

The potential of social media in the classroom in case of scarce resources: Students' perspectives

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Abstract

In a digital age, the question of using social media in the classroom has sparked interest from researchers and educators across the globe. While the benefits of using technology in the classroom are unquestionable in developed countries (Klopfer, Osterweil, Groff and Haas 2009), they are less obvious in developing countries. The present study explores the potential of using social media in contexts of limited resources. Results from a questionnaire administered to higher education students at a university in Burundi show that students are well-acquainted with widely used social media platforms, using them in their everyday activities. Students consider them excellent vehicles for improving their language skills in both English and French. In regard to incorporating social media into the classroom, students are very positive even though they are aware of the challenges this may pose. Based on the results, this study reflects on the potential advantages to incorporating social media in classrooms with limited resources.

Keywords: social media, potential of social media, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), classroom activities

1. Introduction

The emergence of technologies today seems to have paved new pathways for education, engaging teachers and students alike through their use in the classroom. Social media, in particular, attract the youth and are increasingly being incorporated into the classroom as a means of teaching. The term “social media” is used to refer to “online media where users share information in a many-to-many exchange, as opposed to the broadcast media which supply viewers with information following a one-to-many model” (Rozema 2009:38). This observation is echoed in Stewart (2015:482), according to whom the concept of social media has evolved “as a way to describe various platforms for online communication.” While Carr and Hayes (2015:46) support this view, they also recognize that it is not always easy to define the concept of ‘social media’; that is,

“although we know what social media are, we are not necessarily able to articulate why they are what they are, and various disciplines address social media disparately.” Nevertheless, Carr and Hayes (2015) propose the following definition that should guide scholars for about two decades (from 2015 to 2035), which they put in the following terms:

Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others.

(Carr and Hayes 2015:50)

Four key elements stand out from this definition, namely (i) Internet-based means, (ii) selective self-presentation, (iii) user-generated content, and (iv) perception of interaction. “Internet-based channels” simply means that social media are online tools that offer users the opportunity to communicate using the Internet. “Selective self-presentation” refers to the freedom users have to choose what to share. Finally, “user-generated content” and “perception of interaction” refer to the value of contributions generated by users rather than the organizations or individuals that host the medium, and the inherent feeling “to create, capitalize on, or maintain social interactions among its users” (Carr and Hayes 2015:50), respectively.

Social media include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Skype, LinkedIn, Google+ and other sites which allow people to interact and share knowledge (Paulsen and Tække 2013). Kent (2015: 2) considers social media as unique means of communication, as they enable users to interact more closely and offer multiple communication options, such as “synchronous, asynchronous, visual, aural, textual, hyperreal, and hyperlinked.” In light of this flexibility, Theunissen (2015) stresses the multiple potentialities of social media, especially in the field of public relations. These potentialities could be extended well beyond the traditional boundaries of regular broadcast media (Abe and Jordan 2013, Kent 2015). Indeed, the use of social media in the classroom is thought to have great potential (Abe and Jordan 2013, Paulsen and Tække 2013, Rozema 2009, Srirat 2014) and, in fact, to be somewhat unavoidable. Today’s world is technology-based, making social media prominent in teens’ lives; curricula should therefore be adjusted accordingly (Stewart 2015). For Abe and Jordan (2013), this omnipresence of social media in students’ day-to-day lives is what could make integration of social media into the classroom successful (see also Reid, 2011). They put it in the following terms:

Considering that such a high percentage of students are spending time on social networking sites, college faculty and administrators may benefit from integrating social media into their curriculum to serve as a useful tool to enhance student learning.

(Abe and Jordan 2013:16)

1.1 Advantages of social media

Given that social media are an integral component in the lives of today’s students, Abe and Jordan (2013) are right in their observation that social media could and should be used to improve learning. Incorporating social media into the classroom offers many benefits. For example, studies reviewed

by Abe and Jordan (2013) show that integrating social media into the classroom (i) promotes students' real-time engagement, (ii) enhances the connection between teachers and students, (iii) offers affordable, broader and faster platforms for coordinating activities, and (iv) efficiently supplements materials delivered in the traditional classroom. Paulsen and Tække (2013), on the other hand, identify six potential benefits of using social media in the classroom, namely that they (i) offer a platform for enhanced learning, (ii) form more open communities for researchers, (iii) improve the study environment at school, (vi) facilitate contact with the surrounding community, (v) stimulate motivation and commitment, and (vi) develop media and IT skills. In addition, Stewart (2015:485) shows that benefits of social media are

backchannel discussions, enhanced communication, increased student creativity, classroom management, increased access for academically-marginalized students [...] opportunities for widened and interactive audiences and the implications for learning and literacy practices.

