TOWARDS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE (ESL/EFL) IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Evriklea Dogoriti
University of Ioannina
Greece

Abstract

This study seeks to determine the way EFL can be taught online, focusing on learners' needs and envisioning a web tool to meet the dynamic needs of today's foreign language students in higher education. Hence, this paper provides a discussion about the difference that the incorporation and integration of social networking platforms make to teaching with a LMS. To meet this end, the study investigated EFL university students' perceived beneficial value of the ICT tools used in the learning process in relation to (a) motivation (b) engagement (c) performance and (d) communication in a technology-enhanced language classroom.

Key words: instructional design, e-learning tools, social networks, English as a foreign language

Introduction

The contribution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) is widely acknowledged. The use of technology in teaching foreign languages has been increasing extremely over recent decades as it has revolutionized the approaches to teaching foreign languages. As a result of a plethora of new pedagogical and technological tools, new education practices have been developed to accommodate educational values and human diversity. Differences in learning styles have stimulated interest in how technology can help meet students' need to acquire foreign language competency. Learners carry their own individual approach and interests to the learning situation. The literature seems to suggest that students increasingly rely on social media and the web for their studies (Junco, 2011b; Davis *et al.*, 2012).Traditional-aged university students have embraced social media technology and are known as "digital natives" or "net generation" because such social media technology exchanges have been part of their entire lives (Prensky, 2001; Jones *et al.*, 2010). Given this insight, researchers explore more opportunities to seek creative ways to use social media technology in an effort to reach out to students and meet their needs. In that regard, understanding the use and the value of ICT tools used in the learning process can help educators revolutionize their approaches to teaching foreign languages and integrate technology in a meaningful way.

Integrating Technology in Foreign Language Instruction

- Technology integration is the use of technology resources- computers, mobile devices, videos, digital cameras, social media platforms and networks, software applications, the Internet among others- in daily

classroom practices. Successful technology integration is achieved when it helps supports the curricular and the students' goals, when students use it effortlessly and regularly and have easy access to it (Smith, 2007). The benefits of ICT integration in education have been extolled by many researchers and have been reported to:

- help students engage in academically purposeful activities, become autonomous in learning and support their collaborative linguistic skills (Dudeney&Hockly, 2007; Prensky, 2010).
- higher their levels of engagement (Davies, 2011)
- strengthen their ties to the educational institution(Anderson, 2007)
- Support student-centered and self-directed learning(Castro, Sánchez and Alemán 2011)
- Produce a creative learning environment (Chai, Koh and Tsai 2010)
- Offer more opportunities to develop critical (higher-order) thinking skills (McMahon, 2009)
- Improve teaching and learning quality (Gee, 2011)
- Support teaching by facilitating access to course content (Conole, and Alevizou, 2010)

Literature suggests that instruction using ICT should be viewed as an enhancement to the traditional way of teaching rather than a substitute for it (McLoughlin & Lee, 2014). Technology tools combined with appropriate instructional design can create a good learning environment that is motivational and can lead to effective language learning (Huang *et al.*, 2011). ICT mediation can foster the students' engagement in language learning (Kharade, & Thakkar, 2012). Digital tools can affect communication between students and educators, increase their engagement and interest in their studies and benefit their performance (Project Tomorrow, 2010). Aspects of student engagement are manifested through taking initiative and responsibility for learning, using resources, time on task, sharing information and pursuing learning beyond classrooms (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). These elements constitute what Brown (2000) calls "learning ecologies", in other words an environment for learning with the right tools that supports social learning.

