

Facebook as a Platform for EFL Learning: Critical Literacy in Social Networking Websites

Amirali Mohammadkhani

Ph.D. candidate, Payam-e-Noor University, Iran

Elaheh Mazinani

M.A. graduate, Allameh Tabatabai University, Iran

Elham Zandvakili *

M.A. graduate, Iran University of Science and Technology

Alireza Fard-Kashani

M.A. graduate, Iran University of Science and Technology

Abstract

Using Web 2.0 technologies like Social Networking has become an integral part of learning in many classes. This study tried to observe the effect of applying Critical Literacy in two classes, a conventional class at a university and an online class on Facebook as an example of a Social Networking websites. Findings proved that learners in the conventional class developed the three skills of questioning taken-for-granted concepts and redefining them, problem posing, offering solutions and suggestions. Results also revealed that students gained more motivation and improved their self-efficacy. Learners of the Facebook group showed similar skills and benefited from more improvement in their motivation and self-efficacy. Moreover, they showed signs of developing in the ability of reflecting on thoughts and comments far more than the other group. They also reported their increased empathy and tolerance because of the treatment.

Keywords: critical literacy, CALL, social networking, Facebook, online language learning

INTRODUCTION

The advances in technology and the rise of new forms of communication has led to the expansion of the definition of literacy to mean being able to produce and comprehend different “semiotic forms” (Luke & Dooley, 2011, p. 856). Based on this definition, speakers of different languages are expected to function in these different forms of communication to be considered literate. The definition of literacy does not stop to expand here. Many scholars maintain that users of a language should be able to actively

analyze texts and “transform relations of cultural, social and political power” (Luke & Dooley, 2011, p. 856). This ability is known as Critical Literacy (CL).

CL is valuable and necessary for language learners because it enables them to think critically and achieve equality and social justice. It also helps them to influence social transformation. CL is a way of thinking that helps learners to challenge what they read and ideas they take for granted in their everyday life (Ko, 2013). Advocates of CL believe that education is in constant interaction with different realities of the society (Moreno-Lopez, 2005). This will cause education systems to be influenced by the social structures. In return, they can also change the existing state of affairs. Additionally, Cummins and Sayers (1995) state that CL is centered round issues of power. Therefore, if it is desired to develop a CL curriculum, it should make learners see diversities and differences and help them to examine their own beliefs and assumptions. It should also make them gain new identities by taking social actions as they try to make a difference (Leland & Harste, 2004).

Advocates of CL hold the view that literacy is a social practice (Gee, 1999). For that reason, CL can be promoted when language is used in a social context. This idea corroborates Norton and Toohey’s (2004) view of the use of language. They contend that the use of language is a practice that construct, and is constructed by, language learners’ understanding of themselves, their social environments, their histories, and their possibilities for the future. Silvers and her colleagues also emphasize on the fact that meaning is constructed through using different kinds of texts and interaction between the users that happen in social contexts (Silvers, Shorey, & Crafton, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Abednia and Izadnia (2013), citing Freebody (2008), maintain that text has “ideological, moral, and political functions” (p. 338).

By considering the abovementioned fact about the social aspect of CL, it is essential to point that reading and writing practices are changing and a new set of literacies has been born. These literacies stem from the digital media and include onscreen reading, online navigation and research, hypermedia interpretation and authoring, and many-to-many synchronous and asynchronous communication (Chun, 2011). Moreover, Chun (2011) suggests that new online media have contributed to transformation of language and literacy.

It is essential to consider the fact that computers have become an indispensable medium of literacy and language use (Warschauer, 2001) without which some modes of communication would be absent in our language learning environment. It is also noteworthy that computer environments promote the development of sociocognitive literacy in different ways since they “have evolved to multi-modal means of expression and representation of information” (Kern, 2000, p. 259). Such environments encourage learners to work together and discuss social and cultural issues as classroom is not limited to people physically present in a classroom (Fey, 1998). Moreover, Ko (2013) asserts that a CL approach in EFL context is underexplored, and there are very few studies that tried to investigate the effect of using online communication on learners’ CL skills (e.g., Fey, 1998). Hence, this study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of

using Facebook, a social networking site (SNS), as a platform for second language acquisition on learners' CL.

