an educational resource.

As Ferdig (2007; cited in Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011) states, social networking promotes social interaction, supports active and social learning, and constructs knowledge within a constructivist environment, echoing Vygotsky's (1978) notion that society and culture influence cognitive growth. Moreover, Ferdig (2007; cited in Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011) notes that social networks connect learners with more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978) within students' zones of proximal development, and more knowledgeable others are not limited to the classroom (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). Although Facebook has the potential to positively affect EFL learning, research on the interactions between EFL learners and teachers is lacking. In fact, while interaction is one of the main reasons for students' participation in Facebook (Aydin, 2012; Huang, Yang, Huang, & Hsiao, 2010; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009), several studies focus on peer interactions (e.g., McCarthy, 2010; Robelia, Greenhow, & Burton, 2011), whereas only one study, conducted by Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011), explores student–teacher interactions and age and gender effects on their interaction. Thus, EFL student–teacher interactions on Facebook, which constitute social contexts for language development and support learners in acquiring communicative intentions (Tomasello, 1999), have yet to be investigated.

The linguistic, social, and cognitive development of learners is closely and directly related to active participation in sociocultural events (Hall & Walsh, 2002) and environments. In this sense, classrooms are not the only places that shape learners' language development. Student–teacher interactions on Facebook, which provide social learning opportunities, may contribute positively to EFL learning experiences. In this context, the level of EFL learners' interactions with their teachers remains to be examined, and levels of interaction have not been clearly defined. How EFL learners perceive interactions with their teachers on Facebook must be researched before developing approaches to improve the use of Facebook in EFL teaching and learning activities.

1.1. Literature review

This section reviews the research on Facebook as a tool for interaction and communication between students and teachers, the effects of gender and age on such interactions, Facebook within educational contexts, and the effects of Facebook on teaching and learning a target culture and language.

Research shows that Facebook presents both positive and negative effects on social interaction and communication between students and teachers (Butler, 2010; Huang et al., 2010; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Pempek et al., 2009; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). For instance, Charlton, Devlin, and Drummond (2009) examined connections between college students' communication strategies and found that science students at two universities spent a great amount of their personal time on communication. A qualitative study by Ryan, Magro, and Sharp (2011) reported on how Facebook helped a subset of doctoral students who enrolled in a methodology course in the College of Business at a university in the United States to adapt to a Ph.D. program and life in a new culture and concluded that Facebook encouraged socialization and community building among students. In terms of interaction between teachers and students, Berg, Berquam, and Christoph (2007) found that Facebook was a means to build better relationships with students and personnel, and Sturgeon and Walker (2009) noted that faculty members created informal relationships with their students via Facebook. Similarly, Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) found that the participants who enrolled in the basic communication course at a university in the United States emphasized negative associations between teachers' use of Facebook and teacher credibility. Specifically, teachers who practiced more self-disclosure on their Facebook profiles had more credibility than teachers who practiced little self-disclosure. However, research also shows that university students restricted access to their profiles for university staff (Kolek & Saunders, 2008) and that student use of virtual office hours via Facebook did not significantly differ from their use of traditional office hours (Li & Pitts, 2009). Most interestingly, Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) examined how both undergraduate and graduate students used Facebook to communicate with their professors and found that passive behaviors were more common than active behaviors. The participants in the study were students who enrolled in selected courses in the College of Education at the University of Toledo in the Unites States.

A limited number of studies show that students' gender is a significant variable affecting student–teacher interaction, while students' age is not. For instance, Hewitt and Forte (2006) reported that 73% of male students found the faculty presence on Facebook acceptable, whereas only 35% of women found it so. The participants in the study were in two undergraduate courses whose professors had established Facebook accounts. Similarly, Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) noted that male students found student–teacher interactions on Facebook more appropriate than females, while age was not a factor regarding teacher–student interactions. In a study that aimed to present a structural model explaining the utilization of Facebook for educational purposes among secondary, college and graduate students in Turkey, Mazman and Usluel (2010) also found that gender was an important factor shaping participation on Facebook and other social networking sites.