Technology Resources and Online Foreign Language Learning

Social interaction is undoubtedly another element which shapes effective learning experiences (Dunleavy & Milton, 2009). The fact that students engage in the digital world makes the use of alternative methods of learning quite appealing. "Net Geners want more hands-on, inquiry based approaches to learning and are less willing to simply absorb what is put before them" (as cited in Barnes, Marateo, & Ferris, 2007, p. 23). Learning becomes as much social as cognitive as students explore and take their learning into a larger community beyond the classroom seeking relevant, meaningful, and authentic tasks (Willms, *et al.*, 2009, p. 34). As Oblinger & Oblinger (2005) state student engagement and motivation depend on building social connections between learners and making curriculum and instruction relevant to their experiences and targets. Claxton (2007) further suggests that learners engage in activities that are relevant to their field of study, give them the option to organise their study and are connected to reality. Barnes, Marateo, and Ferris

(2007a) refer to a list of multimedia tools- among others social networks, learning management systems (LMS), wikis, blogs-, that comprise the technological methods that can help students engage in their learning and construct knowledge. Learning with the help of Web 2.0 tools and Social media has positive impact on language learning making learning a collaborative and communicative process that can provide a more diverse custom made student experience through asynchronous environments. (Dogoriti & Pange, 2014; Clark &Gruba, 2010).The findings of studies show that online language learning and instruction through social media and LMS help learners learn autonomously and interact with peers and facilitators with online tools like e-mail, chat, formal lowing negotiation of meaning and knowledge construction (Felix, 2005; Dogoriti & Pange, 2014;). Nevertheless, LMSs are deemed by many as a teacher-centered tool using technology to deliver content to learners, since it is no one other than the teacher who decides on the material presented in the LMS course (David, 2013). Likewise, critiques on the use of social media tools like Facebook and Twitter in language teaching mainly focus on the fact that they can be used to foster socialization, interaction, cooperative learning, facilitate peer assessment and engaging learners in generating content which in turn help to enhance learners' motivation (Shih, 2011).Given the affordances of the LMSs and social media tools, like Twitter, Facebook or Edmodo a more flexible and customizable tool such as a personal learning environment (PLE) which could perhaps combine the best of both worlds needs to be explored. As Laru *et al.* (2012) argue the integration of multiple tools to support learning has not been extensively explored. Frédéric Cavazza's diagram below shows the multitude of tools currently available in online education.

Figure 1. Social Media Landscape

(Source: http://www.fredcavazza.net/2014/05/22/social-media-landscape-2014/)

Materials and Methods

The current research seeks to explore how social media tools and LMS can be employed to facilitate language learning. Moreover, it attempts to explore the characteristics which may increase learners' motivation and engagement and lead to better interaction between students and teachers. Moodle (Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) has been selected as the course management tool where the course material was uploaded. Moodle is one of the most widely-used learning management platforms in education and since 2010 it is constantly evolving with many new add-ons such as forums, wikis and chat rooms. It is underpinned by a social constructivist approach to learning incorporated into language learning and can be customized for delivery of language instruction (Wright & Wright, 2011). It provides a secure environment where students and instructors must log in to access resources in which to develop their knowledge, enabling language learning autonomy and knowledge scaffolding. In this study the students were also provided with multiple social media tools, namely Edmodo, Facebook, Twitter in addition to face-to-face activities for their language learning to maximize the benefits of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). A qualitative approach was taken to the research to measure the students' reaction to the use of multiple social media tools within an educational context. The focus of this study is on the subject of English language taught within the context of their academic methodology course at level C1-C2 in the department of English Language and Literature in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The participants consisted of 79 undergraduate students. The module was delivered over the winter semester 2014-2015. The students had three contact hours per week for this module in the context of their academic course. This module was not a mandatory component of the students' respective program, but was available as an elective module. Moodle was used as the platform for course administration and content delivery. The social media tools adopted in the course were Facebook, Twitter and Edmodo to facilitate communication. Students were asked to sign in a closed group in all three social media so as to ensure the privacy of the course content and the posts (Boyd & Ellison 2007).

