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***Branch: English Language***

**Students' Perceptions of Informal Learning of  
English in Virtual Online Communities  
A Case Study of First Year L.M.D Students of English**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment for the Requirement of the Master Degree in  
**Language Sciences and Didactics of Language**

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## **Dedication**

*This dissertation is dedicated to our wonderful parents, who have raised us to be the persons we are today. You have been with us every step of the way, through good and bad times. Thank you for all the unconditional love, guidance, and support that you have always given us; we love you!*

## **Abstract**

In this research, we have aimed to discern the link lying between the informal learning of the English language and virtual online communities. So the research attempted to answer the research question that goes as such: What are the English language students' attitudes and beliefs toward virtual online communities? In order to answer this question, a questionnaire and an interview were administered to a sample of first year L.M.D students at Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center-Mila. The results revealed cannot be generalized but have shown a clear rapport between the students' proficiency of English and the use of social networking sites and multiplayer digital games. Virtual online communities in all shapes have proven to boost students' motivations, grammar and vocabulary skills; therefore, informal learning is as a powerful learning vessel as any other. The regular use of virtual online communities was found to positively influence students' perceptions of informal learning of English. Gendre, age, educataional level did not significantly influence students' perceptions of informal learning of English in virtual online communities.

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## **List of abbreviations**

Computer Assisted Language Learning: CALL

Digital Games-Based Language Learning:

DGBLL English as a Foreign Language: EFL

Facebook: FB

L.M.D: Licence Master Doctorate

Language Learning Social Networks: LLSNS

Massively Multiplayer Online Game: MMOG

Second Language: L2

Social Networking Site: SNS

Virtual Online Community: VOC

World of Warcraft: WOW

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## General Introduction

Today's young generation is referred to as the "Net-generation" as technology and the World Wide Web are the two most familiar objects to them (Strauss, 1991). Among the site types that the World Wide Web provides are the online social networks, which have captured the attention of students, as, among others, an educational tool for language teaching and learning. Examples of online social networks could be the twenty first century's most recent internet applications such as: Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter, Reddit, 4chan, etc. along with the Massive Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs), the most popular of which are: Warcraft, League Of Legends, Dota, Everquest.

Students' prolonged exposure to such materials will, we suppose, further increase their learning and build up their motivation; subsequently, informal learning of English will take place. It has also been suggested that the Net Generation students prefer independent learning style and take the benefits of technology for better learning (Carlson, 2005). Communicative skills are most likely to be enhanced, because of the previously mentioned procedure.

Moreover, the online social networks also provide an opportunity for both instructors and learners to be exposed to the language through authentic activities and materials; consequently, they can promote constructivist learning through meaningful communication (Woo et al., 2007). It is, therefore, perhaps, no longer useful to focus on the language classroom as the theatre for linguistic success or failure (Sockett and Toffoli, 2012). Thus, shifting our focus to informal learning of English becomes inevitable.

Sockett and Toffoli (2012) did not manage to successfully link online instructors and learners exposure with other Second Language Acquisition (SLA) models. For example, their contention that online instructors and learners exposure has much in common with task-based learning does not sound true. Teacher-designed tasks with

defined objectives in task-based learning are often intended to push learners to explicitly focus on form (Keck et al., 2006); this is exactly the opposite of what

Sockett and Toffoli (2012) said happens in online instructors and learners exposure, in which language learning is wholly implicit.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Social networks and massive online multiplayer games have become critical phenomena. The problem of this study revolved around the possibility to assess students' perceptions of informal learning of English in virtual online communities. Specifically, it sought to answer the following sub-problems:

- How to investigate students' perceptions of informal learning of English in virtual online communities in terms of:

- Social networking sites and multiplayer online games
- Mobile technology

- How to discern the relationship between informal learning of English and virtual online communities in terms of:

- Social networking sites especially (Facebook.com)
- Multiplayer online games especially ( World of Warcraft)

## **Aims of the Study**

This study aimed to investigate the informal learning of English through social networking sites and massive multiplayer online games; it seeks to expose how the students perceive it.

## **Research Question**

The dissertation investigated the research questions below:

- a. What are the English language students' perceptions of Facebook as an informal language learning tool?

What are the English language students' perceptions of digital games based language learning (DGBLL) as an informal language learning tool?

c. What are the English language students' perceptions of mobile phones as an informal language learning tool?

## **Hypothesis**

We hypothesized that:

The English language students could have positive perceptions of virtual online communities as informal English language learning tools.

## **Data Collection Tools**

To answer the above questions a questionnaire and an interview were conducted together with a quasi quantitative data.

## **The Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation provided an overview of the students' perceptions of informal learning of the English in virtual online communities. It is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter discussed virtual online communities and provided a brief overview on their emergence; moreover, this chapter discussed informal English learning through some types of virtual online communities and mobile phones.

The second chapter introduced us to the students' perceptions of social networking sites as well as the perceived strengths and weaknesses of online learning. Then, it

tackled factors that influence online learning, affective results of using social media and eventually the relationship between the social web and informal learning.

The third chapter comprised the methodology, results and analysis of the research tools, which contained a questionnaire and an interview. Both were students oriented.

The fourth chapter included several discussions of the results along with practical considerations, recommendations and limitations of the study.

## **CHAPTER ONE: VIRTUAL ONLINE COMMUNITIES**

## Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, technological contrivances have changed society. The creation of technologies such as the radio, television, telegraph, telephone and personal computer has shortened spaces amongst human beings and quickened crowd thinking. These devices raised the pedestal for internet creation (an unforeseen assimilation of information sharing capacities). The Internet today has modernised telecommunication through diffusion of multiple kinds of old-fashioned media such as video, audio, and text alongside interactive elements. Its use as an instrument for information distribution and a means for connecting persons through networked computers has led to a bountiful ground for the growth of new communication applications. Manasian (2003) foresaw that the Internet and other new tools would change practically every facet of our lives because they deal with the very core of society. Former technologies, from printing to the telegraph have had remarkable influence.

Yet, the coming decades are likely to display more radical changes, and to occur much quicker than in the past, for technological development is taking a relatively faster pace path. More notably, it seems as if they will be as prevalent and omnipresent as electricity.

Since the first thorough investigation on internet applications, it has been revealed that human relations through the computer-generated medium is considerably unlike physical interaction. This raised up interrogations concerning how different these two realms are, and more significantly, if users will profit from the dissimilarities. Academics have argued whether the virtual world is a positive or negative approach to human interaction.

The advancement of portable devices and wireless technology has ensued in drastic changes in the social and economic lifestyles of the contemporary people.



Nowadays most technological devices are manufactured to accustom everyone's practical needs. These gadgets are reforming users' daily lives. However, the improvement of digital technologies has had no critical effect on higher institutions of learning.

The digital games business has recently witnessed major alterations, partly because of the technological innovations. Malliet and de Meyer (2005) trace the video game medium back to its prehistory (starting 1958) and note that "almost all game genres known today already existed in a prototypical form in the early 1980s" (p31), ranging from language-concentrated adventure games to more hasty action-leaning games. However, the upsurge of online personal computer (PC) games starting in the 90s and the latest development of massive multiplayer online games (MMOs) have stretched the possibilities for players to interact in and with foreign languages, occasionally comprising numerous languages synchronously (e.g., Thorne, 2008).

### **1.1. A Brief History of Virtual Online Communities**

Nowadays, the Internet has come to be an essential part of many people's daily lives. People interact by email, shop online, and some may even date online. In March 2008, there were approximately 1.4 billion people, who had access to the web. The next generation will take this invention for granted as the previous generation did with television and telephone (Turow and Kavanaugh, 2003). For example, in California, 13 year old children use the internet to communicate with their school friends through instant messages (Gross, et al., 2002), and individuals regularly operate it to diagnose health related issues, find movie show times, and check airline schedules.

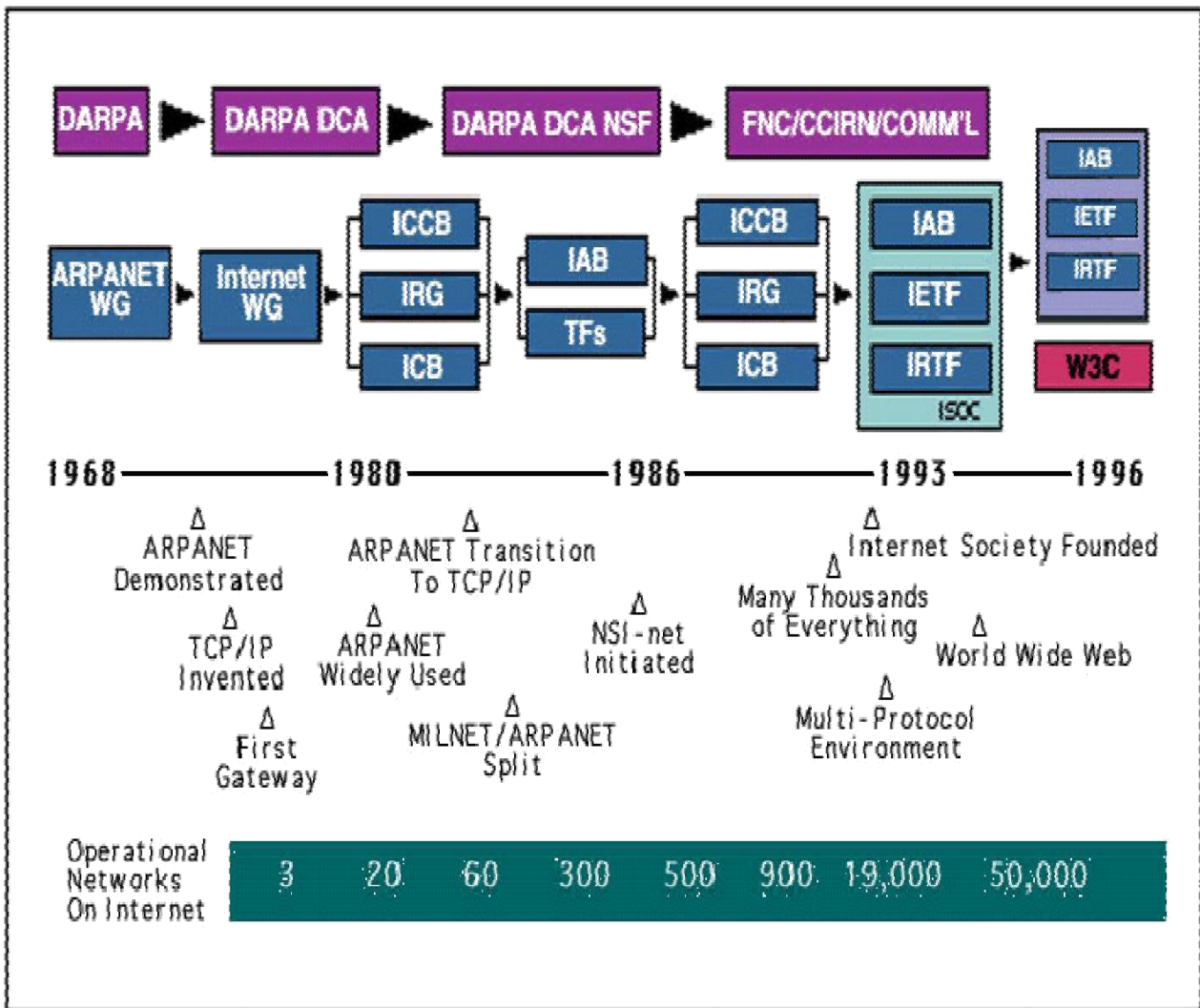
However, the Internet has not globally infiltrated society. At the turn of the century, the most popular reason why people used the Internet was to communicate with other people through email or to maintain interpersonal relationships (Hampton et al., 2001). In order to have a better grasping of the influence of the Internet on community structure, it is fundamental to look at the development of on-line communication.

