

Japanese University Students’ Attitudes toward and Usage of Facebook in English Classes: The Implications

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Social media use has risen rapidly in recent years and has now spread to nearly 50% of the world’s population (Worldometer, 2020), with 2.45 billion monthly active users globally and rising year-on-year (Statista, 2019a). However, while the social network service (SNS) application pool has grown tremendously in the last decade and a half, research output has unfortunately not kept pace, and the research that has been done has been dominated by Facebook studies. For example, during the last 10 years there have been two studies published in the *Journal of AsiaTEFL* where “Facebook” was a keyword, but no articles have similarly focused on Twitter, Instagram, or WeChat. To cite another example, within the *CALL Journal*, a journal focused specifically on the field of computer assisted language learning (CALL), a search for “Facebook” yields 74 results, and a search for “Twitter” yields just over half of that at 39 results. A search for either “WhatsApp” or “WeChat” brings 18 results each, “Instagram” yields 12, “Snapchat” brings just four results and a search for “TikTok” yields zero. In 2012, Wang and Vasquez noted that social media-related studies only accounted for around 9% of CALL-related studies, and this number appears not to have shifted much in recent years. However, this is in contrast to both booming SNS usage rates, indicated by the high penetration rate noted above, and the widening social media application pool, now including tremendously popular platforms such as WhatsApp, WeChat, LINE, Discord, Twitch, Mixer, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and Facebook (Ortiz-Ospina, 2018).

However, despite SNS research being somewhat dominated by Facebook, the 18-year-old platform may not always be the best choice any longer, particularly in Japan. Japan has a 61% SNS penetration rate (Statista, 2019b), higher than the global average, but Facebook cannot be said to be dominant, as only 22% of the population had Facebook account as of 2017 (around 28 million users). Within that group, only around 5% are college-age users (1.4 million), with an even smaller percentage using the service regularly for open communication. Instead, most Japanese users tend to use Facebook in a guarded, professional manner for job-seeking, much in the same way that Westerners may use LinkedIn (VR Marketing Research Camp, 2018).

Yet, current CALL research suggests that social media use within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom brings a wealth of benefits to language learning and teaching, including improved intercultural

tural communicative competence, positive identity formation and affirmation, improved brainstorming and planning abilities, improved vocabulary acquisition, improved grammatical accuracy, improved fluency, improved written output, higher in-class engagement, improved awareness of conversational structure (such as turn-taking and repair techniques), and improved test scores (Dizon, 2016; Erarslan, 2019; Lauer, 2020; Özdemir, 2017; Yunus & Salehi, 2012). Thus, given the educational benefits, it is an area worth exploring, and given the ever-widening application pool, a research gap has appeared. This paper seeks to not only explore this growing research area but also aims to build a foundation for future multi-platform SNS research, hoping to modestly expand the CALL knowledge base.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While much work has been done examining the effects of various Web 2.0 services on EFL performance (Abrams, 2016; Shadiev, Hwang & Huang, 2017; Wang, 2015; Zou, Wang, & Xing, 2016), and of which SNS platforms are but one, studies specifically targeting SNS use remain somewhat rare (Wang & Vasquez, 2012). However, of the work that has been done, current research has begun to highlight the linguistic, social, cultural, and psychological benefits for students.

On the language learning side, for example, when comparing Facebook's effects on EFL writing output against traditional paper and pencil writing activities, Dizon (2016) found that Japanese students of English using the social media service improved their fluency by a statistically significant margin, suggesting that the service is useful for fostering authentic communication. These results echo earlier findings of Facebook use in class, such as Yunus and Salehi's (2012) examination of 43 third-year Malaysian university students engaged in a Facebook activity. Participants reported an increase in their brainstorming abilities, organic vocabulary acquisition, grammar usage in context, and essay planning skills after completing the online Facebook classroom activity. Additionally, Razak et al. (2013) tracked the linguistic benefits across all four skills by utilizing Facebook as a means of increasing authentic communicative opportunities; they especially found that the platform provided students with ample time and space to practice and improve.

Importantly, and sharing a data set with the current study, Lauer (2020) examined Facebook use from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. His cross-cultural study involved students from several countries working with Japanese students, and yielded interesting results. While a decisive majority of students outside of Japan tended to enjoy the Facebook activities, Japanese student attitudes were far more ambivalent, with just 50% claiming that they enjoyed them. These attitudes, however, contrasted somewhat sharply to the output that students produced, as written work across all countries for the activity was quite substantial, suggesting high engagement. This was of particular significance given that the Japanese students were not English majors, while the international students in the study were, meaning that additional effort was required on the Japanese side to produce lengthy L2 posts online.