They were then divided into three groups in order to use and assess each of the ascribed social network tool. A qualitative approach was taken to the research in order to examine the students' response to the use of multiple social media tools within an educational context. In addition, student reaction to the use of multiple social media tools was recorded in an online survey. Initially, students were asked to complete a pre-test to validate their language level. A mixed method (content analysis-questionnaires) was employed to measure the data: content analysis refer to the use and frequencies of the social media tools and the questionnaires to the students' beliefs, reflections, perceptions and attitudes regarding the benefits, experiences, and challenges about each of these technology tools. The questionnaire was structured in two major segments. The first segment aimed to explore and assess the motivation, engagement and communication of the participants while the second segment, aimed to seek the perceptions of the students on the SNSs particular tools for communication and information. Each set of questionnaires contained 30 questions regarding demographics, technology usage, tenure in the platform, satisfaction with the tools, motivation and communication. It contained a

combination of likert type, yes/no, closed ended questions. Gender and lists of student names were collected from the existing course.

Results

The first segment aimed to explore and assess the motivation, engagement and communication of the participants. As the results show in figure 2 students who used Facebook in their Moodle course found it makes the lessons more interesting (91%) followed by Twitter by a narrow margin (85%) and Edmodo (73%). The students' motivation for participation in class activities was enhanced most with Facebook use (89%) and a little less with Twitter (75%) and Edmodo (56%).

Figure 2: perceived degree of motivation
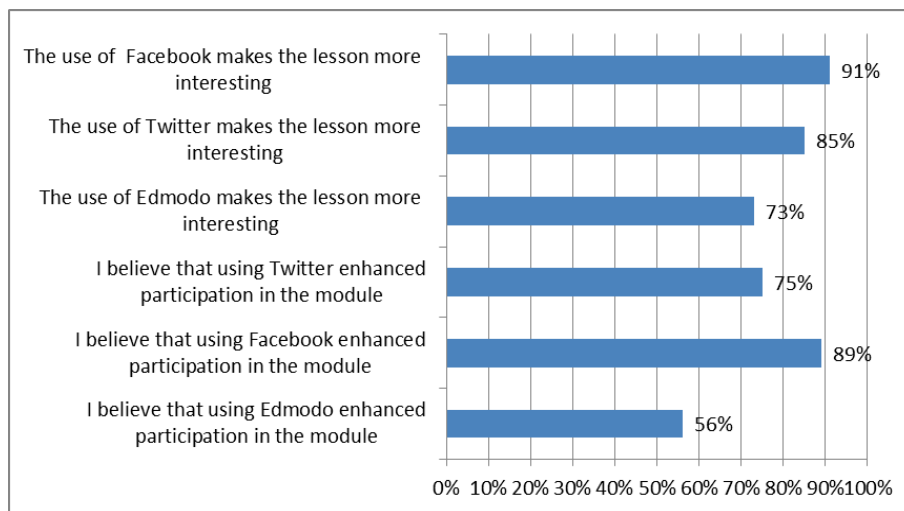
Participants were finally asked to rate communication among students and among students with their instructor (figure 3). The majority of students (89%) found Facebook a more convenient and easy means of communication. Others are more closely related to the use of Twitter for class communication (85%) and Edmodo at (51%). A total of 92 % of the participants responded that the overall amount of interaction with peers/ instructor increased when using Facebook whereas Twitter had a smaller rating (66%) and Edmodo (45%).