Although scholars examining student–teacher interaction have not reached a consensus, and research is lacking on the effects of age and gender, current literature reveals positive influences of Facebook on education in general. Facebook impacts

academic settings (Villano, 2007) for both educators and students (Couros, 2008) in educational applications (Boon & Sinclair, 2009). Moreover, Facebook promotes achievement (Violino, 2009) and can be utilized for educational purposes (Mazman & Usluel, 2010). As Karl and Peluchette (2011) noted, Facebook has led educators to seriously consider the role that social networking could play in education. Research of a more narrow focus shows that Facebook can have positive effects on classroom practices and student involvement. For instance, Schaffhauser (2009) explored the experiences of two teachers and noted that Facebook and other social networks helped to demolish borders and barriers. Research also demonstrated that Facebook use increased student involvement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008) and engagement (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). Moreover, in a project-based study via social networks, Maguth, Yamaguchi, and Elliott (2010) found that learners who used technology demonstrated improved ability to analyze information and communicate. Last, research on the educational benefits of Facebook focused on specific areas, such as social learning (Ganis, 2009; Greenhow, 2009); e-learning (Durkee et al., 2009); environmental learning (Robelia et al., 2011); and business (Ramirez, Hine, Ji, Ulbrich, & Riordan, 2009), art (Shin, 2010), and chemistry education (Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009). These studies also show positive effects of Facebook within the above areas.

A limited number of studies have indicated that Facebook has positive effects on target-cultural awareness and EFL learning. For instance, Facebook offers effective cultural interventions (Christie & Bloustien, 2010) and significant cultural relevance (Carrington & Hodgetts, 2010), while it narrows the gaps between cultures (Birky & Collins, 2011). In terms of EFL learning, Facebook, as an EFL learning tool and environment, creates engagement in homework assignments (Kitsis, 2008), supports and facilitates foreign language learning (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010), and improves basic skills, specifically reading and writing skills (DePew, 2011; Pascopella & Richardson, 2009; Skerrett, 2010; Stewart, 2009; Walker, 2010; Waters, 2009; Yancey, 2009). For example, Facebook offers considerable possibilities as an effective cultural intervention (Christie & Bloustien, 2010) and provides significant cultural and textual relevance for young people (Carrington & Hodgetts, 2010). Vasalou, Joinson, and Courvoisier (2010) investigated how designers' intentions materialize through users' practices in Facebook. Their findings showed that culture and experience with the site affected users' motivations for using Facebook. In addition, no significant differences were found between users from five countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Greece and France) when measured through social searching. Cho (2010) explored cultural differences in social networking sites and found that members of collectivistic cultures maintained more contained network relationships. In addition, Ryan et al. (2011) found that interaction on Facebook reduced difficulties associated with adjusting to a new culture. Last, Mills (2011) noted that Facebook was a valuable tool for individuals learning French culture and language.

Facebook has powerful effects on second/foreign language teaching and learning. Kitsis (2008), for instance, suggested that online discussions created engagement in electronic homework assignments, and Romano (2009) stated that teachers and students experienced fun in English classes. Kabilan et al. (2010) found that students at a university in Malaysia considered Facebook to be a useful and meaningful language-learning environment, as it supported and enhanced the process of learning English. Other research focuses on the use of Facebook as an educational environment in which to acquire reading and writing skills. For example, Stewart (2009) noted that a Facebook virtual literature circle could be an excellent teaching environment. Hamilton (2009) stated that Facebook offered authors and publishers a powerful and positive medium for connecting with teenage readers, whereas Walker (2010) underlined findings suggesting that Facebook could be used for supporting and enhancing literature circles. In a project-based study, Skerrett (2010) stated that Facebook could be used to deepen teachers' understanding and pedagogical practices in relation to literacy education. Drouin (2011) found positive correlations among text messaging frequency, spelling and reading fluency, while there was a negative effect on reading accuracy. In terms of writing skills, Pascopella and Richardson (2009) claimed that writing instruction that uses social networking helps to keep students engaged, whereas Yancey (2009), in developing research-based best practices, stated that an online environment encourages teenagers to try new modes of composition. DePew (2011) suggested that social media sites developed rhetoric, whereas Waters (2009) underlined that social networking technology was the e-portfolio enhancement of the day and discussed how electronic portfolios were becoming more innovative by integrating a range of other e-learning tools.

