

# Facebook as a Tool in University English Language Education

## Jolita Šliogerienė

Professor  
Mykolas Romeris University,  
Faculty of Politics and Management,  
Institute of Philosophy and Humanities,  
Address: Str. Ateities 20, LT-08303 Vilnius,  
Lithuania  
E-mail address: j.sliogeriene@mruni.eu

## Marjan Masoodi

Lecturer  
Mykolas Romeris University,  
Faculty of Politics and Management,  
Institute of Philosophy and Humanities,  
Address: Str. Ateities 20, LT-08303 Vilnius,  
Lithuania  
E-mail address: marjan.masoodi@mruni.eu

## Dalia Gulbinskienė

Assistant lecturer  
Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences,  
Faculty of Philology,  
Department of the English Language Didactics,  
Address: Str. Studentų 39, LT-08106 Vilnius,  
Lithuania  
E-mail address: dalia.gulbinskiene@leu.lt

**Abstract.** *Over the past several years, there has been an explosion in the availability and widespread use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This study evaluates the potentially relative effectiveness of Facebook as one of the most popular social networks applied for the development of English language skills, fostering metacognitive awareness and promoting learner autonomy by Lithuanian intermediate EFL learners in university settings. To this end, 63 intermediate EFL learners were questioned to express their beliefs about the use of Facebook and to assess their views on the improvement of language skills and motivation in English language learning, fostering their metacognitive confidence, attitudes and sense of autonomy towards English language learning. The research revealed that applying Facebook by learners improves their language skills and promotes their sense of autonomy.*

**Key words:** *learner autonomy, Facebook, metacognitive awareness, online learning, social networking sites (SNS).*

## 1. Introduction

Technology is more and more integrated into society's norms. It is well known that social networking tools have become a way of life for people of all ages and provide a means of communication that is

highly accessible to users across the globe. In addition, they allow users to participate in a collaborative form of knowledge construction, because they provide tools for creating and sharing information with others through the exchange of profiles,

conversation, photos, and videos. Educators are realizing that with the popularity and social nature of Facebook, there are numerous ways to integrate it into foreign language courses to encourage target language production. Today's so-called "Net Generation" students are connected, digital, and highly social. Therefore it is essential that educators design the curriculum with these characteristics in mind. This curriculum should be derived from social and student-centered views of learning, which are best suited to tap into the collaborative nature of the students. In addition, Facebook platform offers the potential to access real-world resources that enable more diversified participation in the process of knowledge construction and rehearsal.

This study analyzes relative effectiveness of Facebook as one of the most popular social networking sites (SNS) in the world on the development of English language skills, fostering metacognitive awareness and promoting learner autonomy in university studies. The relevance of the topic is revealed by several aspects.

First, learner autonomy has been a major area of interest in academic teaching and learning for recent decades. Much has been written about what learner autonomy is, the rationale for promoting it, and its implications for teaching and learning in university studies. In terms of its rationale (Benson, 2011; Holec, 2008) claims have been made that it improves the quality of language learning, promotes democratic societies, prepares individuals for life-long learning, that it is a human right, and that it allows learners to make best use of learning opportunities in and out of the classroom. During this period of time

the concept 'learner autonomy' has been given a wide interpretation and its ambiguity is still there, it means both the way of learning and the qualitative inclusion of a learner into university studies. According to Šliogerienė and Suchanova (2009), autonomous student means a learner who has trust in himself/herself and desires to acquire strategies and knowledge to take some responsibility for his/her learning. The term 'autonomy' is a rather wide concept. It means an individual's desire and ability to carry out, control, evaluate and project his activity upon mastering the tactics and strategy of autonomous learning, as well as the basics of its autodidactics (Šernas, Šliogerienė 2006). Although the theme is not entirely new in educational research, the relevance of social networks to language skills, metacognitive awareness and autonomous learning and teaching has not been properly assessed.

Second, many students come to the university with limited study skills, overdependence on the teacher for their learning, lack of motivation and having fixed curriculum. Because of the timid and obedient nature of some students, students' individual differences and needs are often ignored, students are not used to raising questions in front of classmates and not go to the teachers to clarify their doubts about the teachers' corrections out of class. Most researchers agree that motivation plays a vital role in the learner's achievement, it is often attributed to the capacity to override other factors, such as language aptitude, to affect achievement in both negative and positive ways (Šliogerienė, 2013). There has been much research done to reveal the correlation between language learning motivation and learning outcomes from

the point of view of ability to self-regulate studies. Thus, using social media such as Facebook could help to develop learners' self-regulation and become autonomous in language learning. Therefore, we need to equip students in the way that enable them to use Facebook to foster metacognitive awareness, become more effective learners and support the promotion of autonomy in them.