Figure 3: perceived degree of communication
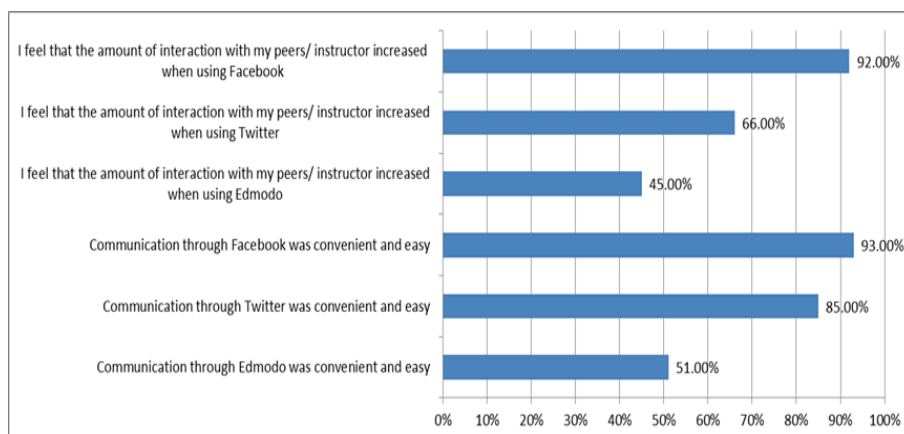
Likewise, Facebook remains the most highly rated social network (89%) concerning engagement in the module. Students felt that the use of Edmodo (71%) and Twitter (61%) in the classroom has enhanced ability to teamwork/ Collaboration skills (figure 4).

Figure 4: perceived degree of engagement
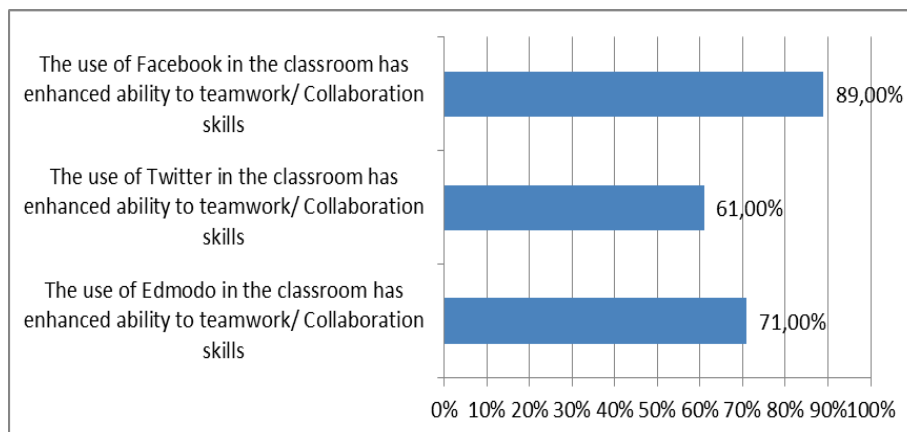
As far as performance in class goes (figure 5), results differ with the group who used Edmodo rating it higher than the other tools (51%) as having had a positive effect on grades or performance. Students indicated that Twitter has had no effect on their academic performance (31%) while Facebook users believed that it has affected their performance positively (45%).

Figure 5: Perceived Degree of Performance
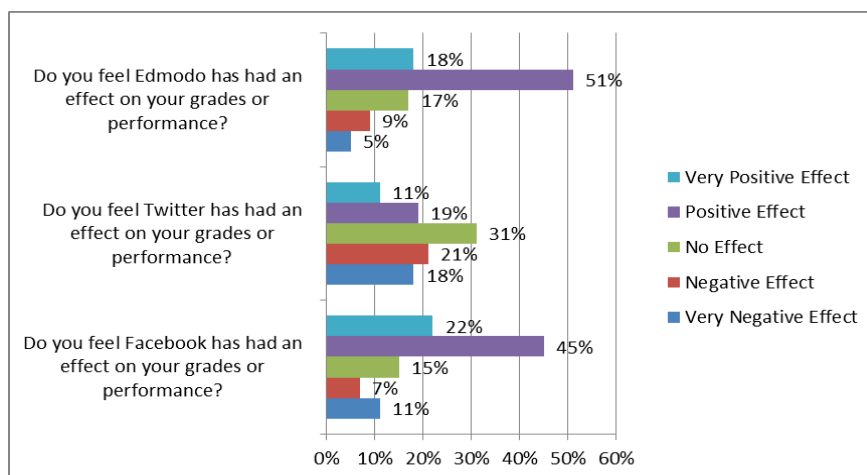
As far as the second section of the questionnaire concerns, the students' answers where combined with the usage data on the several tools, aiming to reveal a trend on which is the most preferable individual tool in the learning environment. More specifically, table 1 summarizes the tools of each SNS that were assessed.