To position this study in a pedagogical framework suitable for EFL teaching, it is necessary to draw on the concept of teachers' roles as suggested by Harmer (1991). He distinguishes between different roles of EFL teachers regarding their interactions and communication with their students. These include the roles of controller, assessor, organizer, prompter, participant, resource, tutor and investigator. As controllers, teachers control what students do and what language they use, whereas they give feedback and correct mistakes as assessors. Teachers also organize students and activities as organizer, encourage them to participate in activities as prompter, and directly participate in the activities as participant. They also act as resource to offer help to students, as tutor for advice and guidance, and finally, as investigator to find the best ways to foster language learning.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the review of literature presented above. First, there is no consensus on Facebook's effects on social interaction and communication, as research shows both positive and negative results. Second, research indicates that gender is a considerable factor for student–teacher interaction, while age has no influence on students' interactions with their teachers. Furthermore, the number of studies on the effects of age and gender on student–teacher interaction is fairly limited. Last, current literature reflects positive influences of Facebook on target-cultural awareness and EFL learning. Given that Facebook has positive effects on target-cultural awareness and EFL learning, that research is lacking with regard to gender and age effects on student–teacher interaction on Facebook, and that no consensus exists in terms of Facebook's effects on social interaction and communication between students and teachers, there is a great need to

investigate the EFL learners' interactions with their teachers. Moreover, it should be noted that students' interactions with their teachers are directly affected by teachers' roles that have influences on EFL teaching and learning processes, as mentioned above.

In conclusion, several factors call for an investigation into the level of EFL learners' interactions with their teachers on Facebook. First, there is a serious lack of research on the use of Facebook as an educational resource. Second, no data have been found regarding the level of interaction between EFL learners and teachers or regarding the level of interaction between students and their teachers on Facebook. Moreover, there is no consensus on social interaction and communication between students and teachers, as research indicates both negative and positive results. It is also significant that the issue has not been examined within an EFL context, let alone one in Turkey. The third reason for conducting the current study is that research is lacking on age and gender effects on student–teacher interactions on Facebook in an EFL context. Accordingly, this study examines two research questions:

1. What are the levels of EFL learners' interactions with their teachers on Facebook?
2. Are age, gender, and year-of-study factors that affect EFL learners' levels of interaction with their teachers?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were students enrolled in the English Language Teaching Department of the Necatibey Education Faculty at Balikesir University in Balikesir, Turkey. All students who had a Facebook account and added their teachers to their friend lists were invited to participate in the study. This resulted in a sample size of 121 students. Students were asked to respond to questions about the five teachers, representing an age range between 40 and 50. Of the participants, 87 (71.9%) were female and 34 (28.1%) were male. The gender distribution in the sample group was a reflection of the overall population in the department. The participants' mean age was 20.3, falling within the age range of 18 and 22. Of the participants, 37 (30.6%) were first-, 27 (19.0%) were second-, 29 (24.0%) were third-, and 32 (26.4%) were fourth-year students.

2.2. Instruments

The data collection instruments consisted of a background questionnaire probing participants' age, gender, and year of study and a survey instrument designed by Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) to interrogate student–teacher interaction on Facebook. The survey instrument consisted of 23 items that were assessed on a scale ranging from one to five (never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, usually = 4, always = 5). The questionnaire was presented in English. The items represented 23 behaviors on Facebook based on whether they are active or passive.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

After approval from Necatibey Education Faculty of Balikesir University was granted, the significance, purpose, research methodology, rationale behind subject choice, research ethics and the role of the researcher were explained to the students invited to participate in the study. It was stated that participants' privacy would be respected and that participation in the study was voluntary. It was also mentioned that there was no risk at all in participating in the study and that the study would be conducted within the bounds of respect for the participants. Then, the researcher briefly introduced the study and the participants' rights and asked the students to participate in the study. Finally, the researcher distributed the data collection instruments and collected the instruments after the participants completed them. The questionnaires were administered to the participants at the end of the fall semester of the 2012–2013 academic year.

