

FACEBOOK AS LOGISTIC SUPPORT TO LINGUISTIC INTERACTION

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Abstract. *New technologies provide significant logistical support to contemporary learning process, particularly in the field of university education. Students, as part of the youth population in the process of education, use new media technologies daily, among which an important place belongs to Facebook. Although Facebook is not characterised as a technology through which one learns, and is primarily used for communication and exchange of information, a number of research point to the importance of Facebook as a logistic support to the learning process. The main objective of the research was to determine students' opinions on how they use Facebook in learning and sharing information important to learn the German language in the process of university studying. The study included 120 students of Faculty of Philosophy, who learn German as a second foreign language. Data obtained from the research confirmed that students use Facebook to share information related to exams, to exchange translation and other specialised texts in German. As for study purposes, the results of the research show that students mostly use Facebook for information sharing in the field of experience exchange with older colleagues, and least for the exchange of scientific articles. Research findings indicate that the surveyed students recognised Facebook as a significant support in learning the German language. As a recommendation, the need for greater use of new media for learning and for providing adequate logistics of the learning process stands out, which is particularly important in the current reform of higher education.*

Key words: *Facebook, learning, information exchange, German language*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The higher education reforms are based on the improvement of the quality of teaching and the introduction of new teaching tools which contribute to the innovation of the learning process. In this context, the new media forms, which have significantly changed the process of learning foreign languages, occupy an important place. In the process of learning foreign languages, the new forms of media, and particularly computers, enrich the existing spectrum of the ways of learning and open new paths for the development of the linguistic competences of students. More recently, the attention of researchers has been directed towards the resources of the Internet, which, due to their technical characteristics, can have multiple benefits in foreign language learning.

For example, the study which investigated the effects of computer-mediated corrective feedback in writing proved that the students who used computer-mediated feedback achieved better scores on the tests in relation to the respondents who did not receive any feedback by using the computer. The obtained results go in favour of the opinion that the computer-aided learning of a foreign language gives positive results (AbuSeileek, Abualsha'r, 2014).

The application of new media technologies occupies a significant place in the development of interculturality, whereby telecollaboration stands out as the new possibility for the development of intercultural exchange through the Internet. In this context, the Internet represents a communication tool and means of support which enables mediation in the intercultural exchange (Lee, 2009; O'Dowd, 2007; Thorne, 2003). This is particularly important in the learning of foreign languages in the field of university education that seeks to globalize programs and engage students in dialogue with peers from remote parts of the world. It is believed that telecollaboration represents the potential which is not yet developed enough in the field of higher education, which is also confirmed by the results of the study conducted at European universities. Namely, the results of the survey on the sample of 23 European countries point to the positive attitude of the respondents towards telecollaboration, but also to numerous difficulties of organizational, temporal, technical and subjective nature (Helm, 2015).

Newer studies point out the significance of social network sites (*Language Learning Social Network Sites - LLSNSs*), that is, online communities with the specific purpose of encouraging cooperation among students in the process of learning foreign languages (Isbell et al., 2017; Osipov et al., 2015; Kramersch, 2014). The existence of these sites enables students to use specifically designed tutorials in order to apply what they have learned in school, through dialogue with native speakers from around the world. In this case, the computer serves as a support to the process of foreign language learning, which enables the receiving of instructions and the communication itself. The advanced academic communities have initiated specialised sites for learning foreign languages (*Livemocha, iTalki, Lang-8, Hello-Hello, Duolingo, Palabea*) which enable learning of a desired language for more than 13 million international users (Lin et al., 2016). Although this represents a large number of users, there are few studies which could confirm the effects of such learning of foreign languages; therefore, the results of studies which indicate high potentials of social networks in the achievement of positive linguistic interaction are valuable (Garcia, 2013).

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH REVIEW

In essence, Facebook is an online social network through which individuals can exchange information. At first, Facebook was used in academic circles; therefore, first users were students and their professors who discovered innovative methods of communication and learning through new technologies (Kwong, 2007). Afterwards, it was realised that Facebook had high potential when it came to educational programmes.

Today, Facebook represents one of the most popular social networks used by students (Lempe et al., 2006; Gass, 2003). Students use Facebook for different purposes, mostly with the aim of establishing contact and exchanging various information; however, it is less known that it can be used in formal and informal learning (Madge et al., 2009). As a social network which is widely used by students, Facebook has the potential to become an important support in the process of learning foreign languages (Akbari et al., 2015). Although its role within the domain of education has been recognised, research studies show that this social network is still being used less in university education in relation to more traditional technologies such as e-mail, when it comes to information exchange (Roblyer et al., 2010).