Table 1: Individual Tool per SNS

	Facebook	Twitter	Edmodo
Student-student & teacher – student	YES	YES	YES

communication			
Information feed – Announcements	YES	YES	YES
Student assessment - testing	YES	NO	YES

For each of the aforementioned tools, the answers of the students were collected and statistically analyzed, as well as the actual usage data of the student groups. The results are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Results on Individual Tools

	Facebook	Twitter	Edmodo
Student-student & teacher – student communication	1. 75% of students responded that the chat module is easy to use 2. 431 posts were introduced during the semester on the Facebook group	1. 56% of the students responded that Twitter is appropriate for student – student communication 2. 35 tweets concerned communication between students or between student and teacher	1. 35% of the students responded that Edmodo's Forum is an easy to use module for student-student communication. 2. 19 posts on Edmodo forum were introduced
Information feed – Announcements	1. 81% of students responded that getting updates about class from Facebook is convenient 2. From total 10 announcements that the teacher introduced on Facebook, 130 acknowledgements were received	1. 92% of students responded that getting updates about class from Twitter is convenient 2. From total 10 announcements that the teacher introduced on Twitter, 183 acknowledgements were received	1. 41% of students responded that getting updates about class from Edmodo is convenient 2. From total 10 announcements that the teacher introduced on Edmodo, 71 acknowledgements were received
Student assessment - testing	1. 43% of students responded that running assessment tests using Facebook has helped them improve on the class 2. From total 8 test that the teacher introduced on Facebook, 151 submissions were received	NO	1. 89% of students responded that running assessment tests using Edmodo has helped them improve on the class 2. From total 8 test that the teacher introduced on Edmodo, 211 submissions were received

Concerning the aspect of communication (student-student & teacher – student communication in each tool), Facebook users (75%) replied that the chat module is easy to use1, (56%) of the students responded that Twitter is appropriate for student – student communication and (35%) of the students responded that Edmodo's Forum is an easy to use module for student-student communication. Tool usage analysis showed that 431 posts were introduced during the semester on the Facebook group, which makes the Facebook posts on the group's wall a more favourable means of group communication. There was a significantly smaller number of tweets (35) concerning communication between students or between student and teacher whereas 19 posts only were introduced on Edmodo forum. As for Information feed – Announcements (92%) of students responded that getting updates about class from Twitter is convenient stating a clear preference for the "tweet" feature for group interactivity. Respectively, (41%) of students responded that getting updates about class from Edmodo is convenient. From total 10 announcements that the teacher introduced on Facebook, 130 acknowledgements were received while from total 10 announcements that the teacher introduced on Edmodo, 71 acknowledgements were received. By contrast, 183 acknowledgements were received on Twitter making it seem as a more preferred means for Information feed – Announcements. With respect to student assessment - testing, (89%) of students responded that running assessment tests using Edmodo has helped them improve on the class as opposed to (43%) on Facebook while this feature is not available on Twitter. From a total of 8 tests that the teacher introduced on Edmodo, 211 submissions were received and 151 submissions were received on Facebook while this feature is not available on Twitter.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current survey indicated that students perceived that social media could enhance their learning experience. Depending on the distinctiveness of the tool, the findings indicate that such tools facilitate different aspects of perceived motivation. Engagement in tasks is driven by a perceived interest and gratification in the ICT tool. Students perceived that the use of social network tools may enhance interactional competences and collaboration which in turn may improve but not increase language competence. The qualitative data suggests that a more effective planning should be done in designing a learning environment which could accommodate the needs of learners and enhance learning. The results of the research point toward the need for a technological tool which would integrate the most preferred features of the existing popular social networks and be used effectively in language education. The time is ripe to explore more creative methods of learning and teaching (Dunn, 2013) with technology tools. Social media enhance the learning experience and must seek to meet student expectations and needs. The results of the study point towards a tool which offers an easy to use interface, enhances social interaction, assesses learning procedure and provides resource of information. These findings are in agreement with the findings of a former study which examined the perceptions and attitudes towards web-based English as a Foreign Language (EFL) among English teachers in Greece (Dogoriti, 2010). The findings of the current online survey suggested that the respondents had positive attitudes toward online learning