LITRETURE REVIEW

Critical literacy

CL is a term referred to a set of pedagogic approaches that share a principle derived from ideas of Paulo Freire (1972), who considers language teaching and learning as a politically and culturally powerful act that can affect learners and their communities. KO (2013) also defines CL as a reading practice and a way of thinking in which ideas that are taken for granted are questioned and challenged. He maintains that from an epistemological point of view, knowledge in CL is ideological, meaning that knowledge is constructed by the discursive rules of each community and cannot be neutral. He continues to explain this phenomenon from an ontological perspective by stating that no knowable reality exists that can be perceived objectively based on which you can construct knowledge; on the contrary, he argues for realities that are constructed locally. In a similar vein, Cervetti, Pardales, and Damico (2001) comparing CL and critical reading, argue that CL has its roots in three different traditions, namely, post-structuralism, critical social theory and Freirean critical pedagogy.

AS Ko (2013) mentions in his work, there are very few studies on the issue of CL in an EFL context. One of the earliest examples of these works is a study conducted by Shin and Crookes (2005) carried out in two Korean EFL classrooms. Their main aim was to encourage learners to have critical dialogues and develop their English language skills at the same time. In order to do so, critically-oriented material was introduced to learners. Discussions made in class were recorded and analyzed alongside oral and written interviews with students and teachers, student class evaluations, and associated documents. Results revealed that learners are capable of handling critical dialogue in a foreign language. Based on their findings Shin and Crookes (2005) concluded that there cannot be only on critical pedagogy approach even in Korean context and the idea that Korean learners would be resistant to such approaches is just a myth.

In another study set in a Taiwanese university, Kuo (2009) used two picture books as the basis for the discussions in the class. In order to analyze the collected data, Kou used Lewison, Leland & Harste's (2008) model of CL instruction. In this model, CL instruction sees language and interaction as a process that starts individually, but meaning-making in language needs to move to the social level to get completed. Using this model, Kou tried to observe to what extent the goals of CL were achieved in the classroom. Findings showed using picture-books with social themes is effective in promoting learners' CL in specific themes. Findings also proved that in designing a CL curriculum, the movement should be from personal and cultural resources to critical stances. Moreover, Kou states that in teaching CL, teachers should not overlook the fact that the degree to which they apply the principles and aspects of CL is dependent upon learners' reception and readiness.

In a more recent study set in Taiwan, Ko (2013) conducted a qualitative case study on a college teacher experiencing CL teaching to students majoring in English in Taiwan. Using the data collected from classroom observation, class discussion and interviews, Ko realized that the teacher himself underwent some changes in his teaching beliefs. Drawing on the findings and observations, he suggested that since teachers play a vital role in teaching CL, teacher training courses should be designed so teachers' critical faculties and skills are developed. In the end, he made some pedagogical suggestions about keeping the balance between teaching linguistic skills and CL skills, using personalized and locally-oriented materials, providing abundant examples how to ask critical questions and how critical stances from different perspectives are adopted.

In Iranian context, that our study is set, Izadnia, & Abednia (2010) explored the effect of a CL approach on learners' personal development. They conducted their study in a reading comprehension class with 25 students at Allameh Tabataba'i University. They asked their students to bring their own reading texts to class and encouraged them to approach the texts from a critical perspective through group discussions, and asked their learners to keep reflective journals about the texts they brought to class. Thematic analysis of the collected journals revealed some specific topics and themes in which learners had developed self-awareness, improved their confidence and boosted their critical thinking ability. In the end, Izadnia, & Abednia strongly suggest that teachers take a CL approach in their teaching.

In another more recent study by these two researchers (Abednia, & Izadnia, 2013), they again used a reading comprehension class and sought to observe the effect of CL teaching on learning processes and outcomes of the reading course. This time, 27 freshmen studying at Allameh Tabataba'i University brought the texts of their own choice to class and discussions in a problem-posing manner were encouraged. The same types of data were collected from reflective journals and their group discussions. Findings revealed the development of the students' critical consciousness in different areas, namely, learners' way of writing about the topics; trying to capture the complexity of issues by contextualizing them, and "reconsidering their own previous conceptualizations of them" (p. 348).

Social networking sites as learning environments

Kamel Boulos and Wheeler (2007) believe that Web 2.0 as the second incarnation of web can be named Social Web due to the fact that users can contribute more to creation of contents and with their collective intelligence, a more democratic use is encouraged. SNSs as one of the examples of Web 2.0 sites provide numerous opportunities to conceptualize social groupings and interaction among people (Merchant, 2012). Their importance in people's everyday life is undeniable and even those who are tagged as 'refuseniks' (Willet 2009) are aware of the phenomenon they try to avoid. It is even suggested that the very nature of social interaction is influenced and transformed by SNSs (Halvorsen, 2009). Gunawardena and her colleagues also contended that using SNSs has formed a unique culture which blurs the boundaries between the virtual world and the real world (Gunawardena, Hermans, Sanchez, Richmond, Bohley, & Tuttle,

2009). Benkler (2006), in this regard, argues that people in their online networking activities 'reorganize their social relations in ways that fit them better' and 'loosen bonds that are too hierarchical and stifling' (p. 367). Pasfield-Neofitou (2007) also states that SNS users construct their identity through their textual behaviors, and effective language use and manipulation is important for learners. He also mentions that multimodality in such environments enables them to present themselves not by text and chat alone, but by using their photos, music, videos, and shared friend lists.