However, few research studies confirm that Facebook is a valuable resource for the support of educational communication among students, which offers a model how social networks can be used for the purpose of education and learning foreign languages (Aydin, 2012). The rising popularity of Facebook among the student population (Stanisavljević Petrović, Pavlović, 2016) has motivated university professors to think about the possibilities of online networking of educational activities. The networking of educational activities through social networks has high potential for the advancement of the quality of teaching and foreign languages learning, especially in the section referring to the provision of support to the interaction between students and professors. The study which was conducted at certain Malaysian and Australian universities confirmed the existence of a larger number of positive outcomes in those situations in which students establish an online interaction with their professors. The findings of the study support the attitude that social networks improve communication and interaction among students themselves, and are beneficial for the student-professor relation (Hamid et al., 2015).

A survey conducted in the United States shows that faculty involvement in on-line interaction through Facebook can contribute to improving academic achievement and student communication. The results of this research indicate that there are significant effects which arise from good communication between students and professors, primarily referring to meeting the expectations of students, availability of professors, their professionalism and credibility (Sarapin, Morris, 2015).

A positive role of Facebook in the development of independent learning and critical thinking of students is indicated by the studies which have found the positive effects of the use of new media in higher education (Richards, 2015; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Shih, 2013). Namely, it has been determined that the use of blogs, e-portfolios and Facebook has multiple benefits due to the feedback, the development of collaborative model of learning and the quality which enable reflection (Mason, 2006).

The advantage of Facebook as support in learning lies in the informal way of connecting students and the exchange of educational interactions, which emphasises its learning potentials outside the formal education. The results of the study conducted at a university in Mexico, with the aim of exploring the benefits which the students can obtain by using Facebook, indicate that this network is a very valuable tool in the process of

learning. It is believed that Facebook contributes to the improvement of the learning process, improves communication and interaction and helps students in their professional development (Pérez et al., 2013). Similarly, a study conducted in Malaysia, on a sample of 300 university students, confirmed a notable role of Facebook in learning English as a foreign language. The results of the study show that students believe that Facebook can be used as an online environment, which makes the learning of the English language easier and more accessible. Besides these findings, the study indicated the need for greater integration of Facebook into the institutions of higher education, as well as the significant role of professors who create a learning environment whose aims and outcomes are planned in advance (Kabilan et al., 2010).

Previous researches promote the opinion that Facebook represents a meaningful environment which can be used as a support to the learning process and the strengthening of competencies in the area of foreign languages learning. The following research focuses on the population of students and shows their perceptions regarding Facebook as the support in the process of German language learning.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this research is to determine whether students recognise and use the advantages of Facebook regarding the exchange of information which refer to the learning of the German language (i.e. exchanging their experiences in the learning of the German language, exchange of information regarding exams, exchange of translations and other specialised texts).

The research uses a descriptive method and a scaling technique, as well as a Likert-type scale as the main instrument for data collection. The *research instrument* was specifically constructed for the needs of this study. The reliability of the instrument is tested by Cronbach's alpha method, whose value meets the criteria of reliability, since α is 0.847, which indicates that the instrument is relevant for the needs of the research. For the purpose of this paper 10 items were analysed - the ways of using Facebook in the process of learning German as a foreign language.

The sample of the research is planned and it includes a total of 120 students from the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Law of the University of Niš, who are learning German as their second foreign language. Depending on the year of studies, the characteristics of the sample are as follows: 36 students, i.e. 30% of respondents, attend their first year of studies; 21 students, i.e. 17.5%, attend the second year; 25 students, 20.8%, attend the third year; while the number of students who attend the fourth, senior year of their studies is 38, i.e. 31.7%. The research was conducted during the academic year of 2015/2016 at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Law in Niš, with the students who learn German as a foreign language.

The collected data have been processed by using the SPSS 19 software. The processing and interpretation of the data has been done by a quantitative method, and descriptive statistics have been used for statistical calculations (frequencies and percentages).

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained by the research, shown in Table 1, indicate to what extent the students agree with the claims which describe the way they use Facebook as the means of the exchange of information important for the learning of the German language during their studies.

Taking into consideration a larger number of items, the presentation and the analysis of the obtained results are conducted by distributing all items into 5 main categories which have emerged after creating groups which contain similar claims. The first category includes items referring to the exchange of experiences, that is, the claims which have the aim of examining the opinions of students about the use of Facebook for the exchange of experiences regarding the German language learning. In the Table 1, those are the first and the second item, which refer to the exchange of experiences with older colleagues regarding the study materials, the list of the previous most important exam questions, etc. The results of the research indicate a high level of agreement – 43.3% completely agree and 20.8% partly agree for the first claim, and, somewhat larger, 47.5% completely agree and 30.8% partly agree, for the second one. Using the analysis of the obtained results, it can be concluded that the students use Facebook to a great extent in order to exchange experiences with their older colleagues, as well as to collect important exam information from previous examination periods.