Linked to Lauer's exploration of cross-cultural interactions, Facebook has been shown to improve both students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in general and their intercultural communicative effectiveness (ICE) in particular (an element within the ICC broader category). Özdemir's (2017) study of 40 university freshmen in Turkey found that, by exposing students' L2 writings to a global audience via an international Facebook group focused on language learning, statistically significant increases were seen across a range of areas, such as ease of talking to international strangers and an improvement in the ability

to get along with members of other cultures. As Özdemir notes, SNS use can be particularly helpful in improving students' intercultural competencies in countries where students may otherwise have limited access to members of other cultures, such as Turkey and Japan.

Facebook has also been used to good effect when encouraging language learners to engage in intercultural relationships with L1 English speakers across borders. Researchers have found that students can utilize Facebook to build and maintain relationships with target language users while studying abroad or after they have returned home, thus cementing the language gains that they may have made via authentic L2 use during study-abroad programs (Mitchell, 2012; Sockett & Toffoli, 2010). Also, Reinhardt and Zander (2011) found that students can strongly benefit from online collaborative work after receiving explicit instruction and guidance on how to use SNS platforms effectively with target language foreign users. This ties in to Pegrum's (2009) notion that a blended learning environment containing both electronic and traditional teaching elements is beneficial to students, and echoes the findings of earlier, pre-SNS studies that found that language students can benefit from online communication in the forms of increased understanding of L2 pragmatics and exposure to a larger, organic vocabulary pool (Smith, 2004; Thorne, 2003).

In the above cases, the linguistic gains build upon grounded sociolinguistic theory, such as that the imaginative elements of creative writing in a second language can help improve student self-confidence, both in their EFL abilities and their personal identities as competent L2 users (Vandermeulen, 2011). This increase in confidence works in tandem with increased written output, both of which can translate into increased willingness to communicate in the digital domain (Lee, 2019). The benefits for improving brainstorming and organization skills through Facebook use in particular are in line with previous, pre-SNS research in which Kern (2000) examined how learners can design, organize, and present their thoughts through L2 writing in a way that is compatible with what they imagine their readers' expectations to be. SNS work in particular also reinforces the idea that writing is an inherently social activity (Hayes, 2000; Hyland, 2003). Written output shared with one's peers (such as via social media) has also been shown to improve student reading and writing (Zamel, 1983; Zhang, 2013), can foster positive multicultural identity formation (Matsuda, 2013), links both author and reader in the learning environment (Von Glasersfeld, 1990), and allows students to tap into the Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development and reap the benefits of peer-to-peer learning.

On the application side, many EFL-specific SNS platforms have emerged over the years, such as LingQ, Lang-8, Italki, and Polyglotclub, each designed to help language students improve their abilities within specific linguistic areas, yet each one has failed to some degree in terms of gaining traction and maintaining long-term user engagement (Liu, Abe, Cao, Liu, Ok, Park, Parrish, & Sardegna, 2014). Yet despite market variation both in and outside of the EFL field, Facebook studies have dominated research output, and have been conducted in multiple countries around the world, from Jordan (Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, & Abu-Melhim, 2014) to the US (Mitchell, 2012), from Britain (Selwyn, 2009) to Thailand (Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012), from Turkey (Ekoc, 2014; Özdemir, 2017) to Malaysia (Omar, Embi, & Yunus, 2012; Yunus & Salehi, 2012). However, while most of the above studies found that students do seem generally positive toward the service, student attitudes are sometimes ambivalent (as in the case of both Lauer and Ekoc's studies), or output seems to be somewhat shallow (as in the case of Selwyn's study). In some cases, it was found that students preferred offline tasks to Facebook work (Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh, & Abu-

Melhim, 2014; Rifai, 2010).

Although somewhat rare, work is beginning to be conducted examining alternative platforms. For example, research has found that LINE (Colpitts, 2017) and Twitter (Alnujaidi, 2017; Blattner & Dalola, 2018; Chawinga, 2017) both provide opportunities for students to improve their concise writing skills, as the short chat structure of the former and the strict character limit of the latter necessitates brevity and clarity. Twitter in particular was used successfully in eliciting daily output and question responses among EFL college students in Japan (Bonnah, 2019). Among Bonnah's findings were that most students enjoyed the activity, and, compared to non-Twitter EFL classes, students produced a greater quantity of writing and had more interaction with the teacher. YouTube was also used by Benson (2017), who studied Chinese student commentaries. His discourse analysis provided evidence of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic learning, and the service's global reach also encourages ICC development. Instagram has also been shown to improve second-language skills in places ranging from Malaysia (Mansor & Rahim, 2017) to Turkey (Erarslan, 2019) to Indonesia (Soviyah & Etikaningsih, 2018). For example, the Erarslan study found the 40 students using Instagram over a 10-week period significantly improved scores on a course-book achievement test when compared to a control group.