and expressed the pressing need for a student-friendly social network to supply web-enhanced English language learning.

Limitations

There are several limitations that should be acknowledged in this mixed research method and sample. One major limitation is the self-selection bias as the instructor used social networks that were more familiar to students. Participants might be biased toward a more positive outlook on the use of the particular social networks in their module. The findings shed light on usage of social media in teaching in one discipline in a Greek higher institution but cannot be generalized to other areas of higher education. Future research could focus on usage of social networks in other disciplines and possibly from other countries.

References

Anderson, P. (2007). What is Web 2.0?: ideas, technologies and implications foreducation: Citeseer, JISC technology and standards watch, February 2007,available online at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/techwatch/tsw0701b.pdf, accessed 11th March 2015.

Barnes, K., Marateo, R. & Ferris, S. P. (2007a). Teaching and Learning with the Net Generation. Innovate Journal of Online Education, 3(4). Reprinted in The Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University; Pennsylvania. Retrieved March 2015 from: http://www.innovateonline.info/pdf/vol3_issue4/Teaching_and_Learning_with_the_Net_Generation.pdf

boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13, 210−230.

Brown, J. S. (2000). Growing up digital: How the Web changes work, education, and the wayspeople learn. Change, March/April, 10–20. Also accessible at USDLA Journal, 6 (2)February 2015. http://www.usdla.org/html/journal/FEB02_Issue/article01.html

Castro Sánchez, J. J. and Alemán, E. C., 2011. Teachers' opinion survey on the use of ICT tools to support attendance-based teaching. Journal Computers and Education, vol. 56, pp.911-915.

Conole, G., and Alevizou, P. (2010). Review of the use(s) of Web 2.0 in Higher Education, HE Academy commissioned report, available online athttp://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/EvidenceNet/Conole_Alevizou_2010.pdf

Chai, C. S., Koh, J. H. L., & Tsai, C.-C. (2011b). Exploring the factor structure of the constructs of technological, pedagogical, content knowledge (TPACK). The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 20(3), 607-615.

Clark, C. & Gruba, P. (2010). The Use of Social Networking Sites for Foreign Language Learning: An Autoethnographic Study of Livemocha. In Proceedings of ASCILITE - Australian Society for Computers in

Learning in Tertiary Education Annual Conference 2010 (pp. 164-173). Ascilite.

Claxton, G. (2007). Expanding young people's capacity to learn. British Journal of Educational Studies. 55(2), 1-20

Davies, R. (2011). Understanding technology literacy: A framework for evaluating educational technology integration. TechTrends: Linking Research and Practice to Improve Learning, 55(5), pp. 45-52.

David, S. A. (2013). A Critical Understanding of Learning Management System. Management_System

Davis III, C.H.F., R. Deil-Amen, C. Rios-Aguilar, & M.S. González Canché. (2012). Social media and higher education: A literature review and research directions. Report printed by the University of Arizona and Claremont Graduate University. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/hfdavis/2/

Dogoriti, E. (Ed.). (2010). Proceedings from International Conference "ICT for Language Learning" 3rd Edition: Perceptions and attitudes towards Web-based ELT among English teachers in Greece. Greece. Retrieved from http://conference.pixel-online.net/ICT4LL2010/common/download/Proceedings_pdf/SLA24-Dogoriti,Pagge.pdf

Dogoriti, E., & Pange, J. (2014).Considerations for Online English Learning. In Mallia, G. (Ed). The Social Classroom: Integrating Social Network Use in Education (pp. 1-568). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-4666-4904-0

Dunleavy, J. & Milton, P. (2009). What did you do in school today? Exploring the concept of Student Engagement and its implications for Teaching and Learning in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Education Association (CEA), 1-22.

