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Pre-service EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards Language Learning through Social Media

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media. Additionally, the study attempted to explore the role of social media in their language learning experiences. The study was conducted with 120 pre-service EFL teachers. The data were gathered through a questionnaire. The findings indicated that pre-service EFL teachers regard social media as a regular component of their foreign language learning experiences. In the light of the results, it is recommended that teacher training programs involve some components concerning how to employ social media as a means of fostering interaction and communication among learners.

1. Introduction

Today, social media is a major part of our lives and a very large amount of people are spending many hours on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube* worldwide (Eren, 2012). The rise of Web 2.0 tools, which are described as the web-based services providing users visual, textual and interactive information, has made social media very popular all over the world (O'Reilly, 2005) and has caused researchers to examine the possibility of social media use in teaching and learning processes (Tılfarlıoğlu, 2011). It is claimed that social media has an enormous role for a high quality education corresponding to the social settings of learning and fostering critical thinking in students (Mason, 2006). There are even researchers suggesting that it has potential to change educational system completely, encouraging

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students for superior learning instead of being inactive participants of a classroom (Ziegler, 2007). Although social media is not directly intended for educational purposes, it has drawn attention from EFL teachers since it serves as an educational tool within the framework of foreign language learning. From a social constructivist perspective, foreign language learning is regarded not only as an individual but also a collaborative process and basic mental processes in foreign language learning are supposed to be facilitated through social media (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). According to Sekiguchi (2012), developing active language learning environment is the key element for supporting EFL learners and social media can be integrated into the EFL curriculum purposefully and appropriately in order to promote communities of learning in which EFL learners can participate on a regular basis. Moreover, social media can provide learners with richer mental images, thereby facilitating language learning as it can present material in more than one modality (Smith et al., 2003).

As social media platforms have ended the limitations of the physical world by offering unlimited communicative opportunities in the virtual world, they have become increasingly used to supplement language learning (Fewell, 2014). Today's language learners are responsive to utilizing such social media platforms as Social Networking Sites (e.g. *Facebook*), blogs/microblogs (e.g. *Twitter)*, collaborative projects (e.g. Wiki), content communities (e.g. YouTube), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In the EFL context, much research has been conducted on the learners' attitudes towards the educational use of social media. To begin with, the study of Razak and his associates (Razak et. al., 2013) revealed that the EFL learners perceive Facebook as an interactive learning environment which improves their writing skills, promotes learner-learner and learner-instructor interaction and develops a sense of belonging. Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012) found that EFL learners have positive attitudes towards employing Facebook to improve their grammar and writing skills. Having investigated EFL learners' opinions about the use of Facebook in a university language course, Yang (2013) found that the students have positive perceptions about Facebook as an interactive learning platform. According to the results of another study (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010), tertiary level students think that Facebook can be used as an online environment to assist the language learning process. In a recent study, Kanasin (2014) reported that the students have positive attitudes towards employing Facebook in their writing classes as the utilization of Facebook can increase their motivation. The study of Eren (2012) demonstrated that learners have a very positive attitude towards the application of Facebook to language teaching although conventional classroom based language learning still remains a backbone for language teaching. Aydın (2014) reported that EFL writers have positive perceptions about the utilization of Facebook as a portfolio tool although they believe that the process is tedious, time-consuming and demanding. İstifçi (2014) claimed that most of the students have positive opinions on employing Facebook for educational purposes. Atmaca (2013) also indicated that student teachers believe that integrating Facebook into educational settings is useful.