The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software. Before giving the descriptives, t-test and analysis of variance, the reliability coefficient and total variance were computed. The reliability coefficient of the scale was computed using Cronbach's Alpha. The value indicated a high level of reliability (0.88), whereas the total variance (68.2) demonstrated that the scale was valid for measuring levels of participants' interactions. The result of the reliability coefficient of the scale found by Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) was also adequately high (0.92). After obtaining the validity and reliability, the frequencies, mean scores, and standard deviations were computed to examine the distribution of the items and group homogeneity. Then, a t-test that displays a two-tailed probability of the difference between the means was conducted to examine the relationship between gender and the dependent variable. Finally, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the mean differences between the items in the scale and subject variables, age and year of study. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for t-test and ANOVA.

3. Findings

The findings obtained from the study are divided into two subsections: the levels of EFL learners' interactions with their teachers on Facebook and the relationship between the levels of interaction with their teachers and subject variables, including age, gender, and year of study.

3.1. EFL learners' interactions with their teachers on Facebook

According to the findings presented in Table 1, Turkish EFL learners displayed mainly passive behaviors while interacting with their teachers. To begin with, Turkish EFL learners stated that they usually read their teachers' status updates ($x = 3.5$). The findings further indicated that EFL learners sometimes read their teachers' basic ($x = 2.9$), personal ($x = 2.9$), work ($x = 2.9$), and education information ($x = 3.1$). Learners also stated that they sometimes read through the groups their teachers joined ($x = 3.3$) and the posts on their teachers' walls ($x = 2.6$). Similarly, they sometimes viewed their teachers' profiles ($x = 3.1$), photos in which their teachers were tagged ($x = 3.1$), and photos posted by teachers ($x = 3.1$). Furthermore, they sometimes watched videos posted by teachers ($x = 3.1$) and joined the groups their teachers joined ($x = 3.0$). However, EFL learners stated that they rarely read their teachers' contact information ($x = 2.3$) or viewed their friend lists ($x = 1.7$).

The findings presented in Table 1 also show that Turkish EFL learners mainly avoided active behaviors during interactions with their teachers. Though EFL learners stated that they sometimes sent their teachers messages ($x = 2.7$) and friend invitations ($x = 2.5$), they rarely started chats with their teachers ($x = 2.4$). Moreover, Turkish EFL learners rarely commented on their teachers' status updates ($x = 2.1$), videos their teachers posted ($x = 2.1$), photos their teachers posted ($x = 2.0$), or photographs in which they were tagged ($x = 1.8$). They also stated that they rarely posted on their teachers' walls ($x = 1.9$). Finally, Turkish EFL learners never sent their teachers "pokes" ($x = 1.1$).

3.2. Effects of age, gender, and year of study on EFL learners' interactions

According to the values in Table 2, gender was a significant factor affecting EFL learners' interactions with their teachers. Gender affected the rate at which EFL learners read teachers' status updates, viewed their profiles and joined the groups their teachers joined. In contrast, age was significantly correlated with only one item in the scales, as indicated in Table 3. That is, though EFL learners rarely read status updates, females seemed more interested in reading their teachers' status updates when compared to males ($p = .03$). Similarly, females were more interested in viewing their teachers' profiles ($p = .01$) and joining the groups their teachers joined ($p = .02$) when compared to male EFL learners. In addition, the values in Table 3 show that younger EFL learners seemed more interested in viewing their teachers' profiles than older ones ($p = .02$).

Finally, as shown in Table 4, year of study was a considerable factor that affected EFL learners' behaviors in terms of sending their teachers messages and reading their teachers' contact information. Namely, third- and fourth-year students were more comfortable when they sent teachers messages and read teachers' contact information than first- and second-year

Table 1
Learners' interaction levels with their teachers.