Increased interaction with external audiences benefits student by extending the learning space beyond the four classroom walls and participating in "real-world" contexts. Especially, social media provide a platform for student-generated content, text construction and flexible participation in these interactions. The dynamicity of social media renders them excellent tools for the development of literacy skills, which are continuously reworked, redefined, and reshaped. Social media incorporate a student-centred communication into the classroom that is broad in scope, multimodal, practical, and visible, increasing students' confidence and sense of belonging to a community.

Social media present advantages and are indeed believed to facilitate the teaching of a foreign language and allow students to learn effectively as they give them a chance to exchange in the language without the anxiety of face-to-face activities, building confidence and increasing students' motivation (Day and Wells 2009, Rozema 2009, Srirat 2014, Yunus, Salehi and Chenzi 2012). Van Den Beemt, Thurlings and Willems (2020:46) echo the observation that "teachers use social media specifically to motivate students and to improve teaching." Through the use of social media, students have a chance for both peer learning and peer assessment.

The benefits of social media may also be justified from a theoretical perspective. Some observers are of the view that the use of authentic materials and heightened connectivism are the two main drivers motivating the use of social media in the classroom. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Kilickaya (2004), among others, the use of authentic materials was introduced with the adoption of the communicative language teaching approach. For these authors, the ultimate objective of language teaching should be providing learners with a stage for communicating in real situations outside of the classroom. Therefore, it makes sense to incorporate social media into the classroom. Given that language is used by real people for true purposes, the use of authentic materials is warranted (cf. Nunan 1999, Gilmore 2004). Ultimately, mitigating "the sharp disconnect between the way students are taught in school and the way the outside world approaches socialization, meaning-making, and accomplishment" (Klopfer et al. 2009) is an obvious advantage of using authentic materials. Social media also enhance a classroom's connectivism. According to

Siemens (2005), connectivism is a learning model which acknowledges that learning can change following the tools and means used, as well as the place where learning takes place. The digital learner, for instance, can learn from anywhere at any time, and it can be with anyone using the digital tools as well. In this vein, West et al. (2015) stress that incorporating social media into the classroom is critical since today's higher education students are digital natives who use social media as a major part of their lives.

1.2 Disadvantages of social media

As discussed in the previous section, social media have many advantages. However, they also have disadvantages as they may still pose challenges when it comes to using them successfully in the classroom. As observed by some scholars, they may be at odds with contexts and cultures already established in the classrooms and contribute to a decline of writing due to prolonged exposure to the informal language used on social media. Moreover, a successful implementation of social media in the classroom depends on both teacher and student familiarity with and confidence in using them which, in developing countries, may be minimal (Stewart 2015). In addition, increased exposure to wider audiences and platforms may give way to privacy and safety concerns. Peer interactions may be devalued or taken less seriously, as the incorporation of social media in the classroom may relativize deadlines typical of regular school context. Student discussions through social media may also remain superficial and be off-topic. Furthermore, not all social media contribute to learning equally. In the words of Stewart (2015:490), "not all social media are created equal, and more research may need to be done to see which platforms can support learning most effectively and why." More importantly, some scholars see interactions through social media as just circulating individual meaning-making instead of offering real co-constructed meaning.

It should also be noted that social media popularity varies and so may their use. For example, Rozema (2009) and Srirat (2014) contend that of all the social media, Facebook seems to be the most popular channel and the most widely used by students in posting messages, sharing music, videos and photos, blogging, and doing assignments. Van Den Beemt et al.'s (2020) findings that Facebook, Twitter and blogs top the list of most-used social media — in this order of importance —, align with this finding. This is mirrored in Stewart's (2015) observation that while earlier studies of social media focused on blogs that seem to reflect traditional classroom writing practices, researchers are becoming increasingly interested in more interactive social media such as Facebook and Twitter and Jere, Jona and Lukose's (2019) observation that platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp have become popular. This may pose a challenge to their integration into the classroom as teachers and students alike must keep adapting to these new platforms.