Blogs and microblogs have caught attention from foreign language teachers because they form an effective means of creating journals without calling for any ICT skills from learners (Wu, 2006). Wu & Wu (2011) mentioned that tertiary level students' opinions about the utilization of blogs in EFL learning are positive. In another study (Noytim, 2010), it was discovered that the learners perceive blogs as instruments for the improvement of their English with regard to writing, reading, vocabulary, and recording their learning experience. Similarly, Al-Fadda & Al-Yahya (2010) noted that graduate students have positive attitudes towards the utilization of blogs in pre-class preparation and post-class reflections. The study of İstifçi (2011) revealed that EFL learners find the idea of blogs as distant learning tools that are motivating, enjoyable and encouraging. Most recently, Twitter, as a popular microblog, has acquired the attention of educational practitioners and researchers (Borau et al., 2009). Sekiguchi (2012), for instance, pointed out that the learning community on Twitter helps EFL learners to maintain their motivation and regular learning routines. The results of another study (Fewell, 2014) demonstrated that the use of Twitter is believed to promote language learning and social cohesion.

Little research has been performed on the attitudes of EFL learners towards wikis. Chao and Lo (2011) reported on EFL learners' positive opinions about the wiki-based collaborative writing environment. The study carried out by Ducate et al. (2011) also showed that students consider wikis as valid and enjoyable learning tools. YouTube has been integrated into EFL classrooms in a wide range of implementations (Brook, 2011). In a recent study conducted by Silviyanti (2014), it was suggested that YouTube can be used as a material in listening class because it provides many benefits for students. Kuo (2009) noted that the utilization of YouTube videos offers a real native speaker setting and that YouTube offers opportunities to access audio-visual materials that may enhance EFL learners' listening comprehension skills. Moreover, it was reported that the use of YouTube encourages student motivation and improves

EFL learners' oral and aural skills. Second Life (SL) – an online virtual world that allows its users to interact and communicate with each other through their avatars – has emerged as a language learning environment (Aydın, 2013). Antoniadou (2011) found that prospective teachers have positive attitudes towards the implementation of SL in the classroom. In another study (Wang et al., 2009), it was found that EFL learners perceive SL as a beneficial and unusual language learning setting. The study of Balcikanli (2012) also revealed that EFL students regard Second Life as an online platform contributing to authentic interaction.

As social media has come to represent a significant place in the realm of foreign language teaching, it is assumed that the attitudes of pre-service EFL teachers towards social media may provide valuable information about the strengths and weaknesses of it and guide teachers in teaching activities and researchers in further research on the issue. Thus, the present study aimed to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media. The study also sought to determine whether independent variables such as gender, grade and frequency of social media use affect pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards the use of social media in language learning. Additionally, the study aimed at probing the role of social media in pre-service EFL teachers' language learning experiences. To this end, the following research questions were formulated to guide the present study:

1. What are pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?
2. What is the role of social media in pre-service EFL teachers' language learning experiences?
3. Does gender affect pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?
4. Does grade affect pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?
5. Does frequency of social media use affect pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?

2. Method

2.1. Setting and participants

120 pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in the English Language Teaching Department of a state university in Turkey in the academic year of 2014-2015 participated in the study. All of the participants were native speakers of Turkish with a mean age of 20 ranging from 18 to 35 years. Of participants, 87 (72.5%) were female and 33 (27.5%) were male. An equal number of students (30) from each grade level (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) participated in the study.

2.2. Procedures for data collection

In this quantitative research, the data were collected from a questionnaire designed by the researcher based on the review of the literature. Initially, the questionnaire was shown to three experts in the field who concurred that it is measuring what it intends to measure. Then, the questionnaire was piloted on 100 pre-service EFL teachers. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated as .83, which signified that the scale was reliable.

The questionnaire, which is composed of three sections, consists of 31 items in total. The first part of the questionnaire obtains demographic information (gender, age, and grade) from the participants. The second part investigates some information about their social media use. The last part of the questionnaire involves an attitude scale containing 22 items in a five-point Likert type and aims to measure the participants' attitudes towards language learning through social media. The questionnaire was administered to 120 pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in the English Language Teaching Department of a state university in Turkey in the academic year of 2014-2015.