The aim of this study is to investigate if using Facebook can develop students' awareness and promote their sense of autonomy, foster their metacognitive confidence towards English language learning in the university setting.

**The object** of the research is EFL education at university level.

**The material** of the current research is the data of 63 sampled questionnaires about the use of Facebook in fostering language learners' metacognitive awareness and promoting their autonomy. The survey consisted of 15 statements with 2 possible answers presented for the students either to agree or disagree with the statements. In autumn 2015 the questionnaires were submitted to the first-year students of different study programmes between the ages 18 to 25, doing Professional English course at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences and Mykolo Romerio University. The data of the 63 sampled questionnaires was analysed, calculated and submitted in the article.

**The aim** of the research is to disclose the relevance of Facebook in developing language skills of EFL students at university level.

**The objectives** of the present paper are 1) to discuss the importance of Facebook in language learning, 2) to investigate if

Facebook can develop language skills of EFL students.

The following **methods** were used for the current study:

1. Scientific literature analysis was used to provide some theoretical background to the problem.
2. The quantitative analysis helped to find out the frequency of factors about Facebook that are considered useful by EFL students.

## 2. Review of literature

A lot of literature on autonomy in learning now exists, with Holec (2008) commonly cited as a seminal contribution to the field. To start with definitional matters, Holec's (2008) early and still influential definition of learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning and hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning including determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition and evaluating what has been acquired. As Benson (2011) notes that in this definition 'ability' can be replaced with 'capacity' and 'take responsibility for' or 'take control of' with 'take charge of'. He also includes the notion of 'willingness' to stress the point that irrespective of their capacity, learners' autonomy will not be promoted unless they are willing to take responsibility for their learning. On the other hand, Thomas (2014) specifies that independent learning is undertaken outside contact hours, but contributes to course-specific learning outcomes. Independent learning is undertaken by students, either on their own or with others, without direct input from teaching staff.

Metacognitive awareness, a vital concept in learning, means learning about learning. Learners' knowledge about themselves as learner and their learning task are crucial component of metacognitive awareness. Metacognitive awareness is thoughts about thoughts, knowledge about knowledge, or reflections about actions. In short, metacognitive awareness is the regulation of cognition. That is, learners need to link metacognitive awareness with what they know (declarative), how they will use the knowledge (procedural), and when and why they can use the knowledge (conditional) (Chamot 2008). Fostering metacognitive awareness helps students to create meaningful long life learning goal (Benson, 2011; Holec, 2008) that can be monitored and evaluated. Fostering metacognitive awareness requires students to think effectively about their own thinking in relation to a given task. In fact, all the students need to foster metacognitive awareness to perform autonomously. The fostering of students' metacognitive awareness, or their ability to understand and regulate their own thinking and learning which leads to learners' mastery and autonomy, has been urged by a number of researchers (Chamot, 2008).

In the last two decades, researchers have attempted to prove that making students metacognitive learners is beneficial not only in general learning but also in specific subject areas such as reading, writing and communication. They have also attempted to discover different ways that students need to be equipped with in order to gain metacognitive awareness and make metacognitive judgments and choices. (Zhang, 2007). Berthold et al. (2007) and Nückles et al. (2009) showed in their papers that appropriate prompts in the

classroom foster metacognitive awareness in students. Using prompts in the form of questions by Berthold et al. (2007) showed that they had a very large effect on fostering metacognitive awareness and promoting autonomy. As suggested by the researchers, if students are convinced about the usefulness of metacognitive awareness and sense of autonomy, the impact of prompting is likely to be bigger.

### 3. Findings and discussions

As can be seen in Table 1, the general opinion of the students is that they agree Facebook can be an online learning environment to foster students' metacognitive awareness and consequently promote sense of autonomy in them by learning how to learn, giving choices in decisions, evaluating their own learning with the conscious and unconscious teacher teaching. Moreover, Facebook can facilitate English language learning in terms of students' improvement of language skills and communication, students' motivation, confidence and attitudes towards English language learning.