SNSs have a great potential to be used for educational and pedagogical purposes (McLeod & Vasinda, 2008), and more and more attention is directed toward their use in learning (Davies & Merchant 2009; Greenhow & Robelia 2009); however, fundamental issues at stake are still underexplored and very few scholarly studies have been conducted to tackle them (Merchant, 2012). Gunawardena and her colleagues in their study on creating a framework for building online communities of practice mentioned that learning theories present, namely, behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism, cannot fully explain the way learning occurs in Web 2.0 (Gunawardena et al., 2009; Mason & Rennie, 2008). They enumerate five phases in the process of learning in an online Community of Practice (CoP). They start with "context" believing that the process of making sense and creating collective intelligence starts in the context of SNSs. The second phase is "discourse" through which meaning is negotiated. The third phase, "action", is the initiation of the process of socially mediated cognition. The next step is "reflection" in which issues are viewed from different perspective and unfamiliar views are integrated. Schön (1990) also supports this by arguing that exposure to multiple perspectives enables users to reflect on their own learning and engages them in reflective practice that leads to the fifth phase of this process, reorganization. The whole process has an outcome, which is socially mediated metacognition, in which users as a CoP can mutually reflect on their reasoning and developmental process as a group (Gunawardena et al., 2009).

Halvorsen (2009) considers Web 2.0 technologies as means of constructing meaning through interaction between and amongst users. He enumerates benefits of such technologies for learners as motivation boost, creating environments for collaborative learning, providing situations for applying social constructivist approaches to education and finally in proving Critical Language Learning (CLL). In case of collaborative learning, it is believed that learners' self-efficacy can be effectively influential in their participation in collaborative discourse. The same idea is confirmed by Bandura (1997) who maintains that learners' perceived abilities i.e. self-efficacy, can determine their success.

Facebook as a learning environment

Facebook as one of the most popular SNSs available (Torgeson 2006) has proven as an environment with the potential of being used for teaching and learning. Bosch (2009) reports that not many studies are conducted on the possible academic uses of Facebook, and most of the studies available focus more on its social uses. Few studies that have covered the educational aspect of Facebook are mostly conducted in the U.S. For

instance, Hewitt & Forte (2006) conducted a survey about the relationships of students and faculty members on Facebook to understand how student perceptions of faculty were influenced by contact on Facebook. The result of the survey revealed that about one third of students believed that faculty members should not be present on Facebook. In another study, Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007) conducted a study on the relationship between the use of Facebook and student–professor relations. Participants mentioned that use of Facebook can have possible negative associations on teacher credibility.

Barnes, Marateo, and Ferris (2007) mention that some instructors have tried to integrate Facebook into their university courses. A professor of computer and information science at the University of Pennsylvania has used Facebook in order to teach concepts of social networking and to foster critical thinking. Bosch (2009) in her article on the use of Facebook by students at the University of Cape Town used a virtual ethnography and qualitative interviews as her data collection methods. Findings showed that students are more receptive of using SNSs for learning and they prefer them to conventional and traditional classes and methods of learning and teaching.

Social networking sites and critical literacy

In one of the rare studies conducted on the effect of networking on CL of learners, Fey (1998) investigated the effect using asynchronous computer networking on learners' CL in gender issues. The study showed that the online social networking can create a suitable environment for the practice of CL since it helped students to develop their voice in the presence of conflict. Findings also revealed that students felt more freedom in sharing their personal experiences. It was also mentioned that online social networking helped students to extend classroom borders, leading students toward thinking more deeply as they engaged in critical inquiry with diverse students.

Halvorsen (2009), in his study, examined how the use of MySpace SNS affected educators and second language learners in Japan. He focused mainly on Critical Language Learning (CLL) and related issues of identity formation, student empowerment, learner autonomy, and CL as they relate to the use of SNSs. Results showed that MySpace could be considered an effective tool for language development in Japanese context. Halvorsen suggested that other researchers try to measure learners' progress in their sense of autonomy, empowerment and identity. He also considered the absence of a comparison group as one of the limitations of his study. It should also be noted that Japan was used as the specific context of the study. Conducting the study in another context with a different culture and environment could lead to some insightful findings. Based on the presented arguments and points mentioned in the present section and the introduction, this study tries to answer the following question:

How does learners' use of Facebook as a platform for learning English affect their CL?