### **1.1.1. Virtual Online Communities (1960 – 1989)**

In 1960, the United States Department of Defence's Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) developed what was historically acknowledged as the first computer-based online community. In reality, ARPANET was established to network universities and users (Cerf, 2003). The United States government modelled the Electronic Information Exchange System after an emergency communication network and used it to support computerized conferences of scientific researchers in the mid-1970s (Freeman 1986, Hiltz and Turoff, 1993). During the mid-1980s, personal computers gained general recognition by connecting to central communication hosts via modems and phone lines. Those hosts were interlinked through the global network, which delivered information alongside communication services. Through these interconnected computer networks, the entire ecosystem was known as "the net," which implied a "network of networks" that linked host computers using a high speed communications line (Craven and Wellman, 1973). Each host or server turned into the core of its own local network where users could connect.

### **1.1.2. The Birth of the Internet (1990 – 1996)**

In the early 1990s, commercial users were starting to tap into the Net, and the number of Internet hosts grew by 26% between October 1994 and January 1995 (Treese et al., 1995). While the usage of computer networks raised, the cost decreased substantively. Usage of these computer networks ranged from tapping into non-profit community bulletin board systems (BBS) to entertainment and commercial activities (Marx and Virnoche, 1995). America Online arranged information such as book reviews, restaurant guides and recipes for commercial ends (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** A Timeline of Internet Development 1968 – 1996 (Leiner, B. et. al,1999).

In late 1995, America Online had an estimated 4.5 million subscribers worldwide, CompuServe had 4 million, and Prodigy had 1.5 million (Lewis, 1996). Windows 95 was designed in 1995 by Microsoft in order to connect to the World Wide Web (WWW). Thus, low charge Internet service suppliers made their entrance. The new arrivers started relocating previous information networks, and as the World Wide Web gained fame, commercial businesses strung along, which made the Net even more intersected.

The dimension of the Internet magnified yearly. Its structure made determining the number of users difficult, because it was common for multiple users to share a connected computer system. Estimates of Internet users in the mid-1995 ranged from 10 million and 27 million adults (Lewis, 1995). At the beginning of 1996, there were over 24 thousand

discussion groups (Southwick, 1996). In the early 1990s, commercial users were starting to tap into the Net, and the number of Internet hosts grew by 26% between October 1994 and January 1995 (Treese et al.,1995).

### 1.1.3. Virtual Online Communities (1997 – present)

Once the Internet had been broadly recognized in the 90s, software developers commenced scripting applications to employ the connectivity among networks through the World Wide Web (see Figure 2 for timeline).

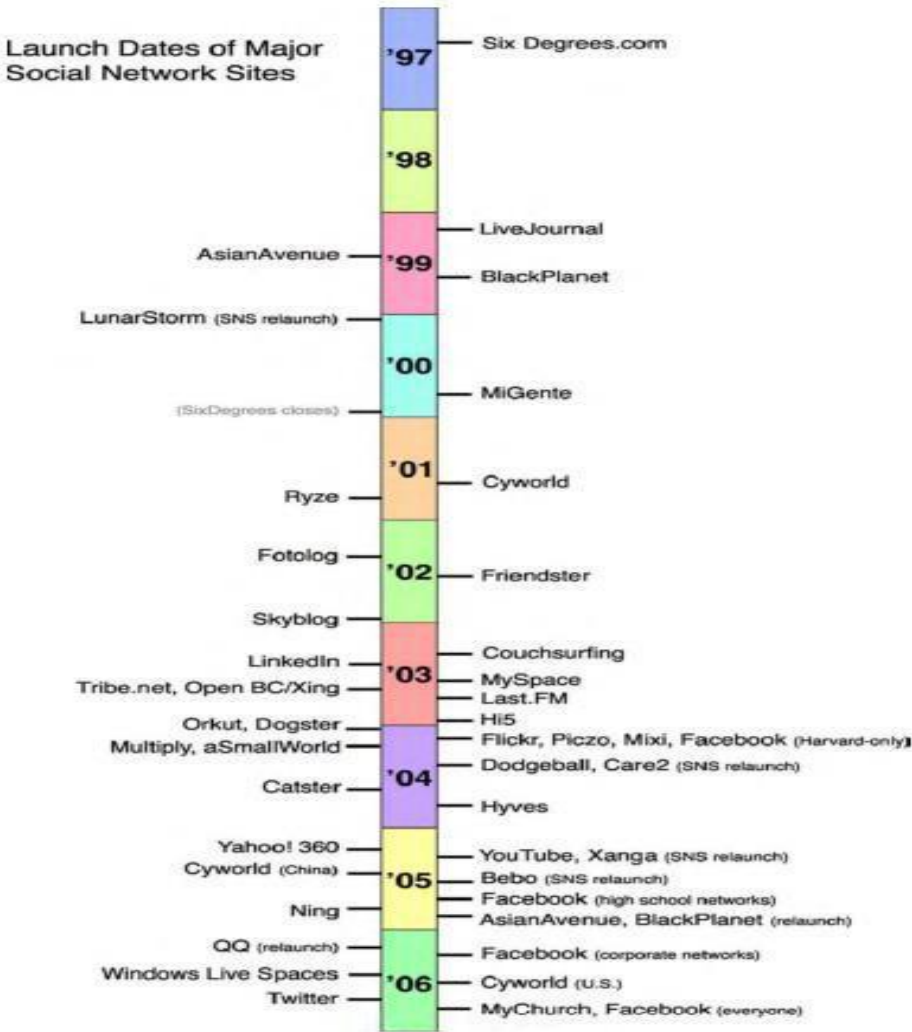


Figure 2 A Timeline of Virtual Online Communities 1997 – 2007. (Boyd and Ellison, 2007)

The above figure is a timeline demonstrating the evolution of virtual online communities from 1997 until now. It started with the establishment of Six Degrees.com back in 1997 and kept gaining popularity up to world leading virtual online communities, site Facebook.com.

## **1.2. Virtual Online Communities Defined**

The origin of virtual communities dates back to the 1970s, the early years of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET); when the world wide web did not exist yet. Nowadays, well-structured forums are simulated locations for information communication and exchange. In 1993, Howard Rheingold was the first to coin the term ‘Virtual community’. According to him, virtual communities are formed “when people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships”.

Various virtual communities have different levels of interaction and involvement between their adherents. A vital feature of a community is the interaction among its members. Apparently, Facebook.com and World of Warcraft are definitely among those ideal social virtual online communities.

## **1.3. Informal English Learning in Virtual Online Communities**

Today’s society has undergone dramatic transformations: The social web seeping through it making radical alterations and giving birth to a multifunctional platform in which distances are shortened and time is but a flat circle; thus, people find an easier way to learn by means of interaction whether formally or informally.

### **1.3.1. Definition of Informal English Learning**

Informal learning is not usually in accord with the usual learning regulations. The process of informal learning cannot be restricted or controlled given the convenience, mobility and liberty it offers, (c.f.2.6.1).

## **1.3.2 Types of Virtual Online Communities for Informal English Learning**

Many virtual online communities can offer an opportunity for people to learn and exchange their knowledge. Numerous examples go as follows: Facebook, LinkedIn, 4chan, Twitter, Reddit, 9gag, Tinder, Steam, Origin, Battle Net, etc.

### **1.3.2.1. Informal English Learning in Facebook**

Facebook (FB) is a communal social networking site that allows users to part information and notions over a wide area. It enables interaction to those with shared interests across political, economic, cultural and geographic borders.

Many studies have disclosed positive impacts of the use of FB as a site for online learning community and a successful tool for formal teaching and learning activities (Alhomod et al., 2012). On the other hand, many studies have revealed the negative impact of FB and showed it may not always be appropriate or successful for formal teaching and learning activities (Fodeman et al., 2009). Rosen (2010) stated that social networks provide opportunities for exchange of synchronous and asynchronous communication, social interaction, and multimedia information.

Students generally tend to use FB for the following reasons: sharing group works, pictures, applications, lessons, resource books and announcements. Recently, English as foreign language students have begun to use social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and it has achieved tremendous popularity among them. Blattner & Fiori (2009) argued that FB 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). Furthermore, Facebook is a social networking site that simplifies online communications among the students second language. Blattner & Fiori (2009) stated that FB can be used to improve students’ performance of the English language, increase motivation and trigger authentic language interaction. They argue that FB has “unique features that offer constructive

educational experiences while maintaining privacy and safety” and that the faculty of FB is “growing everyday with new applications” (p. 8). Facebook has witnessed enormous flourishing since its launch. Leutner & Plass 1998 asserted that FB offers a means of informal communication among its users.

McCarthy (2010) stated that students can communicate and interact in an online environment at their own pace and take time to consider comments and responses rather than being “put on the spot” as in the physical classroom. Communication and relationships originally spawned virtually may take place in the classroom. English language learners may lean towards using the primary sources available in the social networking site to acquire knowledge of the English language. Learning English in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as second language (ESL) contexts is generally associated with various dedicated groups accessible on social networking sites, which afford their members with updates of grammar, vocabulary, etc. Links can easily be posted by group members and just as easily accessed by English language learners.

Student interactions in online discussions can facilitate a learner-centred approach to teaching and provide students with an opportunity to practice and acquire knowledge and skills in a supportive and encouraging environment (Birch et al., 2007). Students’ performance in learning English is apparently affected by FB, because it has become a rudimentary constituent of student everyday life. Kabilan et al. (2010) found that the students believed FB could be utilized as an online environment to facilitate the learning of English.

Nevertheless, teachers seem to be willing to integrate FB within their educational curriculum with prearranged learning objectives and outcomes for a fruitful learning experience. Facebook has facilitated students’ language learning; it can make a more collaborative class environment and even motivate them to learn (Abu Bakar et al., 2010).