While researchers acknowledge that integrating social media into the classroom may be challenging, they maintain that these problems can be overcome (e.g., Paulsen and Tække 2013, Srirat 2014). However, others argue for more research on how to successfully incorporate social media into the classroom before drastic steps are taken without full knowledge of the consequences (e.g., Ludwig and Van de Poel 2015, Stewart 2015). This implies that social media can be effectively applied as learning and teaching tools.

1.3 Steps for implementation of social media in the classroom

A successful integration of social media in the classroom requires reflections and scholars have made various suggestions. Ludwig and Van de Poel (2015), for example, have outlined recommendations for successfully integrating social media into EFL classrooms (see also West, Moore and Barry 2015). Ludwig and Van de Poel propose the following ten recommendations:

- a) Appreciate social media as a space/place for foreign language use.
- b) Adapt social media use to the learners' needs.
- c) Explicitly describe the goals and objectives for social media use.
- d) Develop didactic approaches and methodology for social media use.
- e) Include an awareness-raising component into social media use.
- f) Use social media tools for differentiated instruction and individualization.
- g) Recognise the potential of social media channels as a support network for learners.
- h) Use social media to establish a community of practice among teachers.
- i) Integrate social media use in teacher training programmes.
- j) Ensure awareness of audience(s).

Along this line of thinking, Cochrane (2014:73), gives an overview of six steps through which social media could be successfully incorporated into the classroom, namely: (1) a pedagogical integration of the right technology into both the course and assessments; (2) a lecturer's modelling of the technology; (3) a learning community that is on board; (4) a selection of relevant mobile devices and technologies; (5) technological and pedagogical support for students; and (6) reconceptualization of the roles of teachers and students to work together to co-design and co-construct knowledge.

While these suggested steps may not be perfect, they constitute an important move towards a real integration of social media in the classroom.

1.4 Previous research on social media in the South African context

In a South African context, Jere et al. (2019) examine and confirm the benefits of using WhatsApp groups to motivate students and increase their performance in Mathematics. Rambe and Chipunza (2013) conclude that WhatsApp instant messages could help close the digital divide observed in some parts of South Africa between students from privileged and underprivileged backgrounds. WhatsApp-mediated interactions among students, on the one hand, and between students and the lecturers, on the other, facilitate information sharing and stimulate meaningful engagement and participation. Similarly, Madge et al. (2019) examine an African orientation of social media, showing how students share information about and shaped their learning experiences through Whatsapp. Still in a South African context, Ivala and Gachago (2012) find that Facebook and blogs enhance students' engagement in their learning, while Reid (2011) finds Facebook pages to be excellent pedagogical practices by giving students space to voice their critical thinking. The present study aims to explore the potential of using social media in teaching English as a Foreign Language in limited-resource contexts from a students' perspective.

2. The present study

2.1 Research questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. With which social media platforms are English majors at the University of Burundi familiar, what purposes are they used for, and in what language(s)?
2. What are the students' views on the incorporation of social media into the classroom at the University of Burundi to improve the teaching of English? What challenges might this implementation pose?

2.2 Participants

Participants in this study were recruited from a Pragmatics course in the Department of English Language and Literature of the University of Burundi. Students were in their third (and final) year of their studies for the Bachelor of Arts degree in English. They each speak four languages, namely Kirundi (their native language), French (the official language and language of education in Burundi), Kiswahili (a lingua franca of the East African region), and English (a foreign language in Burundi).

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and invited to participate responding to a questionnaire. In the invitation, it was made clear to the students that participation was encouraged (but not mandatory), anonymous, and would not affect in any way their grades in the course, but that the data would solely serve research purposes. Before submitting their responses, students were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the study, should they wish to do so. They were also reminded that since the questionnaire was anonymous, they would not be able to withdraw from the study upon submission. A total of 48 questionnaires out of the 60 distributed were returned.