Yet challenges to SNS use exist. Working in Japan, Blyth (2015) highlighted areas of concern relating to individual, social and security risks, echoing to some degree Takahashi's (2010) calls for increased teacher awareness in Japan, and linking to Xu, Banerjee, Ramirez, Zhu and Wijekumar's (2019) call for a greater degree of finesse and more robust research design when bringing digital applications into the classroom. In addition to the ethical and logistical challenges facing educators and researchers, others have identified challenges faced by students, such as cross-cultural communication breakdowns, unintended misunderstandings, and a reluctance to break out of pre-existing, real-world peer groups – often groups from the students' home countries (Belshaw, 2011; Fogg & Iizawa, 2008; Mitchell, 2012; McLaughlin, & Vitak, 2009; Williams, 2008).

Thus, while current CALL research has begun to explore the linguistic, social, and cultural benefits to students of SNS use in the EFL class, research output has been low overall, and Facebook has been disproportionately represented. Therefore, this study aims to examine the language learning implications and teaching applications of a wider range of modern SNS platforms.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to address the above research gap by examining Japanese student attitudes toward Facebook vis-à-vis student SNS usage data, in order to explore the language learning implications and teaching applications of a wider range of current social network platforms.

Building upon existing CALL research by going beyond Facebook and examining alternative services, the following two research questions were posited. First, what are Japanese student attitudes toward Facebook use in class? Second, based on usage data, what are some pedagogical applications and implications of alternative SNS platform usage in the classroom?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The data collected have been used for two studies, namely the present paper and Lauer's (2020) examination of Facebook use in class. The two share a common data set, but the focus and analysis of the two papers differ considerably. While the focus of Lauer's (2020) work was to examine student attitudes toward Facebook and Google Blogger use in class, as well as to gauge written output across all groups and the degree of cross-cultural communication present, the current study aims to examine student attitudes toward Facebook use in class when contrasted with student SNS usage patterns.

In order to clearly differentiate, background for Lauer's Facebook project will first be provided. The study involved university students writing semi-freely on a range of cross-cultural issues over 10 weeks in closed groups, and each closed group consisted of one class in Japan (approximately 20 students) matched with one class of roughly the same size outside of Japan. While students were free to write on any subject of interest, some broad topics were also suggested each week for guidance, ranging from self-introductions to tourist spots, to unique food in each country. Students were encouraged to write as much as they could with a focus on enjoyment. They were aware of being graded twice throughout the 10-week project, once in the middle and once at the end, and would be evaluated according to how active they were in the Facebook postings. The teachers in both Japan and all the matching countries were relatively active both in class and on the Facebook pages, promoting student involvement with the project.

In order to bolster student engagement but aiming to keep freedom of choice intact, a balance was struck between the two. Thus, in Japan, the project accounted for 15% of their course grade, but this was purposefully set fairly low so as not to grossly influence a student's overall passing result. Students were made aware that they could avoid the project entirely if they wished, and still maintain a passing score. As none of the participants in Japan were English majors, yet English was a required course for their degree, a pass was sufficient motivation for many participants. Indeed, some chose to do very little or nothing in the project, while others willingly engaged and wrote somewhat extensively. The freshmen across both years were all enrolled in the same mandatory writing course taught by the same teacher (Lauer). The undergraduate students outside of Japan, however, were all English majors and involved in various types of English courses. The Facebook project was set as a small part of their course grades as well. For more details on the project, see Lauer (2020).

Participants

Returning to the present paper, data were gathered from two cohorts of Japanese university students, namely second-semester freshmen in 2018 ($n = 81$) and again second-semester freshmen in 2019 ($n = 82$), which were combined in order to provide a more robust sample size ($N = 163$). In both groups, students were non-English majors, and participants were drawn from three different faculties each year: Education (two classes), Engineering, and Law. As they were not English majors, it must be noted that their enthusiasm and motivation toward English may have been lower than that of English language majors, and this may be a variable influencing the results. Further comparative studies will be needed in order to clarify the role of this variable. The two groups' average TOEIC scores are presented in Table 1, which provides a rough estimate of their English language abilities.