According to Liu (2010), FB has the potential to become a valuable resource to support students' educational communications. Haverback (2009) conducted a study to investigate students' creation and participation in an online learning community on FB to discuss assignments, ask and answer questions, post information, and support one another for their Reading Education Methods course. The findings indicate that students were motivated to be involved in FB discussions and they grasped a better understanding of the theoretical principles ensuring effective reading. In addition, students also developed better ideas as a group compared to when they read individually.

### **1.3.2.2. Informal English Learning Using Multiplayer Digital Games**

Linguists and game developers came to agree that digital gaming offers quite a fertile ground for language learning to take place, as many adventure-based digital games rely on quite elaborated English to build up mentally enriching game scenarios with thrilling quest lines. Besides, all of this happen in a usually very vast realm, interacting with thousands of other players on a global scale.

#### **1.3.2.2.1 Defining Digital Game-Based Language Learning**

According to Salen and Zimmerman (2004, p. 80) “A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.” In the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) literature, the word ‘Game’ signifies wide-ranging environments and player activity forms. Hubbard (1991) writes that “ Within the field of language teaching, game seems to be one of those ‘intuitive’ concepts which remains undefined even in works specifically devoted to it” (p. 221). Early definitions in the CALL literature emphasized that games are self-referential systems, lacking any attempt to represent the ‘real’ world (Hubbard et al., 1991). Therefore, as “a real-world system in its own right” (Crookall & Oxford, 1990, p. 18), a game can be set apart from “authentic communicative activities, which relate to the real world, and formal language practice, which relates to “the world of the classroom” (Hubbard, 1991, p. 221).



Correspondingly, games can also be differentiated from virtual reality. Although the precise relationship between games and simulations remains a debated issue, an essential difference is often that the former emphasize figured social worlds and immersive storylines while the latter focus on discrete and bounded scenarios and tasks (Tobias & Fletcher, 2011).

A broad but cardinal distinction within digital games based-language learning (DGBLL) is one that frames games, either as specifically designed for Second Language (L2) learning and teaching purposes. In recent years, aptly labelled synthetic immersive environments (Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008), or as not specifically tailored to L2 learning and teaching coined Commercial Off-the-Shelf (COTS) games in the general game-based learning literature (Van Eck, 2009); such as commercially designed massive multiplayer online role games (Thorne et al., 2009). To elucidate the instructor tool difference in the perspective of online games, we may consider instructional CALL games as “the implementation of computer games that include an identifiable teaching presence specifically for improving some aspect of language proficiency” (Hubbard et al., 2004, p. 457).

### **1.3.2.3. Learners’ Perceptions of DGBLL**

Hubbard (1991) views that DGBLL’s emphasis is on the learner-player experience.

A good rule of thumb for determining the degree to which a CALL activity is a game, then, is the degree to which students want to play it for the pleasure it brings rather than for some external reason. What a teacher or courseware designer calls an activity is not important; it is how the learner views it that will determine whether it is used as one (Hubbard, 1991, p. 221).

That is to say, a learner’s perception of a DGBLL being a game rather than a study course is what makes it a successful learning platform. Learners’ perceptions comprise both the game and themselves.

As to learners' perceptions about the learning environment, it is noteworthy that gaming environments are often associated with task-based language teaching approaches (Baltra et al., 1990). In L2 pedagogy, a widely accepted definition of 'task' is an activity that involves primarily meaning-focused language use (as opposed to form-focused exercises) that results in some (essentially non-linguistic) outcome and which is intended to result in the completion of some specified language aim (Ellis, 2003). Tasks, in other words, have both non-linguistic and linguistic goals.

In DGBLL, learners engage in a goal oriented game related performance thus ensuring rather productive learning outcomes; the (instructional) designer of a tutorial game specifies language aims. Researchers argue that whereas, ultimately, the attainment of language aims inherent in tasks is most important, an essential task condition needs to be met first: during the task learners must value outcomes most, "otherwise, there is a danger that the learners will subvert the aim of the task by displaying rather than meaningfully using language" (Ellis, 2003, p. 8). For the most beneficial language aims to be achieved, outcomes oriented application is to focus on linguistic cognitive processes. Henceforth, for psycholinguistic reasons, learners' perceptions of the goals integral in DGBLL tasks are important. Learners are more likely to be self-centred when it comes to learning goals and outcomes; they mostly rely on the perceptions of themselves (motivation and self-efficacy). In the educational psychology literature, the learners' goal orientation is seen to involve mastery goals (aimed at the development of competence), performance goals (focused on displaying competence), or a combination of both of these (Elliot, 1999). The consequences for performance goals are ambiguous due to the association of favourable learning outcomes to mastery-approach goals. Massive Multiplayer Online gaming (MMO) environments provide dependable insights on learners' orientations towards their learning goals.

For a better illustration, we mention World of Warcraft, one of the best-selling most successful MMORPGs with over eleven million subscribers worldwide as accurate evidence for the interrelation digital gaming and language learning have.

### **1.3.2.3.1. World of Warcraft**

World of Warcraft (WoW) is a massive multiplayer online role-playing game that allows its users the creation of their own game character, which they then proceed to edit their class, race, gender, facial features and even affiliation. Finally, naming this character offers each player a sense of uniqueness in an immensely vast membership, for each WoW gaming server can amass up to ten thousand players per realm playing with and against each other. The complex mechanics of this thrilling adventure, action based game opens room for an abundant source of language learning material, as it mainly relies on grammatically correct well shaped quest lines and breath-taking vocabulary rich lore stories. All of it taking place in the colossal world of Azeroth, allowing for real time discussions on a worldly scale.

### **1.3.2.4. Informal English Learning Using Mobile Devices**

Mobile learning is the capability to attain scholastic gist on personal pocket devices. Personal Digital Assistants instructional content indicates digital learning resources, which contains any type of multimedia content. Yet, mobile learning's use in the pedagogical terrain is still a matter of debate.

The majority of academics and tutors view mobile learning as the direct successor of e-learning. Pinkwart et al. (2003) for example, defines e learning as 'learning supported by digital "electronic" tools and media', and by analogy, mobile learning as 'e-learning that uses mobile devices and wireless transmission'. Quinn (2000) defined it earlier, as simply learning that takes place with the help of mobile devices, or the intersection of mobile computing (the application of small, portable, and wireless computing and communication devices) and e-learning (learning facilitated and supported through the use of information and communications technology).

According to the above definitions, numerous authors (e.g., Turunen, et al., 2003) view mobile devices as a pervasive medium that may assist us in combining work, study and exploit leisure time in meaningful ways. Traxler (2005) defined it as

“any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld or palmtop devices.”

From the definitions mentioned above, we have concluded that Mobile learning as pedagogical learning tool is still in its infancy; its viability compared to other forms of informal learning is to be argued upon, for it might be a more supple and convenient way to learn but still not as practical as other forms of informal learning.

### 1.3.2.4.1. The Difference between Mobile Learning and E-Learning

The table below elicits the most noteworthy dissimilarities lying between E learning and M-learning:

<b>e-learning</b>	<b>m-learning</b>
Lecture in classroom or internet labs	Learning anywhere, anytime
e-mail to e-mail	Instantaneous messaging
Private location	No geographic boundaries
Travel time to reach to internet site	No travel time with wireless internet connectivity

**Table.1.** Differences between E-learning and M-learning

Since smartphones possess the ability to make learning even more broadly obtainable and reachable; subsequently, mobile devices are deemed by many to be a logical extension of e learning.

### **1.3.2.4.2. Objectives and Challenges in Mobile Learning**

Mobile technologies hold educational potential for today's generation similar to that of television about 40 years ago. Carly Shuler (2008) provides the next key prospects and contests in mobile learning, which recapitulate quarrels in the deliberation about mobile learning fittingly.

#### **A. Objectives**

The objectives are summarised as follows.

##### **a. Encourage 'anywhere, anytime' learning**

Mobile devices permit students to collect, access, and process information outside the classroom. They can support learning in a real-world context, and help bridge school, after school, and home environments.

##### **b. Reach underserved children**

Because of mobile phones' relatively low market cost, they have become within anybody's reach no matter their age, social or economical status.

##### **c. Improve twenty-first century social interactions**

Mobile technologies endorse and encourage collaboration and communication, which are considered indispensable for 21-century success.

##### **d. Fit with learning environments**

Mobile devices can help surmount multiple challenges linked with superior technologies, as they suit several learning environments.

### **e. Enable a personalized learning experience**

Children are inherently different; instruction should adjust to each learner's needs. There are substantial occasions for sincerely aiding differentiated, independent, and personalized learning through mobile devices.

## **B. Challenges**

Here are few of the main challenges of mobile learning

### **a. Negative aspects of mobile learning**

Mental, societal, and substantial defies have to be overcome when mobile devices are integrated into children's learning. Drawbacks hold the potential for disruption or immoral comportment; health concerns; and data privacy problems.

### **b. Cultural norms and attitudes**

A 2008 study done by the Joan Ganz Cooney Centre in collaboration with Common Sense Media discovered that the majority of tutors consider mobile phones as disturbances and thus have no place in scholar domain.

### **c. No mobile theory of learning**

Presently, no mobile learning technology theory has been created, hindering the operative evaluation, instruction, and new learning applications design.

### **d. Differentiated access and technology**

Teachers and learners conceive of wide mobile technology variety as a challenge, and so do producers who seek to simplify this learning method.

## **e. Limiting physical attributes**

Children usually find themselves distracted from their learning goals, because of weakly designed mobile technologies. Some of the reasons that may cause this distraction are as follows: small screen size, restricted text entry, and limited battery life.

## **Conclusion**

From what has been discussed earlier, it can be said that a social networking website does not work as a technical platform for students to learn new theories or hone their skills in English as a second language; rather it works as a motivational platform (Greenhow et al., 2009).

One of the wide online communities exist in Facebook. Indeed, its positive impacts on the curricular terrain are clearly outnumbered by the negative ones. Being constantly able to synchronously or asynchronously discuss, share and browse any kind of instructional content makes it a helpful tool to promote learning in and outside the classroom; however, this tool is also considered to be an entertaining one; subsequently, users with an educational intention may find themselves falling prone to recreational distractions.

The tutorial gaming approach's presence in learning and teaching is as evident as that of any other formal official approach. Nowadays, it is very hard to ignore the major overestimation of the digital gaming industry. From what we have discussed earlier we have concluded that DGBLL managed to fulfil the most challenging task which is providing users implicit learning styles as the learner involuntarily grasps the input unknowingly so.

Merely designing a digital application for the existing educational systems will not be enough for a mobile learning upheaval. The real interest will be letting people select their own pathways and continue matters of interest. Mobile learning possesses

industry potential, but the best gratifying feature of these resolutions is that students of any age or background might have the opportunity to track knowledge that is significant and related to them. Integrating technology, and specifically mobile technology, early and often prepares students for the new reality.