2.3 Instrument: The questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions in English in either multiple choice format or as a five-point Likert scale. They were also asked to optionally comment on their answer. The first part of the questionnaire used in this study (questions 1-7) addressed research question one and aimed to identify which social media platforms participants were familiar with, which platforms they were currently using, and the purposes for which they were using them (questions 1-3). The second set of questions (questions 4-7) aimed to determine which languages in which the students used social media, and whether they could see any improvement in their proficiency in those languages as a result of using the social media.

The second part of the questionnaire (questions 8-10) addressed research question two and aimed to gauge students' perception of the potential of incorporating social media into the classroom to

improve English learning and to identify possible challenges related to this implementation. It took about 20 minutes to fill in the questionnaire¹.

3. Results

3.1 English majors and social media

The first research question addressed in the present study seeks to determine which social media platforms English majors are familiar with, which they actively use, and the purposes for which they use them. Participants were also asked about the languages they to use on social media and whether they find that participation on social media improves their proficiency in these languages. The results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' experience with social media

Media		Participants' experience with media (N = 48)	
		Heard of	Used
<i>Facebook</i>		48 (100%)	48 (100%)
<i>Twitter</i>		48 (100%)	39 (81.24%)
<i>Skype</i>		42 (87.49%)	30 (62.49%)
<i>YouTube</i>		48 (100%)	42 (87.49%)
<i>LinkedIn</i>		21 (43.74%)	12 (25%)
<i>Instagram</i>		45 (93.74%)	12 (25%)
<i>MySpace</i>		12 (25%)	0
<i>Flickr</i>		4 (8.33%)	0
<i>WhatsApp</i>		48 (100%)	48 (100%)
<i>Others (Please specify:)</i>	<i>Snapchat</i>	9 (18.75%)	6 (12.5%)
	<i>Wechat</i>	6 (12.5%)	6 (12.5%)
	<i>Mochat</i>	3 (6.24%)	3 (6.24%)
	<i>Botim</i>	3 (6.24%)	3 (6.24%)

The results in Table 1 indicate that students are (most) familiar with the social media in the following descending order: Facebook (100%), Twitter (100%), YouTube (100%), WhatsApp (100%), Instagram (94%), Skype (87%), LinkedIn (43%), MySpace (25%), Snapchat (18.75%), Wechat (12.5%), Mochat and Botim (6.24%). These social media tools are used among students with the following order of importance: Facebook and WhatsApp (100%), YouTube (87%), Twitter (81%), Skype (62%), LinkedIn and Instagram (25%), Snapchat (12.5%), and Mochat and Botim (6.24%). While MySpace and Flickr are known by the students, no one indicated using them.

¹ The questionnaire was piloted with 10 students who had completed their BA thesis degree before administration. It was administered to participants with no alterations. Only Google+ and Wikipedia were excluded from the questionnaire following comments from two anonymous reviewers whom I sincerely thank for their constructive comments that helped a great deal to improve this paper.

Regarding the activities for which students use social media, they include the following: socializing with peers, exchanging information about politics (local, regional, international), finding opportunities for studies, finding job opportunities, exchanging information about classroom activities, praying, personal research, and entertainment — music, sports, and games.

The results also indicate that students use both French and English on social media, with a preference for English. While 37% (strongly agree = 6%; agree = 31%) reported using French on social media, 94% (strongly agree = 69%; agree = 25%) affirmed that they use English on these networking sites. Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of the students believe that both their English and French had improved as a result of using them on social media, with 100% (strongly agree = 75%; agree = 25%) for English and 87% (strongly agree = 25%; agree = 62%) for French. Participants claimed that their vocabulary, grammar, reading, speaking, listening, and writing are developed by using social media. The answer submitted by participant 10 is shown in Excerpt² (1).

Excerpt 1. Participant 10

English:

I read online articles written in English and follow online conversations or debates held in English on YouTube and all this helps me improve my reading and listening skills. Furthermore, I improve my speaking and writing skills in different WhatsApp and Facebook groups aimed at improving English of which I am a member.

French:

I read online articles written in French and follow online conversations or debates held in French on YouTube and all this helps me improve my reading and listening skills. Furthermore, I improve my speaking and writing skills in different WhatsApp and Facebook groups aimed at improving French of which I am a member.