METHOD

Setting

This study was conducted with the help of participants in two different language learning centers. The first one was 'Shahid Rajaii University', an Iranian teacher training university, in which future teachers working for ministry of education study. These students had passed a screening process by the authorities of the university and most of them come from families with religious and traditional beliefs and background. The second group of students, who participated as the Facebook group studied in 'Safir Language Academy', a private language institute with more than twenty branches in Tehran. The two branches chosen for conducting this study are located in northwestern part of Tehran, which is a very wealthy neighborhood and most people are from economically well-off part of the society. The branches are segregated due to the regulations of ministry of Education and each branch is allowed to provide services to learners of only one gender; therefore, holding classes with the presence of male and female participants at the same time was not feasible at all; however, through encouraging learners to participate in our online class on Facebook we managed to have students of both genders at the same time. The participants' age ranged between 16-32. Most of the participants in the Facebook group were university students or international businessmen. Most of them had visited at least one foreign country and had the experience of using their language in a real-life context. Due to the specific context they live in, they came from different ideological backgrounds. Some of them believed in traditional values of Islam. Some other hold completely secular ideas and the rest showed ideas in between.

Data sources

In order to collect data for the purpose of the study, learners in the conventional class were presented with ten reading texts about different topics of interest to participants. Learners' topics of interest had been identified using a survey at the beginning of the term. Using the CL questions that were presented to learners, they started to discuss different issues related to the texts. These discussions were video-taped for transcription and analysis. After reading each text and the follow-up discussion, learners were asked to write a reflective journal entry proposing their ideas about the topic. These journals were also analyzed to collect data. At the end of the term, we conducted individual interviews with three of the participants to gain more insight about the findings.

In the case of the Facebook group, learners were again presented with the same ten texts in a closed group specifically for the purpose of this study. The CL questions had been emailed to them, and they could use it in order to discuss issues related to the texts. Most of the discussions in the Facebook group happened in the form of writing comments below each presented text in the group. There were a few online chats as well that our learners kindly allowed us to have access to their contents. Participants in this group also had a similar task of writing reflective journals, which were sent to us

using emails. Three participants from this group were also interviewed with the same purpose as that of the other group.

Procedure

Since this study attempts to investigate the effect of using Facebook as a platform for language learning on learners' CL skills, two groups are chosen. The first group consists of a class of upper-intermediate level studying English as their university major. Group 2 consists of people studying English at the same level; however, due to different reasons could not attend the classes at that particular term. Reasons include going abroad, living in another area of the city, and the conflict between the times of classes with their schedules.

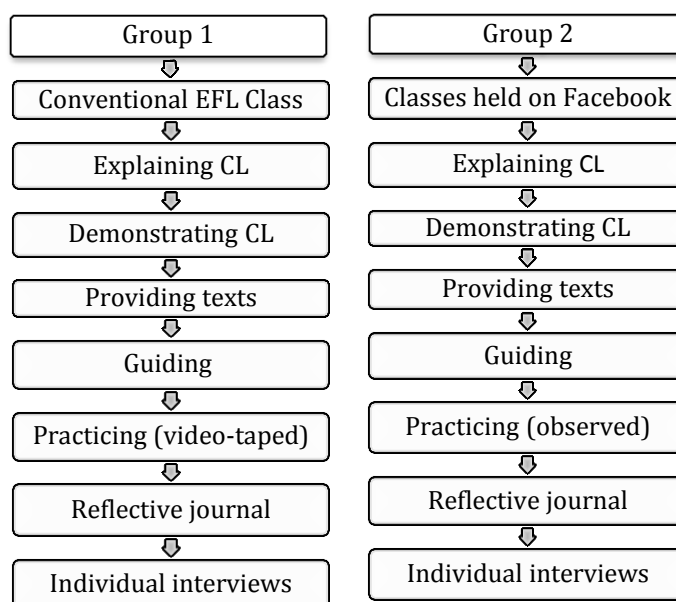


Figure 1. Data collection procedure

Students in group 1 attended their classes, and they were presented with ten different texts on different sessions. Learners of group 2 used Facebook as the platform through which the texts were presented to them. The teacher in both groups, using the suggestions of McLaughlin and Allen (2002) for taking a critical approach to teaching reading, used a five-step instructional framework. Different steps of the framework are explaining, demonstrating, guiding, practicing, and reflecting. First, being critically aware and literate was defined and elaborated to learners. Then, the teacher provided an instance of critical awareness by asking a critical question about a text and provided his idea about it. Then the teacher helped learners to form a critical perspective by asking questions. Since posing questions with critical perspective would be difficult at the beginning, learners were provided with examples of these questions. Next, they tried to answer these questions in group discussions. In this stage, the teacher also helped learners and guided them to think more critically. In the end, learners wrote a reflective journal entry that the teacher commented on both the contents and the language that was used.