**CHAPTER TWO/ STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON SOCIAL  
NETWORKING SITES**

## Introduction

Technology has utterly changed the world as everybody knows; therefore, the use of technology is the ideal method for people to seek knowledge. Social networking sites (SNSs) are online communities of Internet users who want to communicate with other users about areas of mutual interest, whether from a personal, business or academic perspective (William et al., 2009). *The world is a small village* is becoming less and less a metaphor thanks to social networking sites whereby worldly distances have been incredibly shortened. Obviously, the teachers and learners' use of SNSs as a communication tool is visibly on the rise. For instance, teachers and learners rely on Twitter as a bi-directional information provider.

Social networking sites although have been recognized as an important resource for education today; studies , however, show that students use social networking sites such as Facebook for fun, to kill time, to meet existing friends or to make new ones (Ellison et al., 2007). Although it has been put forward that students spend much time on participating in social networking activities, with many students blaming the various social networking sites for their steady decrease in grade point averages (Kimberly et al., 2009). The development of language learning social networking sites (LLSNSs) conveys two vital aspects of CALL: instruction and communication

Users of LLSNSs have a common interest: language learning. The most essential attribute SNSs is to endorse mutual discussions, as users communally participate in conversations to attain their goals. The users' feedback indicates a common range of assets and practices, that is to say a given user's knowledge of their mother tongue provides background that is valued to other users who are trying to acquire that language.

LLSNSs attempted to push the potential of SNSs by supplying users with precise educational materials and more accurate occasions for L2 communication. With these sites reaching up to ten million people in the last years. The issue of the SNSs' influence on learning has been investigated considering the questions below

1. Attitudes: What were the learners' attitudes regarding second language learning on a wide LLSNS?
2. Usage: What models of self-centred usage arose from LLSNS participation?
3. Progress: How much did self-centred LLSNS users assume they actually learned?

## **2.1. Students Perceptions of Social Networking Sites**

The following section illustrates how students may perceive social networking sites.

### **2.1.1. Students and Use of Social Networking Sites**

Social Networking Sites were mainly established as a means of communication between individuals who constantly hold discussions. The members of these sites are able to discover new opportunities and experiences, and express themselves. In addition, the need to use these SNSs might even escalate to become more of an addiction. Based on our background knowledge regarding the matter we have come to presume that younglings seem to use these SNSs for the following reasons:

- To attain technical and professional capabilities.
- Socialization.
- Academic collaboration. Informal learning.
- Professional and academic interests' exploration.
- World news actualization.
- To promote free speech.

## **2.2. Students Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Online Learning**

We attempt to discern the possible strengths and weaknesses that may result from online learning in the section below.

### **2.2.1. Students' Perceived Strengths of Online Learning**

A qualitative study performed by Petrides (2002) on the learners' perceptions of online learning has shown that the participants' thinking functions in writing were deeper than what they delivered in verbal responses; participants could constantly reflect upon each other's reflections, seeing as how they were able to browse any other postings at any given time. As stated by one participant, "There is something that forces you to think more deeply about subject areas when you have to respond in writing" (Petrides, 2002, p. 72). Another applicant recapped this view signifying that the online technology permitted better reflection than in face-to-face classroom debate.

Vonderwell (2003) interviewed 22 students concerning the way they perceive asynchronous online learning. Some participants stated that the asynchronous atmosphere endorsed them to write cautiously about their notions. For example,

Vonderwell revealed that one participant stated, "The discussion questions were not just for writing the answers; they required reflection" (p. 86).

Flexibility is another noteworthy strength of online learning according to Petrides and Schrum in 2002. In Petride's (2002) study, he stated that the participants faced fewer hardships in online course cooperative groups, since schedule readjustments became unneeded.

Another valuable advantage of online learning is the ability to find the most suitable learning approaches.

Convenience is yet another advantageous asset of online learning. As researchers found that online learners read and answered tutor's remarks in online chatrooms at the most convenient of times and places (Murphy & Collins, 1997).

### **2.2.2. Students' Perceived Weaknesses of Online Learning**

Deferral in communication is a major drawback as reported by many investigators (Howland & Moore, 2002, et al.). According to a study by Howland & Moore (2002), the lack of face-to-face, student-student, and student-teacher interaction is yet another issue of serious debate.

The research of Howland and Moore (2002) ascertained that the absence of communication between the learner and the tutor has led to self-confidence concerns due to assignments remaining unclarified by the teacher. Students also stated that general communication between each other was weak and of poor quality (Howland & Moore, 2002).

Petride's (2002) investigation also concluded that non-immediate responses in the online context led to students' frustration unlike traditional face-to-face class discussions. Vonderwell (2003) reported that one participant stated, "It might take hours, maybe a day or so before you get an answer back for the question" especially in asynchronous online environments. (Vonderwell, 2003, p. 84).

Separation from the community and feelings of loneliness were other noticeable setbacks of online learning. Vonderwell revealed that one participant stated, "I still feel like I know a little bit about my instructor, but not the same way that I would if I was in a class. I don't know much about her personality at all" (p. 83). Woods's (2002) study for instance has found similar outcomes, in his analysis on the online communication between teacher and student stated that online students conveyed feelings of seclusion from faculty members as well as their online courses study mates.

## **2.3. Factors that Influenced Students' Online Learning Experiences**

Numerous factors may affect students' online learning experiences. Song et al., (2004) inspection on 76 graduate students' perceptions of beneficial and defying components in learning online revealed that remoteness, comprehension issues regarding instructional goals, and technical complications were challenges in their online learning experiences. Other identified factors are learner characteristics (Howland & Moore, 2002) and the design of the learning environment (Clark et al., 2002).

### **2.3.1. Learner Characteristics that Influenced Students' Experiences**

The learner characteristics affect the manner with which he/she learns online. Howland and Moore's (2002) investigation on students' perception as detached learners in Web-based lessons publicised that students who were confident in their perceptions of on-line learning were those with features consistent with the constructivist learners. The most confident students were more autonomous, practical and accountable for their learning. In divergence with the students who stated less desirable perceptions of their online learning experience had identical anticipations for structure and information as they did for an in-class setup. Those students with less desirable perceptions revealed the necessity for instructor's response, as well as more structure. These students reported the deficiency of feedback and communication from the teacher as neglect (Howland & Moore, 2002).

Garrison et al. (2004) advocated that learners view a dissimilarity in the learning process and a requisite for their role regulation and the online learning ought to be regarded as cognitive or intrinsically angled. Garrison, et al. (2004) suggested that, online learners need to be more responsible, flexible, analytical, participative and curious to be successful in online class.

### **2.3.2. Learning Environment that Influence Students' Experiences**

The design of the online environment should be visually uplifting. Clark (2002) asserted in *Myths in E-learning* that the efficacy of electronic learning “all depends on the quality of the designed content” (p. 599). He also recommended that the electronic learning content have to be more “meaningful, distinct, vivid, organized and personal” (p. 601) to elevate students' memorization.

The text is the most fundamental aspect of communication in today's online tutorials. Texts are usually in paper-based format. Contextualization of learning styles and objectives in a given text are of major significance.

According to Dwyer (2003), communication among individuals is ineffective; as a result, of texts lack any visual/audio clues.

Nevertheless, texts grow more effective when accompanied with analogies, visuals, inquiries, and feedback. Clark (2002) stated that, “A picture really is worth a thousand words and the on-line environment can take advantage of the ability to include animation, photographs, video and other graphics” (p. 601).

### **2.4. Affective Effects of Using Social Media**

The use of social media has affective response effect that may be either positive or negative. As for the positive side, there is a research revelation stating that Facebook Social Network helps shy students overcome their fear, as they feel the pressure uplift (Bosch, 2009).

Regarding the bad side of deploying the social media for educational purposes. First, the online activities between teachers and students could affect teachers negatively for example the fixation on social networking or the inappropriate educator-scholar relationships (Vasagar et al., 2012). Second, linguistic and cultural dissimilarities,

especially in multicultural and multilingual classes, can cause tutorial failure in the sense that students may miscomprehend each other (Rembe, 2011).

## **2.5. Students' Perceptions of Language Learning through Social Networking Sites**

Previous investigations on both LLSNSs and other SNSs has concentrated on progress, attitudes, and usage.

### **2.5.1. Attitudes towards Social Networking Sites**

Albeit users may be concerned about confidentiality and surveillance on SNSs, according to Vie (2007), they do not apprehend sharing and exchanging information.

Chen (2013) examined the effect of FB on two international students' literacy practices (Cindy and Jane in the United States). According to Cindy, the informality of FB prevented her from using FB for literacy purposes, as she herself masters the academic English. On the contrary, Jane utilized Facebook as it is deemed a friendly place for English students; consequently, it was her resort to build a new character as a skilled user of EFL.

Although users usually appear to hold positive or even complicated attitudes towards using SNSs, user attitudes to LLSNSs remain vague. Stevenson and Liu (2010) wrote about both positive and negative user attitudes towards three LLSNSs. On the one hand, their participants were excited about learning from native speakers. On the other hand, they were reluctant about how LLSNSs were destined to be operated, with one respondent saying that Livemocha, an online language learning community, "should be built for learning a language, not for finding others for the purpose of establishing social relationships" (p. 249).



## **2.5.2. Usage of Social Networking Sites**

When using SNSs, non-native speakers tend to show a remarkable attachment to socialization. Mitchell (2012) emphasized the role of acclimation among FB users as well as experimenting with the language and building friendships; Vie (2007) also advocated that SNSs deliver a space for interaction in which learners are subjected to valid language applied for various social objectives. As a minimum two studies submitted that language learners' use of SNSs drops over time. Chen (2013) previously stated participants revealed declined participation on Facebook over time, as calculated by the number of status updates and other posts. Stevenson and Liu (2010) showed that 54% of their participants browsed Babbel.com for approximately one month, and 26% browsed it for one-three months.

## **2.5.3. Progress on the Use of Social Networking Sites**

Previous investigations on the use of SNSs for learning purposes pinpointed three areas of progression: identity construction and development, socialization and pragmatics, and language improvement.

### **2.5.3.1. Identity Construction and Development**

Identity construction and development have been carefully considered in L2 as a pointer of learning progression on SNSs. Upon her surveillance of two polyglot authors, Chen (2013) confirmed that SNSs permit users to browse across languages, cultures, and identities. Likewise, a survey by Blattner and Fiori et al. (2011) encouraged the idea that SNS' use aided students to build their L2 identity and establish a relationship with the target culture.

### **2.5.3.2. Socialization and Pragmatics**

Several studies suggest that social interaction on SNSs helps students to develop pragmatic competence. Vie (2007) illustrated how using MySpace and Facebook improved students' rhetorical awareness. Chen's (2013) case study illustrated the potentials of using Facebook for acquiring pragmatic use in English. Similarly, Blattner and Fiori (2009, 2011) studied learners taking an intermediate Spanish course and found that, with Facebook, these students developed socio-pragmatic competence in areas such as greetings and leave-takings over the course of a semester.