As can be seen from Excerpt 1, Participant 10 feels that his/her language skills improve through exposure and practice. YouTube is used for reading articles (which I assume is about subtitles) and watching videos that benefit their reading and listening skills while WhatsApp and Facebook benefit speaking and writing skills. Participant 15 confirms this observation in the statement given in Excerpt 2

Excerpt 2. Participant 15

English:

I do listen to different Ted talks on Youtube, English Gospel songs as well as preachings. From the very starting point, I have greatly improved my speaking, listening and grammar.

French:

I sometimes watch some preachings in French and there are some keys I get from the speakers.

² Excerpts are unedited.

Participant 15 finds that English speaking, listening, and grammar improved as a result of watching different videos on YouTube, including Ted talks, Gospel songs, and prayers. Prayers also contribute to expanding French vocabulary. In Excerpt 3, Participant 45 supports the idea that his/her English is improved through listening to songs, watching movies and reading articles.

Excerpt 3. Participant 45

English:

The use of social media improve my English because i enjoy reading English on social media. It is also easier to learn English through songs and movies.

French:

French is a language which you can learn or improve learning through people you interact with. So the use of social media helps me to improve my French because I speak with different people through social media.

As Excerpt 3 shows, the English of Participant 45 is improved through reading, listening to songs, and watching movies, while French is improved through interactions held with people in the network. Participant 32 also affirmed improving language skills through watching videos and interacting with different people, as shown in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4. Participant 32

English:

Using social media improve my English because I watch videos on different channels which improve my. English. Again I get in contact with people of different countries and I improve my English through them.

French:

As for English social media can contribute to improving my French. In using different channels of social media I get new words in French and so I am improving my french.

As can be seen from Excerpt 4, English is improved through watching videos available from the different social media channels. Interacting with people from different countries is another way in which English language skills are improved. French seems to be improved in a similar fashion as English, and especially as this participant comes across new vocabulary items. Interaction and exposure seem to be key to improving one's language skills, as stressed by Participant 35 in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5. Participant 35**English:**

English is the most used language in the world especially on the internet. Thus, when I navigate through the internet using English, it makes it easy for me to improve the language.

French:

I barely use French on social media. However, when I encounter a post in French and go through it, it really helps improve my French in a way or another.

As shown in Excerpt 5, using social media is equated with improving English, a language that is everywhere and that seems to be the lingua franca on social media. According to Participant 35, being present on social media has an immediate effect on improving English since it is the most widely used language on these social platforms. While acknowledging that French is not the preferred language on social media, it is also improved if the participant uses it. For Participant 40, as shown in Excerpt 6, vocabulary makes an important contribution to learning English; each time he/she uses social media, they come across new vocabulary items.

Excerpt 6. Participant 40**English:**

I think so because whenever I use social media I always come across to new words and it sometimes help me to improve either in writing , speaking and more it helps me build my self-confidence when communicating with my peers.

French:

even though I don't intend many times to use french ,since on social media some of my peers use french and because me too I have some competence in French sometimes it helps me to acquire some of new terminology in French.

Participant 40 feels that English language skills are improved through new vocabulary items they find on social media. These vocabulary items contribute to improving writing and speaking, and especially, to bolstering confidence as he/she communicates with peers. For the case of French, this participant affirmed learning new vocabulary items through peer interaction in French. In Excerpt 7, Participant 45 echoes the importance of vocabulary in learning English.

Excerpt 7. Participant 45**English:**

“I come across new vocabulary items that I can use in my daily discussions.”

The results presented above give an indication of the social media the participants in this study are familiar with and the platforms which they regularly use. The data indicate that participants use

social media for a wide variety of activities in both English and French, and that this use of social media is said to positively impact student's proficiency in English.

3.2 Incorporating social media into the classroom: Students' perspectives

The second research question examined in this study regards students' opinions on the incorporation of social media into the classroom for improving the teaching of English in higher education. In addition, the question prompts students to identify potential challenges posed by incorporating social media into the classroom. The results from the data analysis indicate that students are enthusiastic about integrating social media into the classroom. For them, the use of social media may result in improved teaching of English in higher education. It is particularly striking to see this enthusiasm towards using social media in the classroom from the students even though they admit that it is a daunting and challenging task. The overwhelming majority of the participants (87%, strongly agree = 81%; agree = 6%) agreed with the statement that "using social media in the classroom can help to improve the teaching of English at the University of Burundi" (Q8 on the questionnaire). The same participants (87%, with strongly agree = 25% and agree = 62%) also agreed with the statement that "using social media in the classroom at the University of Burundi will be challenging" (Q9 on the questionnaire).