Table 1 Facebook as the means of exchanging information important for the learning of the German language during one's studies

Facebook enables:	Total	1*	2	3	4	5
1 Exchange of experiences with colleagues regarding the exams from previous examination periods	120	52 (43.3%)	25 (20.8%)	4 (3.3%)	17 (14.1%)	22 (18.5%)
2 The exchange of experiences with older colleagues	120	57 (47.5%)	37 (30.8%)	7 (5.8%)	13 (10.8%)	6 (5.1%)
3 The exchange of previous exam question	120	70 (58.3%)	12 (10%)	0 (0.0%)	38 (31.7%)	0 (0.0%)
4 The exchange of information regarding the exam schedules	120	69 (57.5%)	12 (10%)	1 (0.8%)	37 (30.9%)	1 (0.8%)
5 Discussion about the exam results	120	43 (35.8%)	38 (31.7%)	10 (8.3%)	10 (8.3%)	19 (15.9%)
6 The exchange of scientific papers with colleagues	120	32 (26.7%)	19 (15.9%)	13 (10.8%)	28 (23.3%)	28 (23.3%)
7 The exchange of translations of certain texts	120	34 (28.4%)	21 (17.5%)	12 (10%)	27 (22.5%)	26 (21.6%)
8 The exchange of information useful for the learning of the German language	120	52 (43.3%)	22 (18.5%)	17 (14.1%)	25 (20.8%)	4 (3.3%)
9 The exchange of information regarding the pre-exam requirements	120	73 (60.9%)	21 (17.5%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (10.8%)	13 (10.8%)
10 Obtaining information about professors	120	34 (28.4%)	20 (16.7%)	8 (6.7%)	29 (24.1%)	29 (24.1%)

*Legend: I agree completely-1; I partly agree-2; I neither agree nor disagree-3; I partly disagree-4; I disagree completely-5

The second category consists of the items which contain opinions on the use of Facebook for exchange of concrete and recent *information about exams* (items 3, 4 and 5: questions,

time and date of exams and results). The obtained data supports the fact that students mostly use Facebook in order to inform themselves about previous exam questions, which explains the percentage of agreement with the given claim, which is 58.3% - completely agree, and 10% - partly agree. To a somewhat lesser extent, 57.5% - completely agree, and 10% - partly agree, the students agree with the claim that through Facebook they exchange information about examination schedules. Facebook is also used for commenting on the results obtained after the exams: 35.8% - completely agree, and 31.7% - partly agree. The analysis of the obtained data confirms that the high percentage of students agrees with the claims which refer to the use of Facebook for exchange of information about exams. The data have confirmed our expectations, since the students have expressed a high level of agreement with the statements, which, again, shows that Facebook is one of the favourite mediums of the young when it comes to the exchange of information of any kind. The exchange of information about the exams is very important for learning, in the sense that it provides help for good organisation of the learning process and distinguishing relevant from irrelevant facts in the learning material. The exchange of information also provides a kind of psychological support which strengthens self-confidence of the young, and assurance that they are well prepared for the exam. Furthermore, the exchange of information is significant, especially for students with lower academic achievement and with whom it can have the role of giving direction and guidance throughout the learning process.

The claims marked in the Table 1 by numbers 6 and 7, referring to the exchange of papers and translations of specialised texts in German, make the third category. The level of agreement for the claim on the exchange of specialised texts is 26.7% - completely agree, and 15.9% - partly agree, which is even less than a half of the entire tested sample, whereby somewhat larger agreement – 28.4% - completely agree, and 17.5% - partly agree is indicated for the following item – *I exchange translations of certain texts with my colleagues through Facebook*. It can be said that the results obtained through the analysis of these claims are as expected, because students largely use Facebook for the exchange of information, while the exchange of texts or translations can be done by using other media tools. However, the obtained results show that less than a half of the students use Facebook for the needs of exchanging the study material for the German language exam, which, in the era of digital media, cannot be considered as satisfactory.

The fourth category includes items which refer to the learning process: *I exchange with my colleagues plenty of information useful for learning through Facebook* and *we exchange information about pre-exam requirements for the German language course through Facebook*. Based on the answers of respondents, it can be stated that the levels of agreement for the above-mentioned claims are 43.3% - completely agree, and 18.5% - partly agree and 60.9% - completely agree, and 17.5% - partly agree, respectively. The results imply that the surveyed students use Facebook in order to exchange information with their colleagues which refer to the learning of the German language, which implies that the students recognise the importance of Facebook, that is, the information they receive in this way, as being useful to the process of learning German. A larger percentage of the questioned students believe that Facebook is important before the exam preparation, that is, during the fulfilment of pre-exam requirements for the German language course. Variations in the answers of respondents are understandable, because pre-exam requirements are mostly individual papers, so students are not certain about the writing style, grammar, translation of some words or understanding the text.