At the end of the term, three learners from each group were individually interviewed and their ideas about the activities and how they have been affected by it were asked. All the data collected from recording of the discussion, written reflective journals and individual interviews were analyzed and the results will be presented in the next section.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The study was conducted in ten sessions, and it took about two months. The collected data was categorized and analyzed from three different sources and are going to be presented below. The sources were more than 200 minutes of recorded discussions in the conventional class and more than 500 comments on Facebook, 240 reflective journals entries, and six oral interviews.

Thematic analysis of recorded discussions, observed comments and reflective journals

Since thematic analysis could help us to interpret various aspects of the research topic, this method was used in order to find patterns within the recorded discussions and observed comments (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although Braun and Clarke argue that there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it, we used Abednia and Izadnia's (2013) depiction of thematic analysis, which is based on Braun and Clarke's (2006). First, by listening to the discussions and reading the comments we familiarized ourselves with data, looking for meaningful patterns to emerge. Then, based on our initial reading and listening of the contents, we searched for themes. Finally, the themes were confirmed and named.

Analysis of recorded discussions inside the class revealed three themes that are going to be discussed below. Analysis of the observed comments and discussions on Facebook also revealed three similar themes and one more theme that was less evident in classroom discussions.

Questioning taken-for-granted concepts and redefining them

One of the most important contributions of CL could be considered to be the development of an ability in learners to look at the world from other perspectives and questioning concepts that are taken for granted (Luke & Dooley, 2011). There is one step further than this questioning, and that is to redefine the concepts using learners' perception of the world. It is also essential to help learners in this process to consider as many aspects as possible in the new definition they want to provide. In our study, learners in both groups showed some signs of developing such ability. The examples of their comments are provided below.

- (Identity- conventional class) People always ask if you are an "Iranian Muslim" or a "Muslim Iranian" or ask about your race when they want to know you. God has created us as equals, so the race or religion should not be considered a separate part of our identity.

- (Happy or meaningful life- conventional class) The word “happiness” itself is an incomplete representation of what they want to show as a perfect life. Considering worldly joys and money as criteria for happiness is wrong.
- (Dreams- Facebook) Many people believe that our dreams are thoughts we sleep with or a vision of what happens in the future, but isn’t it true that dreams can be another life we live?
- (Happiness- Facebook) Sharing a picture in which a girl is crying because she did not get the exact iPhone she wanted for her birthday with a sentence under it asking “define necessity”.

In the first example, the student questions the idea of identity that was presented in the text and learners were discussing it and he tries to add the aspect of the origin of man’s creation as a way to redefine the concept of identity. In the second example that also happened in the conventional class, one of the learners stops comparing meaningful life and happy life. Instead, she questions the criteria with which happiness was measured and defined. This is a clear example of the learner’s development in looking at concepts from different perspective and questioning taken-for-granted ideas.

Similar behavior to the ones mentioned above was observed in our Facebook group discussions as well. The third example provided above is one of them. In this excerpt, learner is shown to think of dreams we have as another life. He continues to include other people’s experiences to prove his point, which shows development on other aspects of critical awareness; however, the fact that he could think of another meaning for dream is important here. The last example is of a different nature. Instead of responding to comments by other learners, one student shared a picture asking “what is necessary?” trying to change what people know as happiness. This instance is a brilliant example of Facebook’s potential to provide voice for people, and helping them to pose problems and change relations of power (Luke & Dooley, 2011).

Problem posing

One part of CL is to improve critical skills in looking at seemingly acceptable and normal situations and pose problems in them (Abednia, & Izadnia, 2013). Monchinski (2008) also argues that problem posing is of crucial importance in critical consciousness. Learners in both groups showed instances of problem posing and some of them are presented below.

- (Choices in life- Conventional class) We always focus on will power as something that determines what happens in our lives. What we call will power, does it really exist?
- (Public opinion- Conventional class) What we understand as public opinion comes mostly from media, there should be a way that media could affect people less.