Participants were asked to identify potential challenges to incorporating social media in EFL education from a set list with the possibility to add other challenges (Q10 of the questionnaire). The options they were given, and the results, are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges to incorporating social media into the classroom

Challenges		Frequency
Challenges to the use of social media		N
Computer illiteracy among lecturers		15 (31.25%)
Computer illiteracy among students		45 (93.74%)
Lack of access to the internet		45 (93.74%)
Lack of equipment such as computers		48 (100%)
Reluctance to share information with unknown people		21(43.74%)
Lecturer-student relationship which is hierarchical and formal to allow sharing information through social media		39 (81.24%)
Lack of support personnel such as IT specialists		42 (87.49%)
Other:	Time allocated to teaching computer literacy not enough	6 (12.56%)
	Lack of electricity	3 (6.24%)
	Lack of government involvement in using technology in education	4 (8.33%)
	Lack of information on the benefits of social media among students	6 (12.5%)
	Bad image of social media among lecturers and the Burundian society in general	3 (6.24%)

As shown in Table 2, lack of equipment (e.g. computers) was the most prominent challenge identified by students at a 100%. Close on its heels are computer illiteracy among students and lack

of access to the internet, with 94% of the students considering them as challenges. Regarding lack of access to the internet, one of the participants suggested the following solution.

Excerpt 8. Participant 27.

This could be challenging as the internet is not good in Burundi. However, it could be helpful if the lecturer downloads the video in advance and that video can be screened to help students as we most of the case learn by doing.

As Excerpt 8 shows, Participant 27 is aware of the challenges related to not having broadband internet but remains optimistic. In addition to internet access, participants identified the lack of support personnel (87%), such as IT specialists, and the hierarchical lecturer-student relationship (81%). These challenges are followed by students' reluctance to share information with unknown people (44%) and computer illiteracy among lecturers (31%). Additional challenges suggested by participants include (i) limited time allocated to teaching computer literacy, (ii) lack of electricity, (iii) lack of government involvement in using technology in education, (iv) lack of awareness of the benefits of social media among students, and (v) the often negative image which social media may have among lecturers and the Burundian society in general.

Regarding the reasons why social media may improve the teaching of English at the University of Burundi, most participants find that social media constitute additional valuable sources for both students and teachers. For example, as shown in Excerpt 9, Participant 10 observed that,

Excerpt 9. Participant 10

Using social media in classroom would help a great deal to improve the teaching of English at the University of Burundi in the sense that social media offers a wide range of sources that help one improve their linguistic skills especially in Burundi where there are few materials aimed at teaching English.

From Excerpt 9, social media are considered useful because they give a wide range of options that may compensate for the lack of resources and materials that are not always available in a Burundian context. This view is supported by Participant 30 in Excerpt 10.

Excerpt 10. Participant 30

I really agree with the statement because after or during class, social media is helpful to the improvement of English learning and teaching. Different online sites are sources of knowledge mainly in speaking English and others.

In addition, social media provide illustrations of skills discussed in class, which is another way they contribute to improving the teaching of English. This is illustrated in Excerpt 11.

Excerpt 11. Participant 15

I believe that some illustrations/ explanations can be found on youtube and be screened. That can help students as they may be watching videos related to the teachings already provided by their lecturer.

Excerpt 11 gives a clear indication of the role social media may have; they constitute a platform that could provide more examples and explanations of topics discussed in class. The advantages of this exposure and variety is illustrated in Excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12. Participant 42

I think since social media is an easy way that each and every student can afford I think if students in the university of Burundi can be sensitized to use social media they will gain more since on social media they will get a good gadget of different new competence as far as English language is concerned for example when using "you tube" they will follow videos of different people across the globe then they will be able to acquire listening skills very quickly and also speaking skills.

Since social media are accessible to most students, all they need is to be sensitised to using them for educational purposes. Students will be exposed to new skills in English through watching YouTube videos, for example. Participant 38 confirmed the usefulness of YouTube for educational purposes, as shown in Excerpt 13.