Dudeney&Hockly Nicky. (2007). How to Teach English and Technology. England: Stenton Associates

Dunn, L. (2013). Teaching in higher education: can social media enhance the learning experience?

Felix, U. (2005). E-learning pedagogy in the third millenium: the need for combining socialand cognitive constructivistapproaches. ReCALL, 17.1, 85-100.Dogoriti, E. (Ed.). (2010). Proceedings from Internatio

Gee, J.P., 2011. Language and learning in the digital age. New York: Routledge.

Huang, Y. M., Chiu, P. S., Liu, T. C., & Chen, T. S. (2011). The design and implementation of a meaningful learning-based evaluation method for ubiquitous learning. Computers & Education, 57(4), 2291-2302.

Jones, C., Ramanau, R., Cross, S., & Healing, G. (2010). Net generation or digital natives: Is there a distinct new generation entering university? Computers and Education, 54(3), pp. 722–732.

Junco, R. (2011a). The relationship between frequency of Facebook use, participation in Facebook activities, and student engagement. Computers & Education, 58, 162-71.

Kharade, K., & Thakkar, R. (2012).Exploring the Pedagogical Potential of ICT Mediation for Promoting Students' Engagement: A Social Constructivist Perspective.

Laru J., P. Näykki P. & S. Järvelä. 2012. "Supporting small-group learning using multiple Web 2.0 tools: A case study in the higher education context". The Internet and Higher Education, 15, 1: 29-38. DOI : 10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.08.004

Leaver (Eds.), An education in Facebook? Higher education and the world's largest social network (pp. 43–52). New York, NY: Routledge.

McLoughlin, C., & Lee, M. J. W. (2014). Beyond friending: Psychosocial engagement on Facebook and its implications for academic success. In M. Kent & T.

Mcmahon, G., 2009. Critical thinking and ICT integration in a Western Australian secondary school. Educational Technology and Society, vol. 12, pp.269–281.

Oblinger, D. & Oblinger, J. (2005). Is it age or IT: first steps towards understanding the net generation. In D. Oblinger & J. Oblinger (Eds), Educating the Net generation (pp. 2.1–2.20). Boulder, CO: EDUCAUSE. Retrieved October 30, 2010, from
http://www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgen

Parsons, J., & Taylor, L. (2011).Improving student engagement.Current issues in education, 14(1).

Prenksy, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. On the Horizon, 9(5), 1–6.

Prensky, M. R. (2010). Teaching digital natives: Partnering for real learning. Corwin Press.

Shih, R. C. (2011) Can Web 2.0 technology assist college students in learning English writing? Integrating Facebook and peer assessment with blended learning.Australiasian Journal of Education Technology. 27:5, 829-845.

Smith, F. (2007). How to Use Social-Networking Technology for Learning. Edutopia.Project Tomorrow, (2010).Learning in the 21st century: 2010 trends update. Irvine, CA: Author.

Willms, J. D., Friesen, S. & Milton, P. (2009). What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic and intellectual engagement. (First National Report) Toronto: Canadian Education Association

Wright, P., & Wright, G. (2011). Using Moodle to enhance Thai language learning: Instructor and learner perspectives. The Journal of Kanda University of International Studies, 23, 375–398

Author Details
Evriklea Dogoriti
dogoritievi@hotmail.com
dogoritievi@hotmail.com/ edogori@cc.uoi.gr