TABLE 1. Japanese Students' Majors and Average TOEIC Scores Converted to CEFR Rating

	N	2018	N	2019
Law	22	552.89 (SD = 54.19) B2	19	497.6 (SD = 66.2) B1
Engineering	20	499.76 (SD = 46.60) B1	18	463.9 (SD = 29.0) B1
Education 1	21	623.68 (SD = 46.93) B2	23	543..8 (SD = 12.3) B1
Education 2	18	479.21 (SD = 37.61) B1	22	405.7 (SD = 70.5) B1

Note. A TOEIC score in the 400s is roughly equivalent to B1 on the Common European Framework (CEFR), while a TOEIC score in the 500s and low 600s is roughly equivalent to B2 on the CEFR. (Source: https://www.coleurope.eu/sites/default/files/uploads/page/toefl_equivalency_table.pdf.)

Tools

Data were collected over the two years using two 4-point Likert scale questionnaires (one for each year). A 4-point scale was chosen over the traditional 5-point model in order to eliminate the safe middle ground. This is particularly important in Japan, where student-teacher social relations are somewhat more hierarchical, and students often do not feel comfortable expressing a strong opinion and do not wish to be seen as criticizing a social ‘superior’.

The 2018 questionnaire (see Appendix A) collected only attitudinal data, but in both quantitative and qualitative forms. The 2019 questionnaire (see Appendix B) collected only quantitative attitudinal data, but also included quantitative usage data. The reason for this is that the current investigation into student SNS usage habits emerged from interesting findings in Lauer’s project.

In terms of the relevant questions for the present study, data were analysed from both the 2018 and 2019 questionnaires’ Question 2 (“How much have you enjoyed the Facebook activity?”). Additionally, qualitative data were drawn from Question 4 of the 2018 questionnaire (“Why do you think so?”), as well as quantitative usage data from Question 4 of the 2019 questionnaire (“Not including this course, which SNS do you use, and how often?”). When expressing their opinions, students were told that they could write either in Japanese or English, and the Japanese answers were later translated into English by a bilingual speaker. Both questionnaires collected gender data, although no significant differences emerged along these lines.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Attitudes

The quantitative results from Question 2 (“How much have you enjoyed the Facebook activity?”) are shown in Table 2. When combined, the Japanese students appeared to have a 50% split between positive and negative attitudes toward the Facebook activity in class, which unfortunately does not provide a clear answer to the question. A 50% positivity rating for non-English majors suggests that the activity was a success and ought to be continued, but a 50% negativity rating also warrants further investigation.

Qualitative Reasons

TABLE 2. Enjoyment of the Facebook Activity

	Combined Participants (N = 163) 2018 & 2019
Very Much	14% (<i>n</i> = 23)
Pretty Much	36% (<i>n</i> = 59)
Not Much	30% (<i>n</i> = 49)
Not at All	20% (<i>n</i> = 32)

valuable. These three are somewhat linked, however, and it can be assumed that students who claimed to have simply “enjoyed the activity” likely did so due to the influence of the other two reasons. As one student put it, “I was able to express myself using English, and I learned a lot through other students’ Facebook posts.” Another student found the additional vocabulary practice to be valuable, and mentioned that “I could learn lots of words because I wrote on various topics.”

The most commonly cited complaint, by contrast, related to technical or security issues. Two students in particular strongly expressed their frustrations, both with the unfamiliar interface mysteriously deleting their content and negating their (substantial) writing effort, as well as with the convoluted log-in procedure. The first wrote that “[i]f I put up Facebook sentences and photos, sometimes it happens that they all disappear”, while the second mentioned that “[w]hen I log in to Facebook, I often need to send my face’s photo. It is too bad. And after I send the photo, I can’t use Facebook for 24 hours”, effectively blocking them from the service for a period. These complaints, among the others related to technical issues, suggest that perhaps some students may prefer a different platform.

Usage

TABLE 3. Summary of the 2018 Qualitative Results

Positive	Negative
English improvement: 10 Enjoyable (general): 7 Talking to foreigners: 6 Learn English expressions: 2 Reading comments: 1 Like sharing: 1	Technical issues: 16 Too much work/tired: 10 Forgot to do: 6 Don’t like FB/SNS: 3 Don’t like activities: 1 Don’t like sharing: 1 Don’t like English: 1 No motivation: 1 Not enough responses: 1 No idea what to write: 1
<u>Total: 27</u>	<u>Total: 41</u>

Qualitative data were recorded from the 2018 Japanese group only. While students gave unique and interesting reasons for their answers, some patterns did emerge. Please see Table 3 for a numerical tally of the qualitative responses.