### **2.5.4. Language Improvement**

There are studies on SNSs which associated between the latter's use and development in new literacies and language abilities (Lee, 2006 & Mills, 2011), while some others concentrated on informal uses of language in online socialization (Chen, 2013 & Lee, 2006). Stevenson and Liu (2010) recounted that users of Babel.com were observed to make vocabulary improvement as well as better self-assurance in using the target language. Mills (2011) discovered that using FB in a French class enhanced a greater sense of community which was achieved through communication.

Lee (2006) also contended that the rate of L2 learners' participation on SNSs seemed to have positively influenced their oral proficiency, vocabulary skills, and semantic complexity. While the outcomes of Lee's study appeared to be promising, she also reported the non-academic usage of language practises among her participants - with a Korean inheritance, language learners preferred informal orthography in Korean; they affiliate themselves with their culture.

## **2.6. Informal Learning and the Social Web**

In this section, we will attempt to demonstrate the relationship that lies between informal learning and the social web, but first we will discuss what informal learning means.

### **2.6.1. Informal Learning Defined**

Learning is an inherent, glib and an everlasting process that characterise the human nature. Education on the other hand, is an academic, well-constructed and instituted process with specific purposes. Learning and education often are jumbled up, because education is built upon the learning process. Learning could be formal, non-formal or informal:

1. Formal learning is transmitted in elementary schools, secondary schools and universities. It is based on the teacher-student model.
2. Non-formal learning is considered as regulated learning but external to the formal learning system; it is given by official organizations such as governmental services, enterprises, etc.
3. Informal learning is unorganized and casual; for instance travelling and watching T.V could lead to informal learning. It is what we learn from everyday life.

### **2.6.2. The Relationship between Informal Learning and the Social Web**

The latest generation of the World Wide Web is one that follows a philosophy of participation, social interaction and collaboration thus leading us to a seamless state of interconnectivity, sustained by the necessary forms of technology. Social networking sites and tools share two common attributes: convenience and interaction accessibility; social networking tools open horizons for various learning styles to take place. They provide students with the ability to remain constantly intertwined within the network and expand their culture.

The social web users' knowledge relies on rearrangements, discussions and continuous sharing. Therefore, the handiest tool of informal learning is none other

than interaction; the freedom of choice found in informal learning is an exclusive feature of it.

The above-mentioned principles are in rapport with ‘connectivism’, whose origins were traced back to several learning theories, social structures and technologies in order to fulfil the twenty first century’s learning needs. The combined efforts of multiple researchers in various educational fields led to the definition of connectivism as a theory for learning built on web structures, shifting environments and dispersed perception.

The concept of distributed perception within connectivism is especially applicable for our paper for it contradicts the idea that cognitions being possessed and dwelt in our minds. Since dispersed perception, tools, relics and social interactions existing out of our minds are not simply sources of stimulus and direction, but are actually thought wagons.

In this way, when we point out to the learning that happens within a networked structure we indicate the information transmitted amongst The units, individuals, relics, devices or settings of these networks. The power of the network is demonstrated through its expandability, growth, reaction, adaptation and diversification in terms of units, individuals, contents and other networks.

Each user runs his/her network connections and learning occurs once connected, when we arrange, construct and recognize forms that permit us to read between the lines and comprehend the knowledge and cognitions lying along the way or dropped by other connections. Today’s challenge is to be acquainted to the person beholding the knowledge rather than the knowledge itself. As we connect more and with more people we gain more knowledge from their diversity. Context is of major importance as well, as it matters as much as the parties involved in the connection/exchange do.

## Conclusion

Students tend to use social networks as a means of socialization, academic collaboration, informal learning, discovery and exploration. Social networks are rather positively seen by the users given the efficient learning they are provided with, although the way that social networks are to be viewed, remains subjective to the viewer.

On the one hand a study has shown that online technology pushed students to better enhance their critical thinking skills, as opposed to face-to-face classroom interaction, on the other hand they seem to face more struggles due to the absence of an instructor and the non-seamless state online technology finds itself in.

Students online learning experiences are affected by numerous factors. Some of which may be pertinent to the learners' characteristics, others are related to their learning environment. Behavioural studies showed an interesting drop rate regarding students' anxiety, shyness and overall freight levels.

Since the social web provides a diversified knowledge through the interactions of numerous culturally varied entities, informal learning becomes an eventuality anyone could benefit from especially if the context is informative and if the interaction is multidirectional, omnipresent and from reliable sources.

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY, RESULTS, AND  
ANALYSIS**

## **Introduction**

First, this study investigates the students' use of the social networking site FB and their broad perceptions of mobile phones and online digital games as new fashions of learning EFL. The research specifically looks at the nature of the relationship between students and Facebook, also how they perceive mobile learning and DGBLL in EFL classrooms. The general design of the study, its data collection tools, its procedures, and results are presented in this chapter.

### **3.1. Design of the Study**

This research paper is subscribed under the quasi-quantitative research design, for it gathered data that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. It is also an exploratory study that allowed us to explore the first year L.M.D students' perceptions of informal learning of English in virtual online communities.

### **3.2 Data Collection Tools**

To answer these questions, we analysed the data gathered via a questionnaire and an interview about the respondents' participation in virtual online communities, and their experiences in social networks, DGBLL and mobile learning.

Questionnaires, amid other data collection tools are simple and useful means to save data from a considerable population sample of EFL students.

As for the rationale behind the use of the interview was to provide more in-depth and more contextualized insights into how students perceive informal learning of English in virtual online communities.

Whereas the survey provided information about the degree to which students are connected to virtual online communities, the qualitative interview provided rich information about what such VOCs actually mean to them, how social networking

sites and Digital games contributed towards the enhancement of their learning, what (precise and specific) reasons led them to use smartphones.

The collected results enabled us to prove or disprove the hypothesis stated early on in the introduction.

### **3.3 Population and Sampling**

The current investigation addressed first year L.M.D students at the Millevian university and it took as a sample a group of forty first year L.M.D students at Abdelhafidh Bousouf University Center-Mila. Among the forty students, only six participated in the interview because they were the only ones who volunteered to take part.

### **3.4. The Questionnaire**

The following segments contained the main elements of the questionnaire.

#### **3.4.1. Description of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire of this study is comprised of four sections. The first part intended to gather background information about the participants: their educational level, sex, English learning experience. The second part targeted students' social networking experience with FB. The third part aimed to ascertain students' general perceptions toward DGBLL. The fourth part tackled students' perceptions of mobile learning within the EFL classroom.

The table below shows the four parts:



Section	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
<b>Section title</b>	Background	Facebook	Online digital games	Mobile phones for connecting to VOCs in the EFL classroom
<b>Type of the information sought</b>	General Information	Experience in using FB	The impact on students' learning of EFL	Mobile learning in the EFL classroom
<b>N° of questions</b>	7	5	7	3

**Table 3.1.** Distribution of questions in the questionnaire

As it is indicated in the table above, each part of the questionnaire contained of a number of questions; their analysis is as follows.

### 3.4.2 Data Analysis

The following segment exhibited and inspected students' responses to the 16 questions of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was delivered to 40 first year L.M.D students at Abdelhafid Boussouf university center-Mila; 40 copies were returned, this gave a total return of 100 %. The following table summarized the precise number of the questionnaire copies delivered and returned in the university with the percent that signified each one of the total sample of returned surveys.

Academic institution	N° distributed	N° returned	% returned
<b>Abdelhafidh Boussouf university center-Mila</b>	40	40	100%

**Table 3.2.** Questionnaire distribution and collection in university

### 3.4.2.1. Background Information

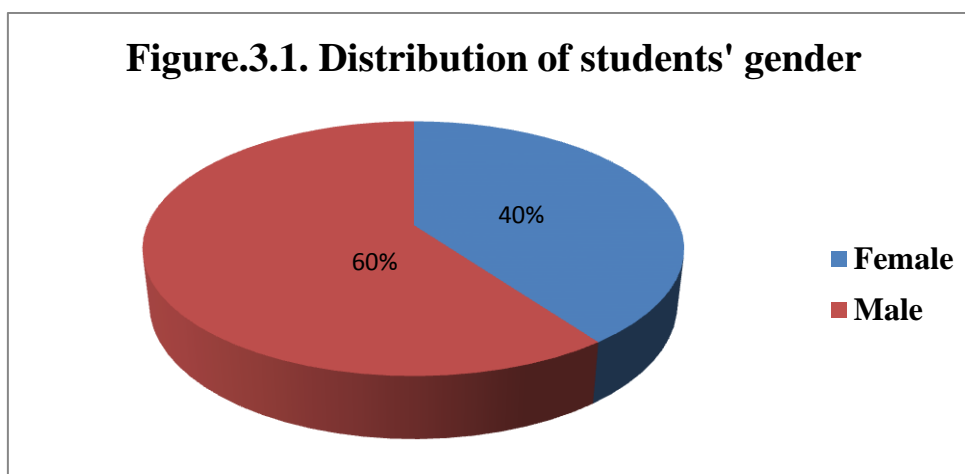
To collect information about the participants' characteristics, we requested them to answer questions associated with their gender, age and experience. Table 2 summarized the detailed results.

Educational level	N°	Gender	N°	Age	N°	Experience with learning English	N°
First year L.M.D	40	Female	24	18-19	7	8-9	7
		Male	16	19-20	21	9-10	21
				20-21	8	10-11	8
				21-22	4	11 or more	4
Total	40		40		40		40

**Table 3.3.** Descriptive statistics on students' age, gender and experience.

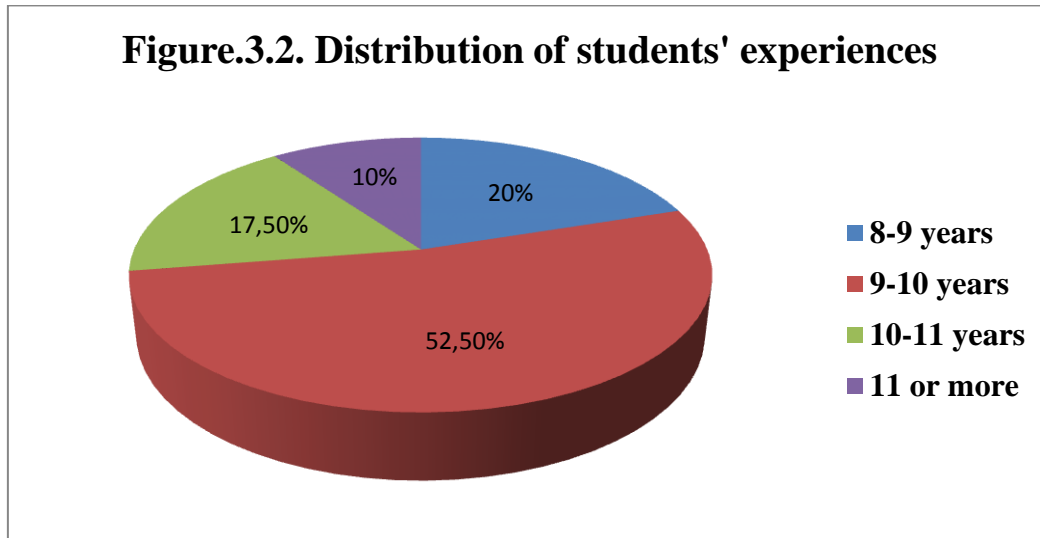
#### i. Students' Gender

As for the students' gender and as it is shown in Table.2. More than half of the participants were females, with 60%, and only 40% were males.