2.3. Procedures for data analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed descriptively by way of IBM SPSS Statistics 21. Simple descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean scores and standard deviations) were tabulated to identify the pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards the use of social media in language learning. Then, the values of independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance were computed in order to detect the relationships between the independent

variables such as gender, academic year, frequency of social media use and the dependent variable, that is, pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media.

3. Results

3.1. What are pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?

Findings were interpreted on the basis of 1.00-1.79 "Totally disagree", 1.80-2.59 "Disagree", 2.60-3.39 "Neither agree nor disagree", 3.40-4.19 "Agree" and 4.20-5.00 "Totally agree". Table 1 shows the findings on the attitudes of the participants towards language learning through social media. As seen in Table 1, approximately all of the participants totally agree that social media can help them to develop their vocabulary knowledge (93.4%). Most of them believe that social media forms a more relaxed and stress-free language learning environment (85.8%). As for language skills, most of the pre-service EFL teachers agree that social media can help them to develop their reading (89.9%), communication (80.8%), listening (83.3%), writing (70%), speaking (66.7%) and pronunciation skills (60.9).

Table 1. The attitudes towards language learning through social media

Statements	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Totally Agree	Mean
	%(f)	%(f)	% (f)	%(f)	%(f)	
20. Social media could help me to develop my vocabulary knowledge	-	3.3(4)	3.3(4)	51.7(62)	41.7(50)	4.319
10. Social media forms a more relaxed and stress-free language learning environment.	-	2.5(3)	11.7(14)	44.2(53)	41.6(50)	4.247
15. Social media could help me to develop my reading skills	-	2.5(3)	7.5(9)	64.1(77)	25.8(31)	4.134
4. Social media provides learners with access to more real-life language use.	0.8(1)	8.3 (10)	5.8 (7)	46.7 (56)	38.3(46)	4.133
6. Learning a language through social media can aid me to improve my studies	-	5.8(7)	13.3(16)	48.3(58)	32.5(39)	4.075
21.Social media could help me to develop my communication skills	0.8(1)	5.8(7)	12.5(15)	47.5(57)	33.3(40)	4.066
17. Social media could help me to develop my listening skills	0.8(1)	7.5(9)	8.3(10)	52.5(63)	30.8(37)	4.050
9. Social media can make language learning more accessible	-	5(6)	10.8(13)	59.1(71)	25(30)	4.042
2. A language learner is more self-directed and flexible while employing social media	0.8(1)	4.2(5)	10.8(13)	65(78)	19.2(23)	3.983
11. Social media can assist me in becoming a more self-confident language user.	-	4.2(5)	25.8(31)	40.8(49)	39.2(35)	3.950
5. Using social media can help me to become a more motivated language learner.	1.7(2)	8.3(10)	12.5(15)	51.7(62)	25.8(31)	3.916
14. Social media can aid me to learn wherever I wish	5(6)	6.7(8)	46.3(55)	29.2(35)	23.1(6)	3,873
16. Social media can aid me to develop my writing skills	1.7(2)	7.5(9)	20.8(25)	52.5(63)	17.5(21)	3.764
7. Using social media in language learning can assist me to incorporate better into the world I live in	0.8(1)	12.5(15)	20.8(25)	42.5(51)	23.3(28)	3.745
3. Language learning is more collaborative when using social media	0.8(1)	10.8(13)	15.8(19)	60.8(73)	11.7(14)	3.716
18. Social media could help me to develop my speaking skills	0.8(1)	14.2(17)	23.3(28)	50(60)	11.7(14)	3.579
22. Social media could help me to develop my pronunciation	3.3(4)	21.7(26)	14.2(17)	39.2(47)	21.7(26)	3.541
12. Social media could help me to learn in ways matching my personality and needs	1.7(2)	15(18)	32.5(39)	40(48)	10.8(13)	3.440
19. Social media could help me to develop my grammar	4.2(5)	25(30)	21.7(26)	35.8(43)	13.3(16)	3.291
13. Social media can enable me to plan and organize my own studies better	3.3(4)	26.7(32)	27.5(33)	35.8(43)	6.7(8)	3.159
8. Social media can motivate me to persist in studying, even when I feel like giving up	10.8(13)	25.8(31)	21.7(26)	29.2(35)	12.5(15)	3.066
1. I am skeptical about the use of social media in language	22.5(27)	37.5(45)	18.3(22)	20.8(25)	0.8(1)	2.400