Across all four classes, the most commonly cited benefits were that students felt their English improved, they enjoyed the activity, and they felt that the opportunity to use authentic English was very

While the above attitudinal data is somewhat illuminating, it still masks a number of confounding variables, and the ambivalent results from the first year warranted further study in the second year. Thus, within the 2019 group (*n* = 82), SNS usage were was also collected in order to help narrow this down, as the platform itself was thought to perhaps be a large influencing factor. Echoing the global and national SNS usage statistical data discussed earlier, the data gathered from the 2019 cohort indicated that Facebook was almost entirely unused by Japanese university students, as only 6.1% (5 students)

reported using Facebook regularly outside of these English courses (see Figure 1). LINE, by contrast, was reported to be used by 98% (80 students) of students, with YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram following with high numbers each.

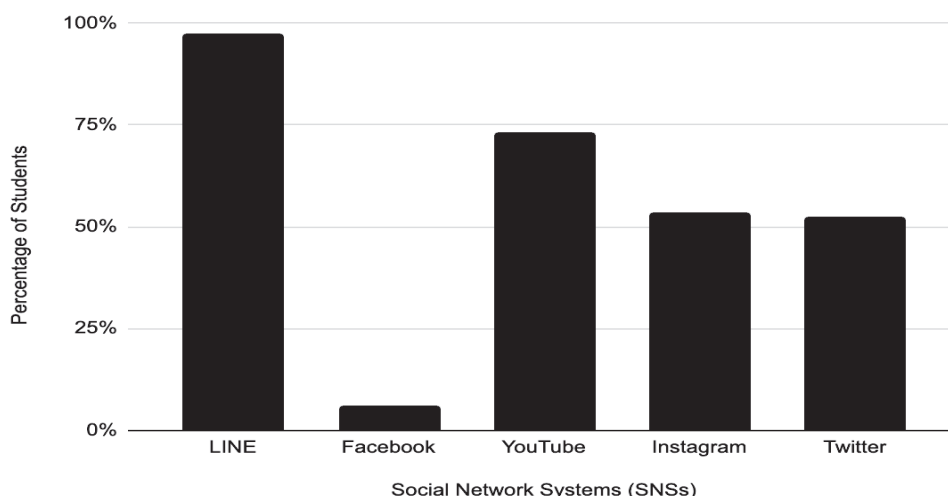


FIGURE 1. Percentage of Japanese University First-year Students (n = 82)

Who Claimed That They “Often Use” Certain SNSs

Note. As SNS accounts are not exclusive, respondents were allowed to choose multiple options. 2Channel, Blogger, Reddit, and TikTok are not included due to having only three or fewer regular users.

While YouTube was the second most popular by a large margin, more detailed data is needed for future studies, as the site’s social feature suite is robust but optional. Some users do engage actively and socially on the platform, but most tend to consume content passively and anonymously. With the data collected for the present study, it is currently impossible to tell which of these two groups each participant falls into. However, the high usage of Instagram and Twitter suggests that the students do have content to produce, something to share, and feel comfortable sharing it via the Internet. The key for educators, then, becomes how best to tap into this natural content creation and encourage students to try the same thing in their L2.

It is worth noting, too, that the above platforms are not mutually exclusive, as users frequently have accounts across several services. This adds gravity to the fact that, despite being free and despite having accounts on several popular social media applications (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube), most Japanese students still do not use Facebook. Other social media services (such as WeChat, TikTok, and 2Channel) barely registered in the student responses.

Pedagogical and Research Implications

As this research paper seeks to answer two research questions, the above results will be discussed in the same format, followed by a discussion of some of the limitations of the study.

1) What are Japanese student attitudes toward Facebook use in class?

Student attitudes appeared to be entirely ambivalent with nearly a perfect 50/50 split, which unfortunately does not provide clear answers. However, when research is carried out into student attitudes toward SNS usage in class, the SNS in question is almost exclusively Facebook, which appears at odds with both the national statistics and the usage data collected (almost no students in the present study cited using Facebook outside the course in a meaningful or frequent way). Thus, confounding factors may be hidden behind the data, strengthening the case for further, differentiated SNS research going forward.

If Facebook were to be eschewed in favour of platforms more familiar to students, three approaches could be applied to any proposed SNS activity which may help educators navigate uncertain waters. First, as suggested by others (Blyth, 2015; Prichard, 2015; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011; Takahashi, 2010; Xu et al., 2019), educators and researchers could work toward creating a framework for SNS study in general, rather than tying studies to a specific platform each time (such as Facebook). By de-coupling from Facebook use exclusively and instead moving to the meta-level, researchers and educators gain the flexibility and future scalability needed to utilize SNS activities across all platforms and to maximize language learning benefits, while also being free to tap into the popularity and familiarity of any future services.