Statements		Number	Frequencies (%)					Mean	Standard deviation
On Facebook, I …			Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always		
Passive behaviors	read my teachers' status updates.	121	6.6	8.3	33.9	33.1	18.1	3.5	1.1
	read through the groups my teachers have joined.	120	5.0	13.3	38.3	34.2	9.2	3.3	1.0
	view photos in which my teachers have been tagged.	121	5.0	22.3	37.2	24.8	10.7	3.1	1.0
	view photos my teachers post.	121	7.4	19.0	35.5	28.2	9.9	3.1	1.1
	watch videos my teachers post.	120	5.8	14.2	53.3	20.0	6.7	3.1	0.9
	join the groups my teachers have joined.	121	7.4	28.9	33.1	19.0	11.6	3.0	1.2
	read through my teacher's education info.	120	3.3	20.8	42.5	26.7	6.7	3.1	0.9
	view my teachers' profiles.	121	6.8	23.1	37.2	22.3	10.6	3.1	1.1
	read my teachers' basic info (e.g., political views, religious view, relationship status, etc.).	120	10.0	30.0	30.0	21.7	8.3	2.9	1.1
	read through my teachers' work info.	119	5.0	29.4	42.9	16.0	6.7	2.9	1.0
	read my teachers' personal info (e.g., interests, activities, favorites, etc.).	120	7.5	31.7	31.7	21.7	7.4	2.9	1.1
	read through the posts on my teachers' Walls.	121	10.7	39.7	28.9	18.2	2.5	2.6	1.0
	read my teachers' contact information (e.g., e-mail, phone number, etc.).	121	24.8	39.7	24.0	7.4	4.1	2.3	1.0
	view my teachers' friend lists.	119	50.4	32.8	11.7	2.4	1.7	1.7	0.9
Active behaviors	send my teachers messages.	120	6.7	34.2	43.3	11.7	4.1	2.7	0.9
	send my teachers friend invitations.	120	33.3	14.2	26.7	20.0	5.8	2.5	1.3
	start chats with my teachers.	121	14.9	41.4	35.5	7.4	0.8	2.4	0.9
	comment on my teachers' status updates.	121	25.6	45.4	24.0	5.0		2.1	0.8
	comment on videos my teachers post.	121	25.6	45.5	28.1	0.8		2.1	0.9
	comment on photos my teachers post.	121	30.6	37.2	27.2	5.0		2.0	0.8
	comment on photos in which my teachers have been tagged.	121	41.3	38.0	19.0	1.7		1.8	0.8
	post on my teachers' Wall.	119	29.5	48.7	21.0	0.8		1.9	0.7
	send my teachers a "poke".	119	91.6	5.9	2.5			1.1	0.4

Table 2
Gender effects on EFL learners' interactions with their teachers (*t*-test).

Statements	Gender	Number	Mean	Std. deviation	F	Sig.
On Facebook, I …						
read my teachers' status updates.	Female	87	3.1	1.0	4.9	0.03
	Male	34	2.6	1.3		
view my teachers' profiles.	Female	87	3.6	1.0	7.0	0.01
	Male	34	3.2	1.3		
join the groups my teachers have joined.	Female	87	3.2	1.0	6.0	0.02
	Male	34	2.8	1.3		

students were. In other words, the more advanced they were in the program, the more comfortable students felt when they sent their teachers messages and read their contact information.

As a result, five conclusions were drawn from the study. First, Turkish EFL students prefer passive behaviors when interacting with their teachers on Facebook. These passive behaviors included reading their teachers' status updates and basic, personal, work and education information; reading through the groups their teachers joined and the posts on their teachers' walls; viewing their teachers' profiles and photos; and watching videos posted by teachers. EFL learners show certain passive behaviors, such as reading their teachers' contact information and viewing their teachers' friend lists. Second, the learners feel comfortable at a moderate level sending their teachers messages and friend invitations but avoid other active behaviors, such as chatting with teachers; commenting on teachers' status updates, videos and photos; and posting on teachers' walls. Moreover, they never feel comfortable in poking their teachers. Third, female learners feel more comfortable reading their teachers' status updates, viewing their teachers' profiles, and joining the groups their teachers joined. Fourth, younger EFL learners are more interested in viewing their teachers' profiles than older learners are. Last, third- and fourth-year students feel more comfortable in terms of sending their teachers messages and reading their teachers' contact information when compared to first- and second-year students.