learning

According to them, social media gives language learners access to more authentic language use (85%) and helps them to improve their studies (80.8%). 84.1% of the participants believe that social media can make language learning more accessible. Moreover, a great number of the participants think that a language learner is more self-directed and flexible while making use of social media (84.2%). They also agree that social media enables them to become more confident in using language (80%) and that it can motivate them more to learn a language (77.5%). A little more than half of the participants believe that social media can help them to learn wherever they wish (52.3%) and learn in ways matching their personalities and needs (50.8%). Additionally, 72.5% of them regard language learning through social media as more collaborative than traditional learning and 65.8 % of them think that using social media for language learning can assist them to incorporate better into the world they live in. Lastly, 60 % of the participants have no doubts at all about the application of social media to language learning.

Although the pre-service teachers of English generally have positive attitudes towards language learning through social media, there are also some statements that they do not agree with. For instance, they disagree that social media can develop their grammar (50.9%). They also do not believe that social media can help them to plan and organize their own studies better (57.5%). More than half of the participants do not agree that social media can help them to persist in studying even when they feel like giving up (58.3%).

3.2. What is the role of social media in pre-service EFL teachers' language learning experience?

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 indicated that 45% of the pre-service EFL teachers regard social media as a regular component of their language learning experiences whereas only 3.3% of them claimed that social media has no role in their language learning experiences. 40.8% of the participants considered social media as an occasional addition to their language learning experiences. Moreover, 10.8% of the participants suggested that social media is the main medium for their foreign language learning processes.

Table 2. The role of social media in pre-service EFL teachers' language learning experience

The role of social media	N	%
Non-existent	4	3.3
An occasional addition	49	40.8
A regular component	54	45
The main medium	13	10.8
Total	120	100

3.3. Does gender affect pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to identify if gender has any effects on the attitudes of the pre-service EFL teachers towards language learning through social media. As seen in Table 3, the findings indicated that there was statistically no significant difference between males ($M = 81.30$, $SD = 8.68$) and females' ($M = 82.93$, $SD = 8.58$), $t(120) = -.925$, $p = .357$ attitudes towards language learning through social media. In other words, gender has no effect on the attitudes of the pre-service EFL teachers towards language learning through social media.

Table 3. The comparison of male and female pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	-t-	-p-
Male	33	81.30	8.68	-.925	.357
Female	87	82.93	8.58		

3.4. Does grade affect pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4 displayed that the seniors have the most positive attitudes towards language learning through social media, which was followed by freshmen, juniors and sophomores respectively.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics

Grade	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Freshman	30	84.93	8.16
Sophomore	30	78.63	8.01
Junior	30	81.33	8.71
Senior	30	85.03	8.21
Total	120	82.48	8.28

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was carried out to determine whether pre-service EFL teachers falling into different grades have different attitudes towards language learning through social media. There was a statistically significant difference at the p<.05 level in pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media for the four different grades: $F(3,117) = 4.17$, p= .008.

The results of the post-hoc comparisons made via the Tukey test demonstrated that the mean score for the sophomores (M=78.63, SD= 8.01) was statistically different from freshmen (M=84.93, SD= 8.16) and the seniors (M= 85.03, SD= 8.21). The mean score for the juniors (M= 81.33, SD= 8.71) did not differ significantly from the mean scores for the freshmen, sophomores or seniors.