The fifth category consists of only one item which refers to *obtaining information through Facebook about professors*. The level of agreement is as follows: 28.4% - completely agree, and 16.7% - partly agree, while 24.1% partly disagree, and 24.1% disagree completely. Although the obtained results indicate that students exchange information about professors, a somewhat larger percentage of respondents disagrees with this claim. This data can be explained by the need of students to provide socially accepted responses, although the information about professors does not necessarily have to have negative connotation. Namely, the exchange of information about professors refers to the familiarity with the personality, professionalism and behaviour of the professor in situations such as, for example, the exam situation. Such information can be important for students during the process of preparing for the exam, as well as during the exam. According to previous researches, the characteristics and behaviour of professors significantly determine the academic achievement of students, therefore, having this information can also be noteworthy from the students' perspective (Çakir, Bichelmeyer, 2016; Buabeng-Andoh, 2012).

If the abovementioned claims are observed separately, it can be concluded that the students of the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Law use Facebook mostly as the means of exchanging information regarding experiences with older colleagues, and less for the exchange of specialised texts.

5. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the data obtained by this research it can be concluded that students recognise and use the advantages of Facebook in the exchange of information referring to the learning of the German language. The data obtained by the research have also confirmed assumes that students use Facebook with the aim of exchanging the experience about learning German. Namely, according to the research data, more than a half of students use Facebook for the exchange of experiences with older colleagues and peers about different ways of learning.

Most often, the subject of exchange is information that refers to the examination schedule, questions from previous examination periods and exam results. An interesting fact is that students are mostly interested in exchanging information which refers to exam questions and achieved results, while the fact that students are less interested in exam schedule probably comes from the fact that students are informed in time about the exam schedule and the mode the exam.

The research data have also confirmed that students use Facebook for exchanging translations and other specialised texts. However, based on the data, it can be concluded that less than a half of the students use Facebook for exchanging study material about the German language course, which certainly cannot be considered as satisfactory.

On the whole, it can be concluded that students recognize and use many of the benefits that Facebook offers in the area of information and study material exchange for learning German. However, the use of Facebook for the purpose of learning within the given population has still not been exploited enough, which is also indicated by other researches (Mueller-Frank, 2013; Veletsianos, Navarrete, 2012; Cheung et al., 2011). In this context, certain systematic measures and solutions need to be undertaken, in order for the extent to which new media is used in higher education to get closer to the developed European countries.

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FEJSBUK KAO LOGISTIČKA PODRŠKA LINGVISTIČKOJ INTERAKCIJI

Nove tehnologije pružaju značajnu logističku podršku i potporu savremenom procesu učenja, posebno u delu univerzitetskog obrazovanja. Studenti, kao deo populacije mladih u procesu obrazovanja, svakodnevno koriste nove medijske tehnologije, među kojima značajno mesto pripada Fejsbuku. Premda Fejsbuk nije prvenstveno označen kao tehnologija putem koje se uči, već je prvenstveno namenjen komunikaciji i razmeni informacija, veći broj istraživanja ukazuje na značaj Fejsbuka kao logističke podrške procesu učenja. Osnovni cilj istraživanja je utvrđivanje stavova studenata o načinu korišćenja Fejsbuka za saznavanje i razmenu informacija značajnih za učenje nemačkog jezika u procesu studiranja. Istraživanjem je obuhvaćeno 120 studenata Filozofskog i Pravnog fakulteta, koji uče nemački kao drugi strani jezik. Podaci dobijeni istraživanjem potvrdili su da studenti koriste Fejsbuk u cilju razmene informacija vezanih za ispite, za razmenu prevoda i drugih stručnih tekstova na nemačkom jeziku. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da studenti najviše koriste Fejsbuk kao sredstvo za razmenu informacija u domenu razmene iskustva sa starijim kolegama, a najmanje za razmenu stručnih članaka. Zaključci istraživanja ukazuju da ispitani studenti prepoznaju Fejsbuk kao značajnu podršku u učenju nemačkog jezika. Kao preporuka izdvaja se potreba za većim korišćenjem novih medija putem kojih se uči, kao medija koji pružaju adekvatnu logistiku procesu učenja, što je posebno značajno u aktuelnoj reformi visokog obrazovanja.

Ključne reči: *Fejsbuk, učenje, razmena informacija, nemački jezik*