4. Discussion

The aforementioned conclusions may relate to certain factors. For example, the reason students prefer passive behaviors while interacting with their teachers may be related to the roles of the teachers (Harmer, 1991). Specifically, the lack of interaction between teachers and students may be a direct result of teachers' roles as controllers and assessors and may also indicate that teachers do not take on roles as organizers, prompters, participants, counselors or investigators. However, sending their teachers messages and friend invitations shows that EFL learners feel open to interacting with their teachers. Moreover, female students' higher level of interest in interacting with their teachers may be related to the fact that there are far more females in the sample than males, which is true of the overall population of English Language Teaching (ELT) Departments in Turkey. Additionally, younger EFL learners' higher level of interest in viewing their teachers' profiles can be attributed to their need to get to know their teachers, as they are new in the department. Third- and fourth-year students' higher level of activity in sending their teachers messages and reading their contact information can be attributed to their higher level of familiarity with their teachers and older students' need for information about their professional lives after graduation.

These conclusions may also relate to cultural factors that may influence EFL learners' behaviors in a Turkish context. First, students' passive behaviors can be interpreted as respect for their teachers in Turkish culture. However, though cultural differences are found to be significant in the utilization of Facebook (Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, Wimmer, & Christakis, 2008; Vasalou et al., 2010), no study has investigated the issue in this context. Thus, cultural factors such as learners' age; gender; ethnicity; religion; educational, social, and economic status; educational and occupational levels of learners' parents; social norms; and their socialization processes constitute a considerable area for additional research into learners' interactions with their teachers. Second, Turkish EFL learners never feel comfortable poking their teachers, as the verb *to poke* in Turkish (dürtmek) has a wide range of negative connotations such as *to jab*, *to push*, *to shove*, *to urge*, *to goad*, *to incite*, and *to provoke*. In addition, it is used as a taboo word in certain situations. Last, the reason first- and second-year students do not feel comfortable sending their teachers messages, when compared to third- and fourth-year students, may relate to the teachers' perceptions of social distance as a discipline tool in Turkish educational context and culture.

Table 3
Age effects on EFL learners' interactions with their teachers (ANOVA).

Statement	Age	Number	Mean	Std. deviation	F	Sig.
On Facebook, I …						
view my teachers' profiles.	18–19	47	3.33	1.1	4.01	0.02
	20–21	49	3.15	1.0		
	22–23	25	2.60	1.0		

Table 4
Year-of-study effects on EFL learners' interactions with their teachers (ANOVA).

Statements	Year of study	Number	Mean	Std. deviation	F	Sig.
On Facebook, I …						
send my teachers messages.	First year	36	2.47	0.9	2.760	0.045
	Second year	23	2.52	0.9		
	Third year	29	2.90	0.8		
	Fourth year	32	3.00	0.9		
read my teachers' contact information (e.g., e-mail, phone number, etc.).	First year	37	2.22	1.0	5.895	0.001
	Second year	23	1.65	0.8		
	Third year	29	2.24	1.0		
	Fourth year	32	2.78	1.2		

4.1. Implications

A summary of the comparison of the findings to previous findings is provided below. First, the results of the study contribute to the extant literature on EFL learners' interactions with their teachers on Facebook, as there is a serious lack of research on the use of Facebook as an educational resource (Aydin, 2012), especially regarding age and gender effects on teacher–student interaction. Interestingly, although Facebook has considerable potential to change how individuals interact (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011), to build better relationships with students and personnel (Berg et al., 2007), and to create informal relationships between students and teachers (Sturgeon & Walker, 2009), the results of this study show that EFL students remain passive in their interactions with their teachers. These results support Teclehaimanot and Hickman's (2011) findings, which suggest that passive behaviors are more appropriate than active behaviors. They also support the results reached by Mazer et al. (2007) that underline negative associations between teacher use of Facebook and teacher credibility, while the findings in this study contradict the results of other studies that suggest that male students find student–teacher interactions on Facebook more appropriate than females (Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Mazman & Usluel, 2011; Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). Moreover, although Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011) found that age is not a factor regarding teacher–student interactions, the current study concludes that age constitutes a significant variable regarding students' interest in viewing teachers' profiles.