100% of the respondents admit that they practice reading in English when using Facebook. Almost all the respondents (95%) believe that Facebook enhances their confidence to read in English. More than a half of the students (60%) believe that they learn autonomously when they can freely choose the kinds of activities they do on Facebook, e. g. read and write comments, post photos or watch videos, etc. This finding reflects certainty among the learners here about the role of teachers' co-operation, instruction and interaction which plays in promoting learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is most strongly associated with 'learning to learn' as the

*Table 1. Students' perception of Facebook as an online English language learning tool*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Practice reading in English	100%	0%
Enhance my confidence to read English material	95%	5%
Learn new words in English	91%	9%
Make learning English easier	91%	9%
Make learning English more interesting	87%	13%
Have a more positive attitude toward learning English as a foreign language	82%	18%
Enhance my English communication skills	82%	18%
Develop my ability to evaluate my own learning	78%	22%
Enhance my motivation to read English material	73%	27%
Enhance my confidence to write in English	73%	27%
Enhance my confidence to communicate using English	69%	31%
Practice writing in English	69%	31%
Tolerate language mistakes	69%	31%
Promote my autonomy when I have some choice in the kinds of activities I do	60%	40%
Enhance my motivation to write in English	60%	40%

learners' views are well aligned with this literature. Actually, the majority of the students agree that Facebook could be used to promote their sense of autonomy by learning how to learn. Students need to develop an awareness of the learning process and strategies that lead to success. This awareness of one's own thinking processes is termed metacognition or metacognitive awareness. Students who reflect on their own thinking processes such as planning how to proceed with a learning task, monitoring their own performance on an ongoing basis, finding solutions to problems encountered, and evaluating themselves upon task completion. These metacognitive activities may be difficult for students accustomed to having a teacher who solves their learning problems and is the sole judge of their progress. Teachers need to encourage students to rely more on themselves and less on the teacher (Šliogerienė, Suchanova, 2005). In this context learning motivation plays a vital role, the more mo-

tivated learners are the more likely they would have an individual desire to study autonomously. This intrinsic motivation leads to the development of language skills on one's own. Several studies have proved that intrinsically motivating activities and attractive tasks lead to better learning (Liuolienė, Metiūnienė, 2006).

The students' positive views and opinions regarding Facebook as a social network to facilitate English language learning can be explained by the fact that social networks, such as Facebook, provide authentic interaction and communication that the students might not have experienced before. Such positive experience could then lead to "increased confidence in language acquisition and a sense of connectedness" among the students (Wang & Chen, 2007, p.6). It allows and facilitates the necessary of interactions with a teacher that improves learning. As such, the students in this study are able to experience the improvement of their language and

thus attest to the aptness of Facebook that could facilitate English language learning.

Most of the students are of the opinion that Facebook could boost their confidence to write, read and communicate in English, 73%, 95% and 69% respectively. The respondents use English on Facebook, applying English for practical purposes which are governed by linguistic rules, focusing on the experience of both meaning and mechanics of language learning. This finding is consistent with Lankard (1995), who stressed that in this type of learning, “the primary intent of the activity is to accomplish the task, not to learn” (p. 5).

Over 73% of the students agree that Facebook could be an environment for enhancing students’ motivation to read, write and communicate in English. The most convincing explanation for such a finding may come from the research of Haverback (2009, p. 1) of her own students that took charge and directed their own learning, and quite similarly, students in the current study portrayed similar self-directed learning. Moreover, the fact that the learners who study through Facebook get more motivation is consistent with the general trend observed in the notion of Gass and Selinker (2008) of affective learning and students’ motivation as a “strong predictor of success in language classes” (p. 21).

82% of the students believe that their communication on Facebook has inculcated a more positive attitude towards learning English as foreign language. This view can be most probably because of using various activities, quizzes, online games that make the students to have a conscious effort to understand and learn the language and learning new vocabulary through discovering and looking for the meaning in the dictionary. This finding is in

line with with many of the previous studies’ findings on vocabulary learning in an ICT-based learning environment (Shahrokni, 2009).

According to Šliogerienė (2006), current needs towards foreign language learning do not require short-term knowledge. Rather they require flexibility and higher order thinking skills which are a part of metacognition.