Excerpt 13. Participant 38

The teaching of English can be improved by the use of social media in the classroom because students can learn English by watching English videos on YouTube for example and it will be more simple for them and even for the teachers.

In addition to simplifying EFL for students and teachers, social media could also improve the teaching of English by offering a platform for adapting to a fast-changing world. Participant 25 puts it in the following terms in Excerpt 14.

Excerpt 14. Participant 25

As the world keeps changing, the teaching system (at the University of Burundi) should try to adapt positively. Almost everyone currently owns a smartphone at the University. This can undoubtedly help improve the teaching of English via the use of social media.

These results presented in this section show participants' views on the benefits of incorporating social media into the classroom and the challenges this may pose. At the same time, they are confident that social media could be successfully integrated into the classroom, and that this could impact positively the teaching of English at the university of Burundi.

4. Discussion and applications

To summarise the findings thus far, the present study explores the potential of using social media in the classroom even in case of limited resources, which was achieved by administering a questionnaire to English majors from the University of Burundi. Regarding the first aim of the study, students were asked about which social media they are familiar with, which platforms they actively use, the purposes for which they use them, the languages they tend to use, and the impact this may have had on their language skills. The results indicate that students are familiar with most social media platforms, though they actively mainly use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Skype, in descending order of popularity. This finding supports the general trend observed in earlier studies with Facebook being rated as the most popular of the social medium among students (Rozema 2009, Srirat 2014) and that Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp have gained popularity (Jere et al. 2019). This result also aligns with the marketing and communication strategies of many organizations (including higher education institutions), as most of them typically end their advertisements with a message referring potential customers to their Facebook page, Twitter account, and YouTube channels.

The purposes for which participants use these social media range from socialising, to classroom activities, to entertainment, exchanging all kinds of information regarding, for example, politics, studies, as well as careers, and religion. These results confirm findings from previous studies that social media allow students to interact and exchange information (Rozema 2009, Srirat 2014). Regarding language preferences, results from the data analysis indicate that participants tend to use English, which is believed to have improved through participating in social media. Even though participants in this study reported not using as much French as English on social media, they find that their French is also improved, despite the comparatively less exposure. This improvement is credited to the increased interaction and exposure to the target language facilitated by social media.

The second aim pursued in this study was to determine students' attitudes toward the incorporation of social media into the EFL classroom and to identify the challenges for implementing this change. The results indicate that participants are very positive about integrating social media into the EFL classroom, arguing that social media offer platforms for more resources and practice. Such sentiments support earlier findings (i.e. Abe and Jordan's 2013). Participants also pointed out that

interacting with a larger audience beyond the four walls of a classroom is another advantage of incorporating social media in the teaching of English in higher education, thus confirming the findings of Paulsen and Tække (2013) and Stewart (2015). Furthermore, using authentic materials which are fully integrated in students' everyday lives, such as social media, would help students and teachers to adapt to a changing world and close the gap between the classroom and the real world (Nunan 1999, Larsen-Freeman 2000, Gilmore 2004, Kilickaya, 2004, Klopfer et al. 2009, Abe and Jordan 2013, Stewart 2015, West et al. 2015).

The participants in this study also raised concerns about the challenges to incorporating social media into the classroom. Following Van Den Beemt et al. (2020), meeting these challenges will require coordination at the three levels, namely the student, teacher/lecturer, and administration levels. Lack of equipment, computer illiteracy, lack of access to the internet, lack of support personnel, lack of electricity, and lack of government involvement in using technology in education were identified as potential challenges that could be handled at the administration level. Obstacles related to the highly formal and hierarchical lecturer-student relationship, reluctance to share information with unknown people, and the lack of awareness of the benefits of social media, straddle the lecturer and student levels. Finally, the often negative image of social media among lecturers and the Burundian society in general could be dealt with at the lecturer level. These challenges could also be met by implementing the steps suggested in Ludwig and Van de Poel (2015), especially by including an awareness-raising component into social media use, recognizing the potential of social media channels as a support network for learners, using social media to establish a community of practice among teachers, and integrating social media use in teacher training programmes. A high-level collaboration between lecturers and the administration might be required for all this to happen.