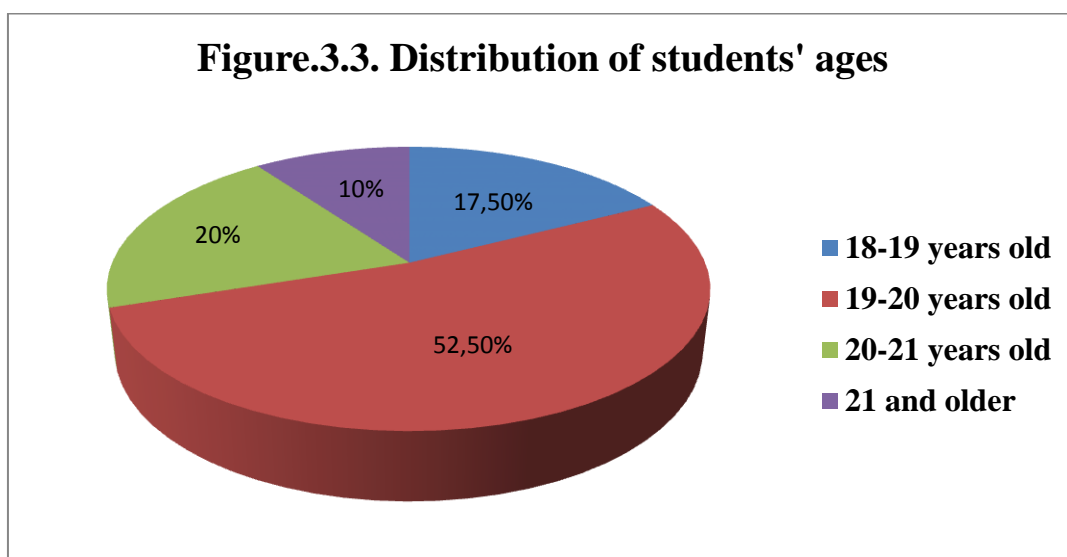
## ii. Students' Experience

Half of the participants' experience in learning (52.5%) ranged from 9 to 10 years and that of 20% of them fell between 10 to 11 years, and then came a category with an experience of 8 to 9 years (only 17.5%). The last category, which had an experience of 11 or more years, represented only (10%).



## iii. Students' Age

Half of the students were 19 to 20 years of age (52.5%), and 20% of them were 20 to 21 years old. As for the students aged from 18 to 19 years, we had (17.5 %). The last category of students whose age is 21 and older comprised (10%) of the sample.



### 3.4.2.2. Students' Experience with Facebook

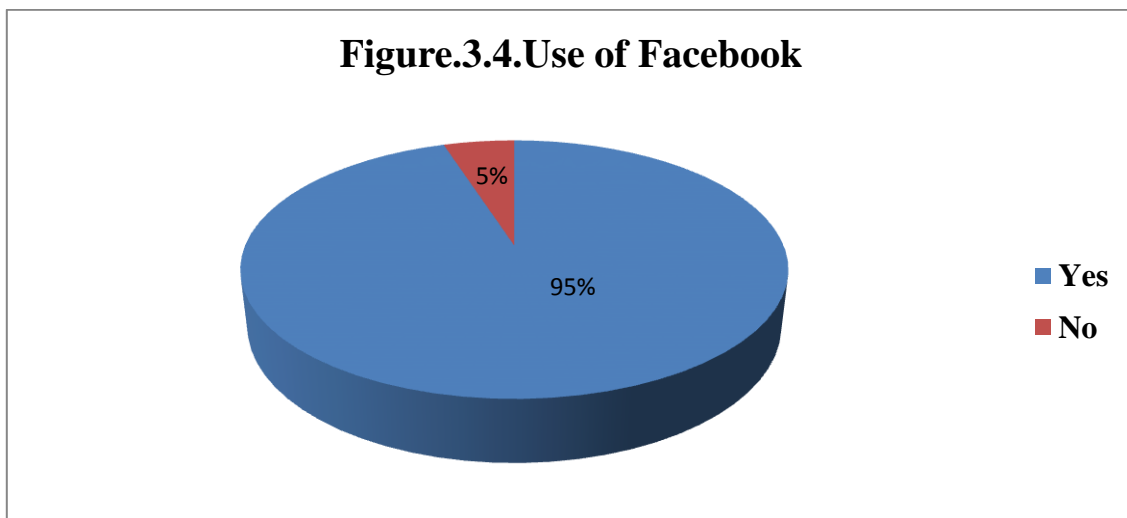
The second section of the questionnaire tackled students' experience with Facebook. In this section, we requested students to deliver precise information about their insights on Facebook, the usage rate, the English language presence and its significance as a learning tool.

#### Q4/ Do you use Facebook?

From 40 students 38 used Facebook and only 2 of them did not.

Use of Facebook	N°	%
Yes	38	95%
No	2	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3.4.** Use of Facebook



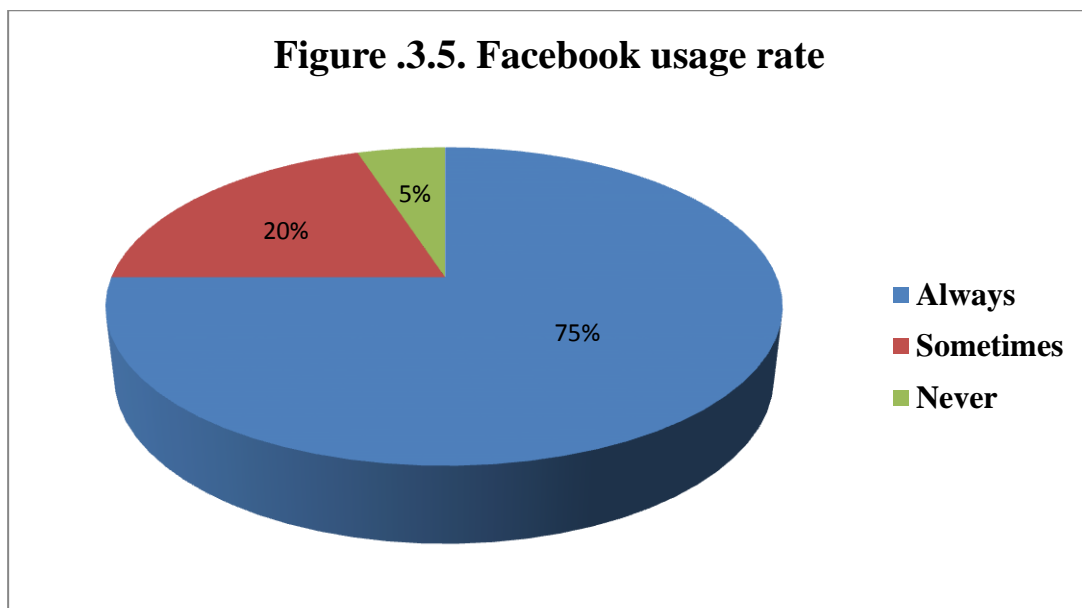
From the results above, we can say that Facebook has become a widespread phenomenon among the youngsters.

### Q5/ How often do you use Facebook?

Stated daily hours and regularity of Facebook used oscillated among the 40 participants as outlined in table 5 with the majority of participants were using Facebook all the time (75%), (20%) of them used it sometimes and only 2 of the participants did not use it at all (5%).

Facebook Usage	N°	%
Always	30	75%
Sometimes	8	20%
Never	2	5%
Total	40	100%

Table 3.5. Facebook usage rate



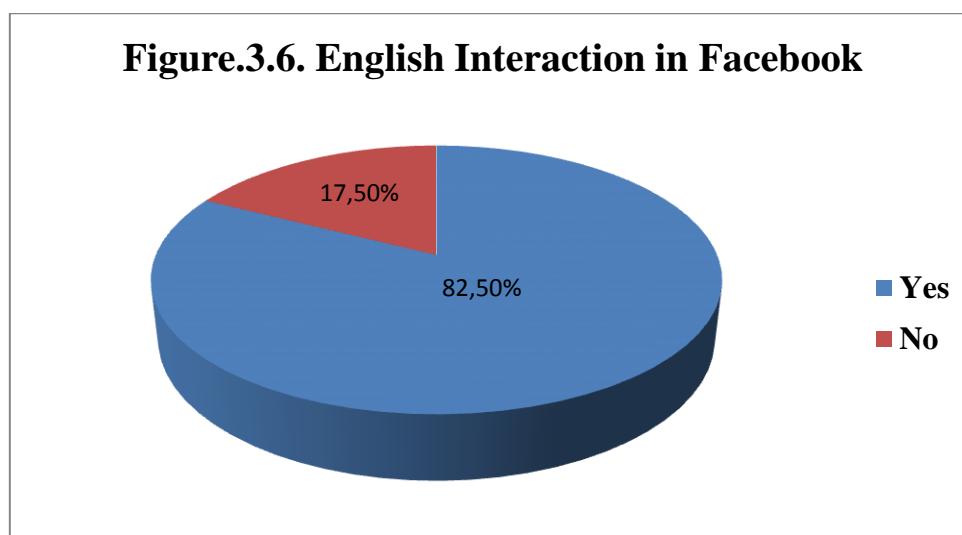
According to the table and pie chart above, we could confirm that FB has become a basic need to many of its users. Since, the vast majority of students used it all the time.

### Q6/ Do you use English to interact in Facebook?

The students' responses when asked whether they use English in their Facebook interactions showed that almost 83% of them used English to interact within Facebook, whereas approximately 18% did not use English in their Facebook interactions. The table below has shown the exhaustive numbers.