Blattner, and Fiori (2009) regard the need for an audience as a “sense of belonging”, which Facebook can easily and effectively enhance, while simultaneously “offer constructive educational experiences while maintaining privacy and safety” (p. 25). Kitsis (2008) also suggests that perhaps too much weight has been placed on serious academic writing in classroom contexts, and less attention has been given to this type of informal probing and testing of ideas (like in Facebook), “where much of the best thinking occurs” (p. 31). As such, the students feel at ease (less pressured) on Facebook. The above findings expound and substantiate Blattner, and Fiori (2009) claim that Facebook is a “powerful learning tool that is not only built of synchronous and asynchronous technologies that has transformed learning but has also extended the reach of those communicative tools” (p. 19).

## **Conclusions and implications**

Having overlooked the theoretical sources, it seems that the rise of social media use emphasizes the central importance of the learners and their attitude to learning. Students’ positive attitude leads to autonomous actions to discover new ideas, study without any pressure. Facebook appears to be one of the most attractive tools nowadays to construct our own syllabus in order to project future results.

Using Facebook can engage students in meaningful language-based activities. Based on the data collected by the students in this study, Facebook as a supplementary virtual learning tool could be utilized as a great opportunity for students to facilitate the learning of English. However, it can not totally replace the class attendance and real lecturing of the teachers. We must not get our teachers to stop lecturing and start just allowing students to learn by themselves. Perhaps, with Facebook, the students will explore and become managers of their learning of English with the help of their teachers.

The teaching of metacognitive skills is a valuable use of instructional time for an English language teacher. When learners reflect upon their learning strategies, they become better prepared to make conscious decisions about what they can do to improve their learning. Strong metacognitive skills empower language learners to take actions autonomously.

## REFERENCES

- Benson, P. (2011). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Longman.
- Berthold, K.; Nückles, M.; Renkl, A. (2007). Do learning protocols support learning strategies and outcomes? The role of cognitive and metacognitive prompts. *Learning and Instruction*, Vol. 17(5), pp. 564–577.
- Buzzetto-More, N. (2012). Social networking in undergraduate education. In C. Cheal, J. Coughlin, & S. Moore (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge & Management*, Vol. 7, pp. 63–90. Available at: <http://www.ijkm.org/Volume7/IJIKMv7p063-090Buzzetto611.pdf> [accessed 22 02 2016]
- Chamot, A.U. (2008). Strategy instruction and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from good language learners*. Cambridge: Language Teaching Library, pp. 166–281.
- Guerra, L. (2012). Digital Networks in Language learning: Instant Messaging and the Practice and acquisition of Writing skills in Pixel. *ICT for Language Learning, Conference Proceedings*, Padova: libreriauniversitaria.it, Webster s.r.l., pp. 161–164.
- Holec, H. (2008). Foreword. In T. E. Lamb & H. Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and teacher autonomy: Concepts, realities, and responses* (pp. 3–4). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Yunus, M. M.; Salehi, H. (2012). The effectiveness of Facebook groups on teaching and improving writing: students' perceptions. *Journal of Education and Information Technologies*, Vol. 1 (6), pp. 87–96. Available at: <http://www.naun.org/journals/educationinformation/17-538.pdf>
- Kabilan, M. K.; Ahmad, N.; Zainol Abidin, M. J. (2010). Facebook: An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education? *Internet and Higher Education*, Vol.13(4), pp. 179–187.

We can say when learners use Facebook, it motivates them. And, the more motivated the learners are, the more autonomous they are which affects their ability to learn the language better. The link between autonomy and motivation is well-established at a theoretical level. Moreover, learners are more committed to it when they can identify what they are doing because they have decided it. Also, if the learners understand why they are doing something, then they are going to be more motivated, and more willing to do what's necessary to reach their goals.

We can conclude that the learners must be given a lot of freedom to develop their own style and to take responsibility for their own learning. Learners should not depend exclusively on the teacher for their learning outcomes. As a matter of fact, Facebook is a very relevant tool for a teacher to help students to be more independent and develop their own strategies.

Lockyer, L.; Patterson, J. (2008). Integrating social networking technologies in education: A case study of a formal learning environment. In: *8th IEEE International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies*, Santander, Spain, 1–5 July 2008.

Liulienė, A.; Metiūnienė, R. (2006). *Second Language Learning Motivation*. Šiaulių universitetas: Filologija.