Table 5. The comparison of the pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media in terms of grade

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Attitudes	Between Groups	859.500	3	286.50	4.177	.008
	Within Groups	7956.467	117	68.59		
	Total	8815.967	200			

3.5. Does frequency of social media use affect pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media?

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was performed to understand whether frequency of social media use affect pre-service EFL teachers attitudes towards language learning through social media. As seen in Table 6, there was statistically no significant difference at the p<.05 level in pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media for the frequency of social media use: $F(2,118) = .031$, p= .969. To put it differently, frequency of social media use has no effect on the attitudes of the pre-service EFL teachers towards the use of social media in language learning.

Table 6. The comparison of the pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media in terms of

frequency of social media use

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Attitudes	Between Groups	4.717	2	2.35	.031	.969
	Within Groups	8811.250	118	75.31		
	Total	8815.967	200			

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the study can be summed up in three topics: the attitudes of pre-service EFL teachers towards language learning through social media, the role of social media in their foreign language learning experiences and the relationships between attitudes and independent variables. First, pre-service EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of social media in language learning, which supports the previous research (Al-Fadda & Al-Yahya, 2010; Antoniadou, 2011; Aydın, 2014; Eren, 2012; Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012; Yang, 2013). They believe that social media can help them to develop their vocabulary knowledge (Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, & Abu-Melhim, 2014). They also believe that social media creates a more relaxed and stress-free language learning environment

(Wehner, Gump & Downey, 2011) and gives language learners access to more authentic language use (Kabilan et al., 2010). According to the pre-service EFL teachers, a language learner is more self-directed and flexible while using social media (Cephe & Balçıkanlı, 2012; McBride, 2009). They also agree that social media can make language learning more accessible. As for language skills, most of the pre-service EFL teachers agree that social media can help them to develop their reading (Aydın, 2014; Cheng, 2012), communication (Zainuddin et al., 2011), listening (Kuo, 2009), writing (Aydın, 2014; Cheng, 2012), speaking (Yen, Hou & Chang, 2013), and pronunciation skills (Fouz & Mompeán, 2012). Furthermore, they believe that social media helps them to improve their studies and enables them to become more confident in using language. They agree that social media can motivate them more to learn a language (Jethro et al., 2012; Ziegler, 2007). Lastly, they regard language learning through social media as more collaborative than the traditional learning and think that using social media for language learning can assist them to incorporate better into the world they live in (Ferdig, 2007; Tomassi, 2012). Although the pre-service teachers of English generally have positive attitudes towards language learning through social media, there are also some statements that they do not agree with. For instance, they disagree that social media can develop their grammar. They also do not believe that social media can help them to plan and organize their own studies better. More than half of the participants do not agree that social media can help them to persist in studying even when they feel like giving up. Second, most of the participants regard social media as a regular component of their foreign language learning experiences. Lastly, gender and frequency of social media have no effect on the participants' attitudes while grade affects their attitudes towards language learning through social media.

Given that pre-service EFL teachers perceive that social media can make significant contributions to EFL learning, some pedagogical implications can be noted. First of all, EFL learners can employ social media as a tool to enhance their basic language skills. EFL teachers should aid their students by converting social media, which is an entertainment platform, into an instructional tool. They can use social media in the process of foreign language teaching with constructivist teaching approaches. Second, from a socio-cultural perspective, social media creates a virtual setting for mental growth that is affected by society and culture of EFL students (Vygotsky, 1978). It also offers strong sources and a relaxed atmosphere for the acquisition and contextualization of linguistic knowledge. Moreover, foreign language teachers should use social media as a means of fostering student interaction and communication in the target language. Finally, as the use of social media in the language classroom is mainly affected by the teacher's exertions, both pre- and in-service EFL teachers should be trained on how to incorporate social media into their instructional practices.

As for the limitations of the present study, the participants were limited to 120 pre-service EFL teachers and the scope of the study was restricted to the descriptive data collected from the questionnaire. Further research may focus on other factors that may have an impact on pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards language learning through social media in different EFL contexts, with descriptive and experimental examination of the use of social media in foreign language teaching and learning. It may also focus on problems encountered in the utilization of social media for language education.

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