English Interaction	N°	%
Yes	33	82.5%
No	7	17.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3.6.** Students' English interaction in Facebook



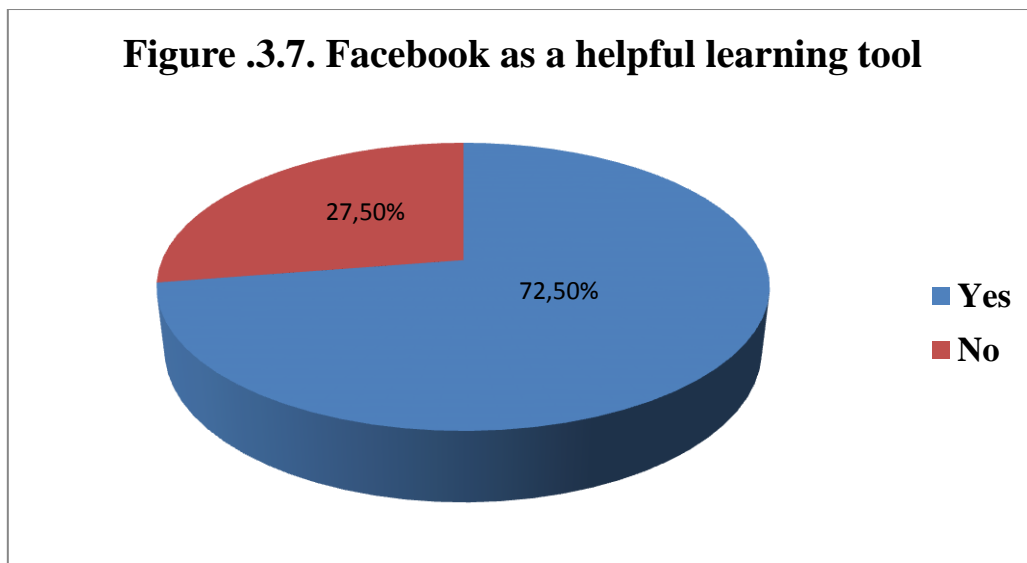
Almost all of the students shown a remarkable attachment to the usage of English while conversing within FB; whereas a few of them preferred Arabic to interact with each other.

### Q7.1/ Do you find Facebook a helpful tool in learning?

As it is indicated in the table and pie chart below, almost 73% of students found Facebook a helpful tool in learning and nearly 18% thought otherwise.

Facebook's significance in learning	N°	%
<b>Yes</b>	33	72.5%
<b>No</b>	7	27.5%
<b>Total</b>	40	100%

**Table 3.7.** Facebook as a helpful learning tool.



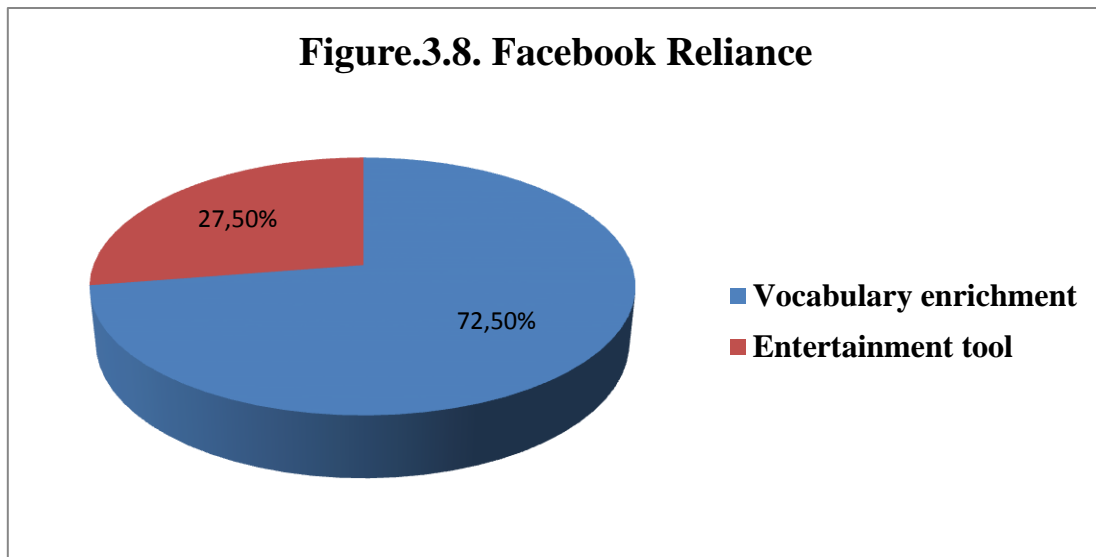
According to the results above, a great share of students agreed upon the helpfulness provided by Facebook concerning their English language proficiency.

**Q7.2/ Elaborate on the reasons for having chosen either?**

Most students acknowledged their reliance on Facebook for vocabulary enrichment; nevertheless, some of them thought that Facebook is rather an entertainment tool, thus did not allow any educational ends to be met.

Facebook reliance	N°	%
<b>Vocabulary enrichment</b>	33	72.5%
<b>Entertainment tool</b>	7	27.5%
<b>Total</b>	40	100%

**Table 3.8.** Facebook reliance



The students, who agreed upon FB as a helpful learning tool considered it a powerful source of vocabulary enrichment. The rest considered it as a recreational tool.

### 3.4.2.3. Students' Perceptions of Digital Games Based Language Learning

The third part of the questionnaire explored the relationship between language learning and digital games by investigating the participants' tendencies towards the employed gaming platforms, their utilization frequency and the nature of the interaction.

#### Q8/ Do you play online games?

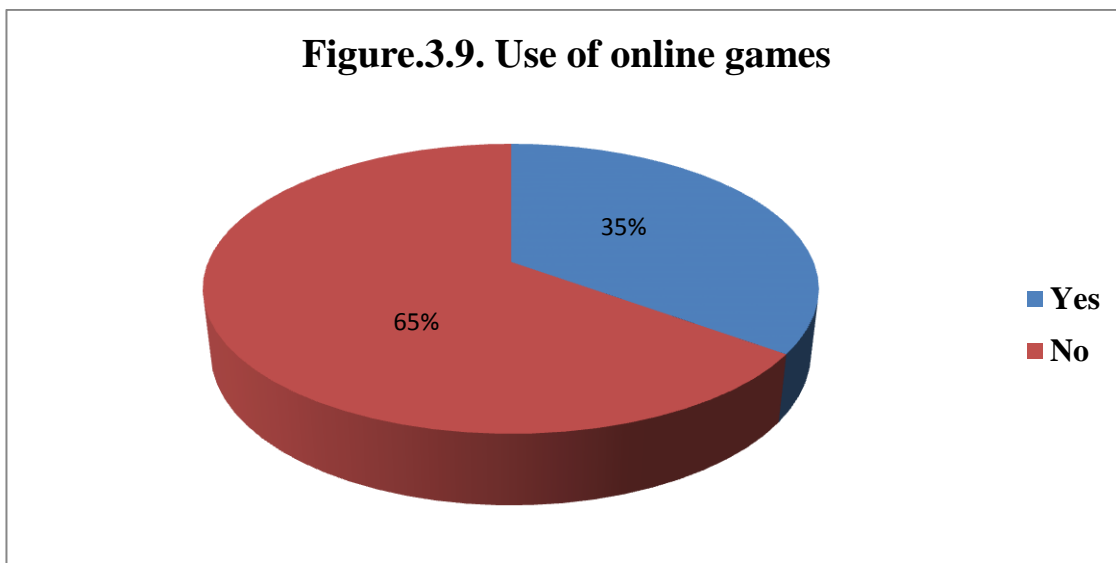
From the total 40, only 14 participants (35%) played online games, however 26 (65%) did not, as indicated in the table below.

Use of online games	N°	%
<b>Yes</b>	14	35%
<b>No</b>	26	65%
<b>Total</b>	40	100%

**Table 3.9.** Use of online games



**Figure.3.9. Use of online games**



As it is indicated in the table and pie chart above, digital games did not infiltrate youngsters’ lives as Facebook did, for more than half of the students did not show an interest towards playing online games.

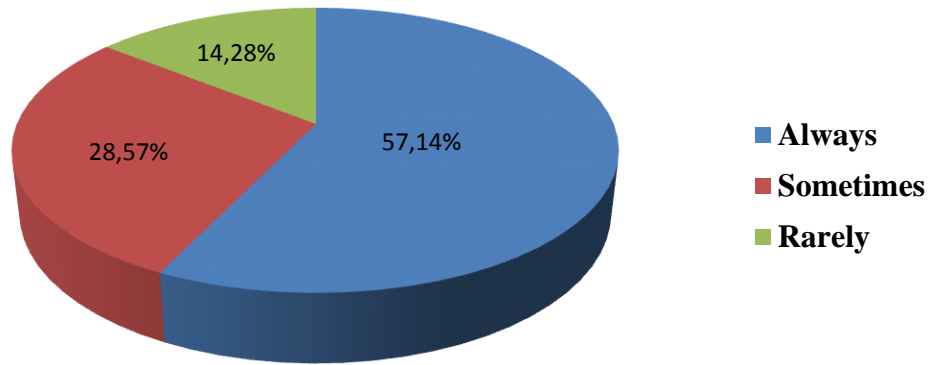
**Q9/ If yes, how often do you play them?**

Online gaming use ranged among the 40 participants as outlined in table 10. The majority of the respondents (57%) used online games all the time, approximately 29% of them utilized online games sometimes and only two of the participants rarely deployed them (14%).

Online games usage	N°	%
<b>Always</b>	8	57.14%
<b>Sometimes</b>	4	28.57%
<b>Rarely</b>	2	14.28%
<b>Total</b>	14	100%

**Table 3.10.** Usage frequency of online games

**Figure .3.10. Online games usage frequency**



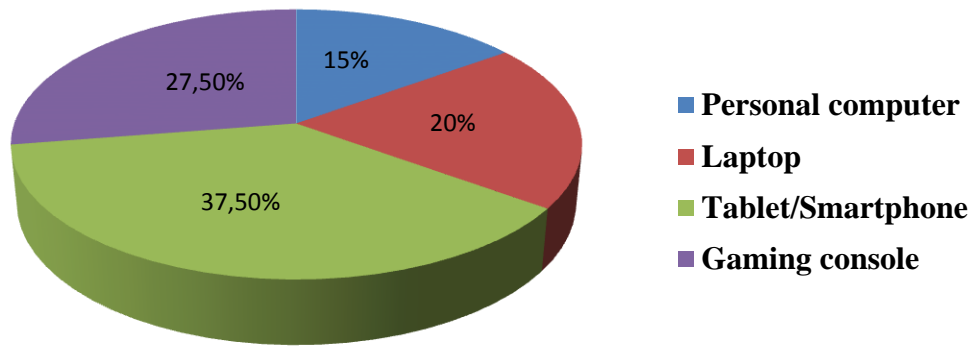
**Q10/ What platform do you play on?**

When asked about online gaming platforms used on a regular basis, a majority of the 40 students reported using smartphones/tablets (37.5%), 27.5% of them used gaming consoles, and 20% relied on laptops regularly. Only 15% of the learners played games on personal computers.

Platform used	N°	%
<b>Personal computer</b>	6	15%
<b>Laptop</b>	8	20%
<b>Tablet/Smartphone</b>	15	37.5%
<b>Gaming Console</b>	11	27.5%
<b>Total</b>	40	100%

**Table 3.11.** Online gaming platforms’ used by students

**Figure.3.11. Online gaming platforms' used**



According to the above results, Gaming platforms choice disparity was mainly due to their subjective tastes.