Means, B. et al. (2009) Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning. *A Meta-analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies*, U.S. Department of Education, Center for Technology in Learning.

Nakatsukasa, K. (2009). The efficacy and students' perceptions of collaborative blogging in an ESL classroom. In C. A. Chapelle, H. G. Jun, & I. Katz (Eds.), *Developing and evaluating learning materials* (pp. 69–84). Ames, IA: Iowa State University.

Narasiman, S. (2007). An analysis of the effects of explicit reading strategies instruction on the comprehension achievement and metacognitive knowledge of ESL students. *Journal Penyelidikan IPSAH*, pp. 54–75.

Nückles, M.; Hübner, S.; Renkl, A. (2009). Enhancing self-regulated learning by writing learning protocols. *Learning and Instruction*. Vol. 19(3), pp. 259–271.

Sarivan, L.; Singer, F. M. (2010). New Media for Better Teachers – The Story of Masterprof in Petroleum Gas University of Ploiesti Bulletin. *Educational Sciences Series*, Vol. LXII. No. 1A/2010, pp. 153–161.

Sarivan, L. (2011). *Homo Zappiens Challenges Language Education*, Available at: [http://www.pixelonline.org/ICT4LL2011/common/download/Paper\\_pdf/ILT67-342-FP-Sarivan-ICT4LL2011.pdf](http://www.pixelonline.org/ICT4LL2011/common/download/Paper_pdf/ILT67-342-FP-Sarivan-ICT4LL2011.pdf).

Sarivan, L. (2012). Cultural Stereotypes in a Constructivist Approach: Language Graduates Use ICT to Understand their Cliches in Pixel. *ICT for Language Learning, Conference Proceedings*, Padova: libreriauniversitaria.it, Webster s.r.l., pp. 141–146.

Selwyn, N. (2009). Faceworking: exploring students' education-related use of Facebook. *Learning, Media and Technology*, Vol. 34 (2), pp. 157–174. Available at: <http://blogs.ubc.ca/hoglund/files/2011/05/facebook.pdf> [accessed 14 12 2015]

Šernas, V. (2006). *Glotoedukologija*. T. 2. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla.

Šliogerienė, J.; Suchanova, J. (2005). The Necessity for Development of Metacognitive Skill at Tertiary Institutions. *Tiltai*, Vol. 3(32), pp. 77–82.

Šliogerienė, J. (2006). The Register of Progress in Self-Directed Language Learning. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, Vol. 17, pp. 179–187.

Šliogerienė, J.; Masoodi, M.; Gulbinskienė, D. (2016). *Moodle as Virtual Learning Environment in Developing Language Skills, Fostering Metacognitive Awareness and Promoting Learner Autonomy*. Vilnius: Pedagogika (Iteikta spaudai).

Veen, W.; Vrakking, B. (2006). *Homo Zappiens. Growing up in a digital age*. London: Network Continuum Education.

## FACEBOOK KAIP ANGLŲ KALBOS MOKYMO UNIVERSITETE PRIEMONĖ

Jolita Šliogerienė, Marjan Masoodi, Dalia Gulbinskienė

### S a n t r a u k a

Šis tyrimas įvertina santykinį *Facebook*, vieno iš populiariausių socialinių tinklų, veiksmingumą, formuojant EFL studentų anglų kalbos įgūdžius universitete, skatinant studentų savarankiškumą ir metakognityvų sąmoningumą. Siekiant šio tikslo, pirmo kurso studentams, pasirinkusiems profesinės anglų kalbos kursą universitete, buvo pateiktas klausimynas, tiriantis jų nuomonę apie *Facebook* naudą gerinant kalbinius įgūdžius, besimokančiųjų motyvaciją, pasitikėjimą savimi, savarankiškumą mokantis anglų

kalbos. Straipsnyje apibrėžiamos metakognityvus sąmoningumo, besimokančiųjų autonomijos sąvokos ir analizuojami socialinių tinklų pranašumai, studijuojant užsienio kalbą. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad bendraudami *Facebook* socialiniame tinkle besimokantieji gerina savo kalbinius gebėjimus, skatina savo metakognityvų informuotumą ir savarankiškumą.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** besimokančiojo autonomija, metakognityvus sąmoningumas, *Facebook*, mokymasis internetu, socialiniai tinklai.

*Iteikta: 2016 04 20*

*Priimta: 2016 05 11*