- (Media- Facebook group) Hollywood presents a version of reality in which people cannot think, or let's say they don't need to think. This picture is far from reality we live in.
- (Identity- Facebook group) We always define ourselves based on the place we are born in and the language we speak with. Aren't these limitations on who we are?

In the first example taken from reflective journals of students in the conventional class, two learners made a very similar comment on how they think will power does not exist the way it was presented to them in the text. One of them questions the way the concept was presented, but he does not redefine the concept. Instead, he focuses on the consequences of thinking about will power as something absolute. In a classroom discussion, one of the students mentioned the second example provided above, asking the question of what we can do to mitigate the effect of media on people's perception and formation of public opinion.

In the first comment taken from our Facebook group discussion on the effect of media on people, one of the learners shared a music video with some links on the interpretations made about the video as an example of a point he wanted to prove. Based on evidence he had provided he accused Hollywood productions to be a distortion of reality. Providing the links as evidence and drawing on them to pose a problem is another unique feature that can be seen in SNSs that serves toward the development of CL. In another excerpt taken from one of the reflective journals, one of the students in the Facebook group asked the question of why people ask about your nationality or race to define you. Through asking this question, she tries to mention this fact that people sometimes have oversimplified and stereotypical view of who people really are.

Offering solutions and suggestions

Since one aspect of CL development is the ability to pose problems, inevitably, trying to offer solutions and taking actions would be another aspect of this skill (Kincheloe, 2008). The analysis of the data showed that learners in the Facebook group made more attempts to take actions through offering solutions or trying voicing themselves by sharing their opinions to the public they belong to. Examples of these efforts are provided below.

- (Media- Facebook group) Many people argue about decoding what is presented to us through music videos and such, but I believe that the best way is to avoid them. No matter what you do, watching them changes the way you see things.
- (Value of money- Facebook group) People always talk about how other things are more valuable to them but in the end their actions serves toward money-making and luxury lives. We should actively change the actions that show us to the world.

- (Value of money- Facebook group) Greatness is not measured by money or stature. It is measured by courage and heart.
- (Culture and religion- Conventional class) If we want to defend Islam from the attacks coming from western media, we should stop complaining and try to present the real face of Islam. Of course, we should first improve our knowledge of Islam.

The first example is an excerpt from a part of a comment made on a text about the effect of media on people. While other students were trying to point out how media manipulates your subconscious thoughts, he questioned the need to be exposed to media indiscriminately and then try not to be affected. Based on this argument, he suggested that not watching everything that is presented to us is a solution. Although to some people, this may seem like a radical argument, we should note that even such suggestion could be seen as a sign of critical awareness since different views were taken in to consideration and strong reasoning supported his idea. The second example is taken from one of the reflective journals, and it includes a learner's remarks about a text with the topic of lottery winning. In this journal entry, he condemns pretentious comments about value of love and friendship over money, demanding real changes in people's overtly expensive lifestyles. The last example from Facebook group was a picture shared by one of the learners stating that greatness is not measured by money. This example easily shows how learners who feel unvoiced can find equal state in discussions in SNSs. This claim can be supported by the comments of the same person in the interviews presented in the section allocated to reporting the interviews.

The only example provided from the conventional class was on a heated discussion over the role of religion in culture. Many of the learners believing that they are adherents to Islamic principles denied the role it could play in culture stating that the religion we have today has digressed drastically from "real Islam". That was when the presented comment was made to be a solution for the issue at hand.

Reflection on ones thoughts and comments

In our thematic analysis of data, we encountered some cases of explicit reflection on thoughts and comments by learners in the Facebook group. The reason we assume for this matter is that due to the discoursal nature of SNSs learners have the chance to look back at what they said more often than learners in the conventional class and see things from different perspective. Being exposed to different perspectives makes learners to be more reflective (Schön, 1990), and reflection is one of the steps in the process of learning in a Cop that finally leads to socially mediated metacognition (Gunawardena et al., 2009) that will result in more development of CL skills.

- (Choices in life- Facebook group) There is no choice in life presented to us. We always live predetermined events (Answering a comment comparing to very similar people with different choices in life) the way I

see it, you can put yourself in different situations in order to expect different results.

- (God- Facebook group) God has created us and we should obey Him.
(In another comment) the question is who can think of what are God's rules that we should obey? How should we interpret Quran to be on the right path?