Addressing the challenges to incorporating social media into the classroom may take time, since most of the concerns raised by the participants fall in the administration category (Van Den Beemt et al. 2020). The awareness-raising component and recognizing the potential of social media channels as a support network for learners may prove to be very strategic in reaching this goal. The university administration may need more evidence regarding the effectiveness of using social media for classroom purposes before making any commitment to financially support it. Interim measures may therefore be adopted by interested lecturers in collaboration with the students, such as using means that do not require substantial financial investment.

For example, WhatsApp is used by all the students and already facilitates sharing information among students; they use it when exchanging information in terms of scheduling/postponing an assessment or cancelling a class. As soon as the class representative receives information from a lecturer, they share it with other students using WhatsApp. The same way students share information about due assignments or any changes to the schedules³ via WhatsApp (this used to be done through text messaging), they could share interesting posts or videos they find on

³ It should be noted that the University does not use any of the Learning Management Systems such as Blackboard, Moodle or MyCourses. Schedules are posted on the Department notice board and any quick change to the schedule is notified to the class representative who has to send an SMS to the class. With WhatsApp, it is much easier to send a message to all the students in one go.

YouTube. Especially, lecturers could share links to selected videos and/or articles with their students via WhatsApp and thus use it for classroom purposes. Students could be assigned specific tasks to do before the next class. They might be asked to discuss everything in small WhatsApp groups and/or share information in the class as a whole. Depending on the tasks, lecturers could choose to count such assignments as completion or mark them for accuracy. This could result in increased participation of students and interaction between them, thus contributing to learning. Students would be motivated to engage in such activities, as they are already on social media. This aligns with earlier observations that the use of social media has an immediate effect on motivating students (Day and Wells 2009, Rozema 2009, Srirat 2014, Jere et al. 2019). Students may also be tasked to search for videos on a given topic and share their findings with classmates in small WhatsApp groups to stimulate comments and discussion, as is common on online forums.

In a course on phonetics and phonology, for instance, students could be asked to record themselves pronouncing target words, listen to themselves and take a second recording, trying to fix some of their mistakes. They can then share both recordings with peers in pairs or in small WhatsApp groups, take a third recording based on peers' feedback, and ultimately send the revised recording to the lecturer for evaluation and feedback. These steps could maximize practice and increase students' involvement, all of which proves beneficial for the learning of English. Furthermore, the above steps could be taken via Facebook, which was used by all the participants in this study. Creating Facebook pages and exchanging comments in small groups is not only possible, but may even reduce the anxiety posed by traditional face-to-face teaching practices. In response to the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers in some schools in South Africa (Ngqakamba, April 15, 2020) taught via WhatsApp by sharing information and tasks with their students, and seemed to be optimistic about its effectiveness. Whichever relevant steps the lecturers may take, the fact that students are already using social media is good news. This may entail that extending their use to classroom activities will not be met with resistance.

5. Conclusions

Based on the discussion above, this study concludes that students know and use the major social media, especially Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter, for a wide range of purposes. In addition, while participants tend to use more English than French on social media, they affirmed that both languages are improved because of being used on social media. Mainly, as reported by participants in this study, language skills were improved by watching videos and movies, listening to talks and songs, interacting with peers via social media, being exposed to the languages, coming across new vocabulary items, and reading articles. Despite the challenges that come with it, using social media could improve the teaching of English at the University of Burundi, as it provides additional sources, extends classroom practices, allows learners to have more exposure and to practice listening and speaking skills, is easy to use for both students and teachers, and adapts to a changing world. These results help answer the research questions examined in this study. At the same time, they give rise to new questions worth considering in follow-up studies, as listed below.

1. Whereas participants in this study are students majoring in English, future investigation could extend the study to students majoring in other subjects to determine what their views are on the benefits of using social media in higher education.

2. The questionnaire could be given to lecturers and administrators to determine alternative viewpoints.
3. Since not all the social media contribute the same way (e.g., Stewart 2015), it might be interesting to examine which platforms contribute more effectively and which ones may not. This could be an important step towards generalising the use of social media as teaching and learning tools.

All in all, the present study lays the basic groundwork for language practitioners and teachers alike in Burundi to reflect on the benefits of using social media in the classroom with limited resources.

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