4.2. Pedagogical recommendations

Some practical recommendations stem from the conclusions of this study. First, EFL teachers should revise their roles as language teachers to increase their interactions with their students, not only on Facebook but also in real life situations. Specifically, they should assume roles such as organizer, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, counselor and investigator rather than the roles of controller, corrector, and assessor. By doing so, they will increase the level of their interaction with their students and facilitate learning. To be brief, teachers have a number of different roles in the educational context (Harmer, 1991). The efficiency of their roles depends on increased interaction with their students in real world settings and in online social environments. Second, EFL teachers should spend time with their students through interactions on Facebook to build better and less formal relationships with them; this should take place in addition to traditional office hours. Furthermore, teachers should see Facebook as a normalized and internalized environment that is no different from real life and should not allow their students to withdraw and avoid interaction. Through increased interactions with their students, teachers may better understand students' feelings and gain educational opportunities, which may lead to positive learning experiences. Third, teachers should create opportunities to help fourth-year students who need information to further professional lives. EFL teachers should be aware that an ideal level of interaction with their students would help to improve classroom practices, learners' involvement and engagement, and academic achievement. Teachers should also be aware of Facebook as a language-learning environment that provides learners with significant opportunities to increase cultural awareness (Cho, 2010; Christie & Bloustien, 2010; Ryan et al., 2011) and acquire and learn basic skills (Drouin, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Waters, 2009; Yancey, 2009). Finally, realization of these benefits depends on radical changes to pre- and in-service teacher training curricula to focus on integrating social networking into teachers' academic and daily lives.

EFL teachers should learn to use social networking tools, which are now an indispensable part of human interaction, to engage with their students in a social context because learners' development is directly related to active participation in sociocultural events (Hall & Walsh, 2002). In fact, an ideal interaction with students on social networking sites is a gateway to social and cultural learning within a constructivist environment, improving language-learning experiences and learners' cognitive development. Teachers should further contribute to their students learning by connecting them with more knowledgeable others on social networking sites.

Additional recommendations pertain to other actors in the educational process. School administrators, for example, should provide opportunities to use social network sites to increase interaction between teachers and students instead of banning their use in schools. Information and communication technologies (ICT) designers should consider the strong need for interaction between students and teachers and add facilities that may increase interaction and communication at schools.

Course designers and curriculum developers should address the importance of teacher–student interaction online by adding more content on social media utilization to their teaching materials, courses, and text books.

In conclusion, given EFL learners' preference for passive behaviors when interacting with their teachers, teachers should increase their interactions with their students. Specifically, teachers should spend more time interacting with their students on Facebook to improve classroom practices, amplify learners' involvement and engagement, promote academic achievement, and increase learners' awareness of the potential of Facebook as a language-learning environment (Cho, 2010; Christie & Bloustien, 2010; Ryan et al., 2011).

4.3. Limitations and recommendations for further research

One limitation of this research is that the participants were restricted to 121 EFL learners studying in the Department of English Language Teaching at Balikesir University. The number of female students in this study is considerably higher than the number of males. Moreover, the scope of the study was confined to descriptive data obtained from the background questionnaire and a scale designed by Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011). The data included Turkish EFL learners' perceptions of interactions on Facebook with their teachers, two females and three males ranging in age from 40 to 50 years old; thus, it should be noted that the findings of this study are limited to the student perspective.

Further research should focus on the relationship between the level of interaction and other factors, such as social networking familiarity, time spent on Facebook, and numbers of teachers in a student's friend lists. Moreover, more research is necessary on the perceptions of student–teacher interaction on Facebook from the teachers' perspectives. There is also great need to carry out cross-cultural studies to understand the theoretical and practical levels of cultural factors and differences and whether they constitute considerable variables or key determinants. Further studies should concentrate on cultural factors that may affect learners' behaviors, such as their age, gender, ethnicity, and religion; their parents' educational and occupational levels; cultural diversity; social norms; socialization process; and learners' educational, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds and status.

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