In the first instance, one learner first commented about lack of choice in life. When he was presented different arguments and he could reread and reflect on his own claims and compare it to those of others, he could modify his claims through socially mediated metacognition. The second example shows a firm comment by one of the girls in the group which was modified to some extent by reflection on her own comment and others.

Overall, findings reveal that learners showed some examples of questioning taken-for-granted concepts and redefining them, problem posing, offering solutions and suggestions, and in the case of Facebook group, learners also showed signs of reflection on thoughts and comments.

Oral interviews

In order to triangulate the data and finding new perspective, six oral interviews were conducted at the end of the courses. Three of the interviews were with learners of the Facebook group and the other three with the learners of conventional class. The comments learners made revealed that applying CL in classes lead to boost of motivation, increase in self-efficacy, and in the case of Facebook group more sense of empathy toward others.

Motivation

As Halvorsen (2009) states, using SNS technology by nature leads to more motivation in learners and development of CL. Learners in the Facebook group showed this sense mentioning that having critically oriented discussions in environment of Facebook drove them to be more active in their participation in discussions. In order to have effective contributions to discussions, some of them had a lot of out-of-class reading and searching online sources to improve their reasoning in discussions. Learners in the conventional class also showed positive remarks about applying CL in class pointing out that it lead them to see class work more than “just practicing” and it caused them to appear more energetic and more guided in classes.

Self-efficacy

Learners’ beliefs about themselves and their abilities are really important, and education should lead people to achieve their potentials by making them believe in what they can achieve. As Bandura (1997) remarks, learners’ perceived abilities affect their behavior, and if learners are put in situations who can have a voice and build their

confidence they can improve themselves in other aspects. Our interviews also showed that applying CL in our classes made learners believe more in themselves. They mentioned “being asked to provide our own views of the world” and “providing solutions for problems” as things that caused them to feel more confident and worthy.

Empathy

In addition to other traits mentioned above, our learners in the Facebook group reported something that could be considered a sense of empathy toward others. They mentioned that seeing other people’s comments made them look at their pages and other aspects of their lives, which lead them to understand and appreciate them more. As a result, they had even developed a sense of tolerance that could be less evident among learners in conventional class.

CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to observe the effect of applying CL in two classes, a conventional class at a university and an online class on Facebook. Learners were instructed and familiarized with the concept of CL and asked to read some texts and discuss them through asking CL questions they were presented. They also wrote reflective journal entries on each topic they discussed and at the end of the term three students from each group were interviewed to share their experience with the researchers.

Findings revealed that learners in the conventional class developed three skills of questioning taken-for-granted concepts and redefining them, problem posing, offering solutions and suggestions. The interviews also showed that they benefited from boost of motivation and increase of their self-efficacy. Learners of the Facebook group showed similar skills and benefited from more improvement in their motivation and self-efficacy. Moreover, they showed signs of developing the ability to reflect on thoughts and comments far more than other group. They also reported their increased empathy and tolerance because of the treatment.

These findings clearly shows that applying CL even for a short time can affect learners critical awareness and make them more motivated and confident learners. Results also show that using Facebook as a platform for holding classes and language learning can increase learners CL skills by giving them more chances to voice themselves. However, in order to keep these desired effects learners should also be allowed to act upon their understanding in a more democratic reality that needs to be built by all the stakeholders in each society.

It be noted that learners from Facebook group came from a more educated and well-off background which may have affected the findings. Conducting a study with similar setting using learners from similar backgrounds could help researchers in the field to shed more light on the issue. In the end, the effect of CL in Facebook on younger learners could be another issue that is worth investigating since their understanding of SNSs is different from their elder counterparts.