Second, as the SNS landscape has become differentiated, with platforms focusing on specific, targeted user experiences, perhaps educators could also differentiate their activities and focus on individual linguistic skills. For example, a speaking or listening activity can be designed with YouTube in mind, leveraging the video-based strengths of that platform. Additionally, a tourism-focused task-based lesson could be run utilizing Instagram, giving students an opportunity to practice descriptive linguistic structures (such as adjective use or degrees of comparison), while also improving their ICC by building on the specific photo-based and global features of the service. Details will be discussed in the following sub-section.

Third, educators ought to be cognizant of ethical and security considerations, and work together with students in designing activities in order to ensure that participants are comfortable using their still-developing L2 skills in an authentic, real-world scenario. If they are not, educators can provide options to limit access, scale back activities, or work anonymously in order to reduce students' exposure to risk. Student privacy is of the utmost concern, given that online expressions are often permanent and may well carry lasting ramifications (Blyth, 2015). Blyth also highlights the distinction between a private, safe shared learning space within the classroom, and the open, potentially dangerous real world outside, accessed via social networks. Abe (2009) echoes this concern, making the distinction between interacting with welcome strangers on the internet and being burdened by unwelcome ones.

Building on this, an approach successfully employed by Lauer (2018, 2020) is that of expanding the safe, trusted language learning environment of the EFL classroom to include classrooms around the world, but not to fully enter the public domain. This was achieved by creating closed SNS groups with partnered institutions across several countries, thus allowing students to safely interact in the L2 in a learning environment with their global peers (Abe's 'welcome strangers'), while also keeping their expressions private and secure so as not to damage their offline reputation later. While Lauer used Facebook for this activity, most modern SNS platforms contain the same functionality and can be utilized in a similar fashion. They can also go further than Facebook by tapping in to platform-specific strengths.

2) What are some pedagogical applications and implications of alternative SNS platform usage in the classroom?

The sociolinguistic research reviewed above details the educational benefits to students across an array of areas, but SNS use in particular is well-positioned to help students broaden their cultural horizons. Students can form stronger inter-cultural, authentic global connections and gain a deeper understanding of foreign culture than through the surface-level cultural features often presented in textbooks. According to Hall's (1976) cultural iceberg analogy, the most easily visible elements of culture, such as food, clothes and music, are often the smallest parts of that culture. True cultural meaning lies beyond the visible spectrum, or 'under the waters' of the cultural iceberg, and requires authentic interaction and communication between cultures in order to be understood. Encouraging students to communicate directly with global interlocutors via online SNS platforms helps facilitate this deeper cultural learning.

Specifically, diversifying SNS classroom work across a range of platforms stands to bring targeted language learning benefits. For example, current research has found that both LINE (Colpitts, 2017) and Twitter (Alnujaidi, 2017; Blattner & Dalola, 2018; Chawinga, 2017) offer many possibilities for promoting concise writing skills and strengthening students' summarizing abilities. LINE in particular stands to be well-utilized in Japan, as the platform contains two core features that can each be used in multiple ways within the classroom, depending on the language learning and teaching goals, while also benefitting from its massive popularity and taking advantage of students' familiarity with the platform and its near-ubiquitous reach. Additionally, as almost all students have a LINE account, many of the technical hurdles encountered in Lauer's Facebook project can be mitigated.

In terms of teaching activities, if an educator wishes to target long-form writing, LINE's homepage post feature can be incorporated in a myriad of ways. As the homepage feature in LINE is essentially the same as a longer-form status update within Facebook, the language learning effects discussed in the above studies apply to LINE as well. Working in the pre-SNS era, Csikszentmihalyi (1997) found that students' second language written output carries more cognitive and sociolinguistic weight when shared with authentic readers, adding a layer of legitimacy to the output that writing practice conducted in class, on a worksheet, and read only by the teacher, simply does not. This added legitimacy and authenticity carries over into the online space, and applies to second language written output shared on social networking services. For example, if teachers wish to target short-form conversational elements, such as question formation, improving turn-taking abilities, or utilizing circumlocution or repair strategies, LINE's chat function can be employed to mimic a verbal conversation, yet without the heavy time pressure of an oral exercise. The activity also removes the need for close proximity, allowing for a wider range of possible interlocutors. Additionally, as all conversations are logged, teachers can easily draw student attention to errors and provide targeted feedback. A chat activity can also be utilized in a cyclical manner, as the corrected chat log can then be used as a script for a face-to-face follow-up conversational practice activity.

Regarding Twitter, Bonnah (2019) asked EFL college students in Japan to tweet every day and discovered that most students enjoyed the activity, improved their written output, and engaged more with the teacher. Twitter also stands to work well particularly in Japan, as it provides a safe, guarded facilitation of student-teacher interactions, often circumventing the complex cultural rules governing these conversations during face-to-face meetings (Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004), and the strict format lends itself to activities

targeting summary skills and exercises in clear thinking and concise expression.