REFERENCES

- Abednia, A., & Izadinia, M. (2013). Critical pedagogy in ELT classroom: Exploring contributions of critical literacy to learners' critical consciousness. *Language Awareness*, 22, 338-352.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Barnes, K., Marateo, R., & Ferris, S. (2007). Teaching and learning with the Net Generation. *Innovate* 3(4). Retrieved March 5, 2014, from <http://www.innovateonline.net>
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. London: Yale University Press.
- Bosch, T. E. (2009). Using online social networking for teaching and learning: Facebook use at the University of Cape Town. *South African Journal for Communication, Theory and Research*, 35(2), 185-200.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Cervetti, G., Pardales, M. J., & Damico, J. S. (2001). A tale of differences: Comparing the traditions, perspectives, and educational goals of critical reading and critical literacy. Retrieved April 7, 2014, from http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/cervetti/index.html
- Chun, D. M. (2011). Computer-Assisted Language Learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. II, pp. 663-680). New York: Routledge.
- Cummins, J., & Sayers, D. (1995). *Brave new schools: Challenging cultural illiteracy through global learning networks*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Davies, J., & Merchant, G. (2009). *Web 2.0 for schools: Learning and social participation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Fey, M. (1998). Critical literacy in school- college collaboration through computer networking: A feminist research project. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 30, 85 - 117.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Gee, J.P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London: Routledge.
- Greenhow, C., & Robelia, B. (2009). Informal learning and identity formation in online social networks. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 34(2), 119-40.
- Gunawardena, C. N., Hermans, M. B., Sanchez, D., Richmond, C., Bohley, M., & Tuttle, R. (2009). A theoretical framework for building online communities of practice with social networking tools. *Educational Media International*, 46(1), 3-16.
- Halvorsen, A. (2009). *Social networking sites and critical language learning*. In M. Thomas (Ed.), *Handbook of research on web 2.0 and second language learning* (pp. 237-258). London: Information Science Reference.
- Hewitt, A., & Forte, A. (2006). *Crossing boundaries: Identity management and student/faculty relationships on the Facebook*. Retrieved March 3, 2014, from <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~aforte/HewittForteCSCWPoster2006.pdf>
- Izadinia, M., & Abednia, A. (2010). Dynamics of an EFL reading course with a critical literacy orientation. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 6(2), 51-67.
- Kamel Boulos, M. N., & Wheeler, S. (2007). The emerging Web 2.0 social software: An enabling suite of sociable technologies in health and health care education. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 24, 2-23.
- Kern, R. G. (2000). *Literacy and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2008). *Critical pedagogy primer*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Ko, M. (2013). A case study of an EFL teacher's critical literacy teaching in a reading class in Taiwan. *Language Teaching Research*, 17(1) 91–108.
- Kuo, J. M. (2009). Critical literacy and a picture-book-based dialogue activity in Taiwan. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 10, 483–494.
- Leland, C., & Harste, J. (2004). Critical literacy: Enlarging the space of the possible. In V. Vasquez, K. Egawa, J. Harste, & R. Thompson (Eds.), *Literacy as social practice*. Urbana: IL: NCTE.
- Lewison, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J. C. (2008). *Creating critical classrooms: K-8 reading and writing with an edge*. New York: Erlbaum.
- Luke, A., & Dooley, K. (2011). Critical literacy and second language learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. II, pp. 856–868). New York: Routledge.
- Mason, R., & Rennie, F. (2008). *E-learning and social networking handbook*. New York: Routledge.
- Mazer, J. P., Murphy, R. E., & Simonds, C. G. (2007). I'll see you on Facebook: The effects of computer-mediated teacher self-disclosure on student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate. *Communication Education*, 56(1), 1–17.
- McLaughlin, M., & Allen, M.B. (2002). *Guided comprehension: A teaching model for grades 3–8*. Newark: International Reading Association.
- McLeod, J., & Vasinda, S. (2008). *Critical literacy and web 2.0: Exercising and negotiating power*. *Computers in the Schools*, 25(3-4), 259–274.
- Merchant, G. (2012). Unravelling the social network: Theory and research. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 37(1), 4–19.
- Monchinski, T. (2008). *Critical pedagogy and the everyday classroom*. New York: Springer.
- Moreno-Lopez, I. (2005). *Sharing power with students: The critical language classroom*. *Radical Pedagogy* 7. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue7_2/moreno.html
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2004). *Critical pedagogies and language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pasfield-Neofitou, S. E. (2007). Intercultural Internet chat and language learning: A socio-cultural theory perspective. *Learning and Socio-cultural Theory: Exploring Modern Vygotskian Perspectives*, 1(1), 146–162.
- Schön, D. A. (1990). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Shin, H., & Crookes, G. (2005). Exploring the possibilities for EFL critical pedagogy in Korea: A two-part case study. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 2, 113–130.
- Silvers, P., Shorey, M., & Crafton, L. (2010). Critical literacy in a primary multiliteracies classroom: The hurricane group. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 10(4) 379–409.
- Torgeson, K. (2006). *Facebook stirs uproar over online privacy*. The Johns-Hopkins Newsletter 9/21. Retrieved March 8, 2014, from <http://media.www.jhunewsletter.com>
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Warschauer, M. (2001). Millennialism and media: Language, literacy, and technology in the 21st century. *AILA Review*, 14, 49–59.
- Willet, R. (2009, March 2). *"It feels like you've grown up a bit": Bebo and teenage identity*. Paper presented at the ESRC Seminar Series. London School of Economics and Political Science, England.