In terms of YouTube, research is beginning to take off, with some researchers exploring online commentary features (Benson, 2017), digital literacies (Chen, 2019) and online video for authentic listening practice (Aldukhayel, 2019). Benson's (2017) examination of user comments was particularly interesting, as it provided evidence of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic learning and improvement. In the same vein as LINE, utilizing YouTube within the EFL class allows educators to target a range of skills and help students improve within a range of linguistic areas. Students can practice listening and speaking if they make videos, reading or writing if an activity focuses on comments, and can greatly enhance their multicultural awareness if the activity draws student attention cross-cultural similarities or differences.

While Instagram may not seem to be the best fit for language learning at first glance, the photo-sharing SNS has been shown to improve second-language skills in places ranging from Malaysia (Mansor & Rahim, 2017) to Turkey (Erarslan, 2019) to Indonesia (Soviyah & Etikaningsih, 2018). For instance, the Erarslan study found that the 40 students using Instagram over a 10-week period significantly improved scores on a course-book achievement test over a control group. In terms of specific activities, Instagram is also well-suited for descriptive practice, can serve as a jumping-off point for cultural or tourist presentations, and can be used in a variety of popular online games (such as 'spot the cat', a game targeting prepositions of place).

Limitations of social media use

However, there is a valid case arguing against SNS use in the class. As discussed above, for example, some students in Indonesia seemed to prefer individual work and felt obligated to make social media posts for class rather than out of a sense of enjoyment (Rifai, 2010), a sentiment strongly echoed in the qualitative data by some members within Lauer's (2020) study of Japanese students. Additionally, in both Turkey (Ekoc, 2014) and in Jordan (Bani-Hani et al., 2014), more than half of the students either did not engage in Facebook writing at all or preferred traditional writing tasks over a public, social activity.

Japan in particular presents an interesting conundrum, given the cultural intersection between individual expression (a cultural norm upon which most social media platforms are built) and a more traditional sense of group and community membership. This creates, as Takahashi (2010) notes, a dichotomy of sorts between 'me-and-them' and 'me-with-them', a cultural clash of digital literacies that also emerged through Fogg and Iizawa's (2008) work. The cultural importance of personal reputation also comes into play (Li et al., 2004), and online, digital public damage to this reputation can potentially have lasting offline effects for some students (Lewis et al., 2008). This research indicated that the lines between students' offline and online reputations are becoming increasingly blurred, and thus one's online life can bring real-world offline consequences that can potentially damage reputation. Given that social media posts are, to a large degree, permanent and may contain personal identifiers, some Japanese students tend to shy away from making posts under their real name for fear of being permanently and publicly associated with a particular opinion or thought, which may later come back to damage their offline reputation (Blyth, 2015).

Also, a problem for many (particularly in East Asia), as Abe (2009) points out, is acute social anxiety brought on by the issue of using appropriate levels of respect when the social distance between two users on a social network is not explicitly known. Thus, many Japanese users feel disinclined to use services that strongly encourage real names, photographic identity and longer-form messages, and instead prefer platforms

that allow anonymity both in avatar appearance and username, and allow for shorter, more generic texts that are intentionally seen as a form of broadcast to a larger audience. One reason for this, in addition to the reputational concerns discussed above, is that these anonymous, short-form ‘broadcast’ style posts circumvent the issue of social distance between interlocutors, as both the poster and audience social standings are not known, thus mitigating the risk of an online mistake damaging an offline reputation.

Thus, it is not too surprising to find that most Japanese, especially youngsters who have grown up with a wider selection of SNS services to choose from than their parents, tend to be rejecting Facebook in favour of LINE, Instagram, or Twitter, all of which allow for or encourage shorter texts posted under pseudonyms. These problems appear to be evident to some degree in the present study as well. While most students did not explicitly cite this form of cultural shyness in their questionnaire responses, it should not be taken as non-existent. Rather, it could well exist as one of the non-visible elements of Japanese culture, not explicitly stated by students and thus not visible to foreign researchers, yet hiding beneath the waters of Hall’s (1979) cultural iceberg.

However, the above challenges notwithstanding, SNS use within class stands to bring substantial benefits to students’ learning experiences and provides them with authentic opportunities to use their English skills in a global setting. It is an area worth researching, and worth iterating upon previous activities toward developing sound, appropriate SNS-based classroom activities across a wider range of services.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study grew out of previous research findings, and thus the focus on alternative SNS platforms was not entirely planned from the beginning. At first, building upon most EFL SNS related research, SNS usage was studied through the usage of Facebook, which is the global leader in terms of overall usage and market penetration. However, based on conversations with students and the results from the first year’s data, it became clear that further insight was needed into the specific demographics of that global Facebook usage figure. It was then found, in the following year, that Facebook is almost entirely unused by Japanese youth as of 2020.

Thus, while the present study serves to suggest that alternative SNS platforms may be more suitable within the Japanese classroom, the primary limitation of this study is that detailed, focused research on each alternative platform was not conducted. There is a need for further research investigating each of these platforms, particularly LINE, Instagram and Twitter.

CONCLUSION

Research indicates that there are numerous benefits for students in using social media networks in the EFL classroom, yet student attitudes are often divided and results are not nearly as positive as expected, particularly regarding Facebook use. The attitudinal data collected in this particular study supports this. However, after contrasting this with student usage data, and after examining the issue from linguistic, technical and ethical perspectives, some possible explanations appear. Privacy, permanent damage to offline reputations, and platform popularity are all key student concerns, and thus consideration needs to be given by educators when designing SNS activities for the EFL classroom. Additionally, educators should be encouraged to keep abreast of the ever-changing SNS landscape and to design SNS activities on a meta-level

rather than tying themselves to one particular brand that may not be appropriate for, or familiar to, students. In-class SNS activities can also be differentiated and adapted to target specific linguistic skills, and educators can utilize a wider range of modern SNS platforms. In so doing, SNS activities can leverage the particular strengths of each platform in order to maximize students' linguistic and socio-cultural gains.

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APPENDIX

2018 Questionnaire

- 1) Your sex: M F
- 2) How much have you ENJOYED the Facebook activity?
 - A) Very much.
 - B) Pretty much.
 - C) Not much.
 - D) Not at all.
- 3) How much do you think your writing improved due to the activity?
 - A) Very much.
 - B) Pretty much.
 - C) Not much.
 - D) Not at all.
- 4) Why do you think so?
(Open-ended qualitative question.)

2019 Questionnaire

- 1) Your sex: M F
- 2) How much have you ENJOYED the Facebook activity?
 - A) Very much.
 - B) Pretty much.
 - C) Not much.
 - D) Not at all.
- 3) Which do you LIKE BETTER: The Blogs or the Facebook activity?
 - A) The Blogs
 - B) The Facebook
- 4) NOT including this course, WHICH SNS DO YOU USE, and how often? Put a 0.
Often Sometimes Never
 - 2channel
 - Blogger
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - LINE
 - Reddit
 - TikTok
 - Twitter
 - YouTube
 - Other
- 5) Outside this project, do you communicate with any foreign friends using an SNS platform?
Yes? No?

ABSTRACT

Japanese University Students’ Attitudes toward and Usage of Facebook in English Classes: The Implications

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This study examines not only Japanese students’ attitudes toward Facebook, but also the language learning implications and in-class teaching applications of utilizing alternative social network platforms. A total of 163 Japanese university students participated in the study, drawn across two years and from three non-English faculties, namely Education, Law, and Engineering. Attitudinal and usage data were collected via two questionnaires. It was found that many students did find global, authentic SNS classroom work to be valuable, but when mapped against their usage data, it was revealed that Facebook may not always be the best platform of choice. Only 6% of participants claimed to actively use Facebook outside of the current project, while approximately 98% of students stated that they use LINE, 73% use YouTube frequently, and more than 50% use Instagram and Twitter regularly. Drawing on current literature, the paper examines these responses in detail and the reasons behind them.

要 約

日本の大学生の英語授業における Facebook の利用意識と利用状況 — その意味 —

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本研究では、日本人学生の Facebook に対する態度を調査するとともに、こうした代替ソーシャルネットワークプラットフォームを利用することによる言語学習への影響や授業での活用法についても調査した。本研究には、教育学部、法学部、工学部という英語を専門としない3つの学部合計163名の日本人学生が2年間に渡り参加した。Facebook に対する態度のデータと実際の利用データは、2つのアンケートによって収集された。その結果、多くの学生はグローバルで本格的な SNS を使った教室活動に価値を見出していたが、彼らの利用データと照らし合わせると、Facebook は必ずしも最良のプラットフォームとして選ばれていた訳ではないことが明らかになった。参加者のうち、今回のプロジェクト以外で Facebook を積極的に利用していると回答したのはわずか6%であった。他方、学生の回答によれば、約98%の学生は LINE を利用しており、73%の学生も YouTube を頻繁に利用していた。更に、50%以上の学生が Instagram や Twitter を定期的に利用していた。本稿では、現在の文献を参考にしながら、これらの回答とその背景にある理由を詳細に検討した。