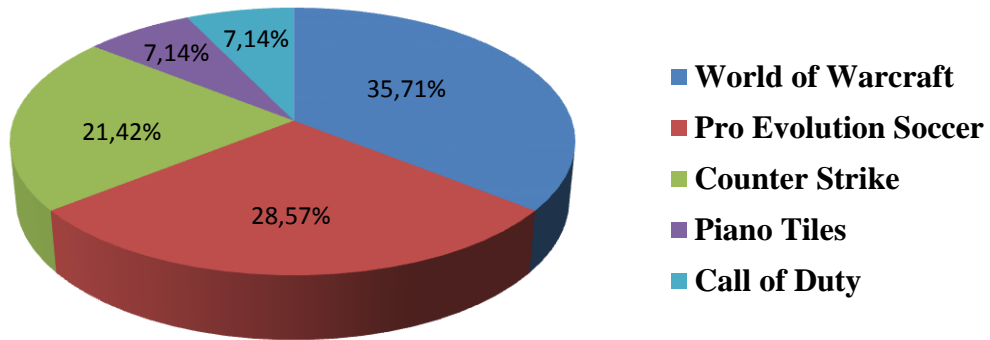
**Q11/ Can you name a few of your favourite multiplayer games?**

When asked about the favourite multiplayer games they usually played, almost 36% of the respondents played World of Warcraft, nearly 29% played Pro evolution soccer, 21% play Counter Strike, 7 % played Piano Tiles, and the last 7.14% played Call of Duty.

Multiplayer game	N°	%
<b>World of Warcraft</b>	5	35.71%
<b>Pro Evolution Soccer</b>	4	28.57%
<b>Counter Strike</b>	3	21.42%
<b>Piano Tiles</b>	1	7.14%
<b>Call of Duty</b>	1	7.14%
<b>Total</b>	14	100%

**Table 3.12. Favorite multiplayer games played**

**Figure.3.12. Favourite multiplayer games**



World of Warcraft, Pro Evolution Soccer and Counter Strike prominence among students is mainly due to their wide spread popularity.

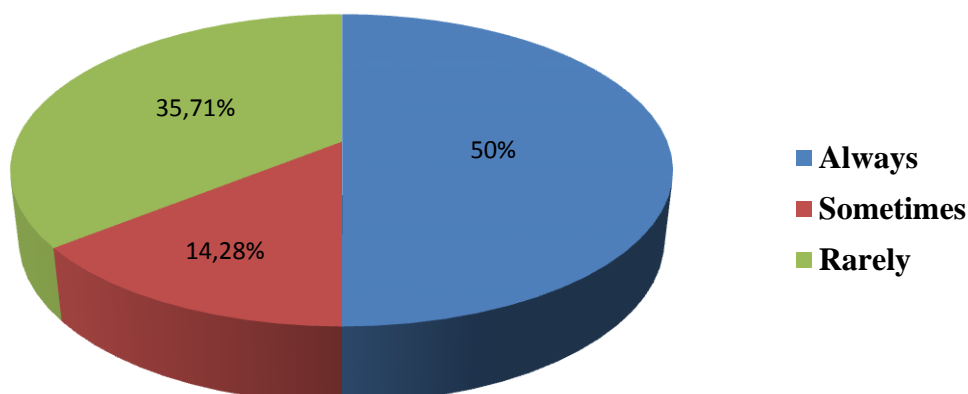
**Q12/ Do you often interact with foreign players?**

From the total 14, only 5 (36%) participants did not interact with foreign players while playing online games, whereas 9 of them (64%) did, 7 students (50%) always did, and 2 of them (14%) did that only sometimes.

Foreign player interaction	N°	%
Always	7	50%
Sometimes	2	14.28%
Rarely	5	35.71%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3.13.** Foreign players' interaction

**Figure.3.13. Foreign players interaction**



Students' responses were contradictory regarding their foreign players interaction in virtual online communities.

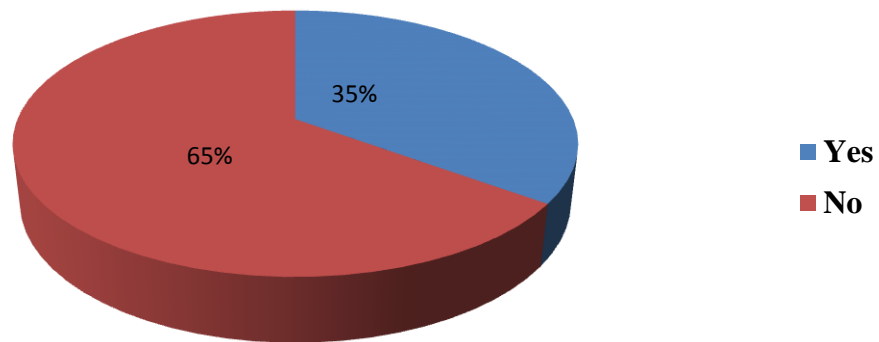
**Q13.1/ Does online gaming help improve your English learning proficiency?**

Out of the total 40 respondents, only 35% agreed that online gaming did help them improve their English learning proficiency, whereas 65% did not agree on that.

English learning proficiency	N°	%
Yes	14	35%
No	26	65%
<b>Total</b>	40	100%

**Table 3.14.** English learning proficiency improvement

**Figure.3.14. English learning proficiency improvement**



Not all respondents responses were positive regarding the help provided by online gaming concerning their English learning proficiency, mainly due to their unfamiliarity with online games.

#### **Q13.2/ Elaborate on the reasons for having chosen either**

Although not all the respondents interacted with foreign players, they all agreed on the sole fact that games themselves offered the opportunity for learning enhancement to take place through single player experience with the vocabulary and the lore the game offered. That is to say, not only multiplayer interaction boosted the learning process.

#### **3.4.2.4. Students' use of mobile learning**

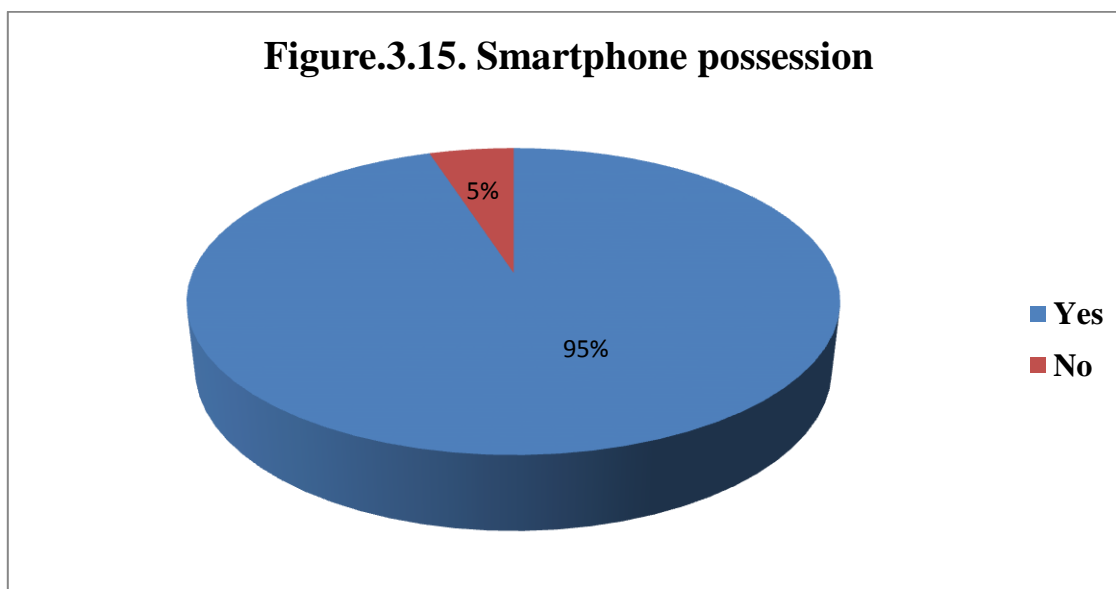
The fourth and last part of the questionnaire enquired about the students' experience with mobile learning. In this part, we requested students to provide honest responses regarding the relationship they thought lied between mobile smartphones and language learning.

### Q14/ Do you possess a smartphone?

When asked about their possession of a smartphone, most responses were positive (95%), only 5% amongst the total 40 participants did not actually own a smartphone.

Smartphone possession	N°	%
Yes	38	95%
No	2	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3.15.** Smartphone possession.



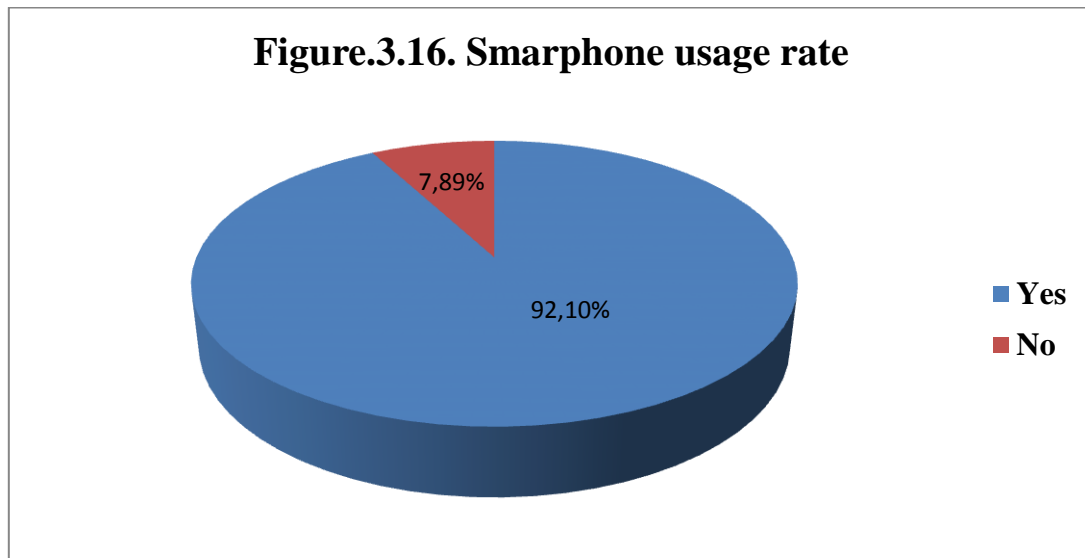
Based on the results above, we have concluded that smart phones have become more of a necessity nowadays, since almost every student possessed a smart phone.

### Q15/ If yes, how often do you use it?

Out of the 38 smartphone users, 35 (92%) admit using it all the time, whereas the rest 3(8%) only use it sometimes.

Usage rate	N°	%
<b>Always</b>	35	92.10%
<b>Sometimes</b>	3	7.89%
<b>Total</b>	38	100%

**Table 3.16.** Smartphone usage rate



Building on the outcomes of the table and the pie chart, we are sure more than ever that smart phones have deeply infiltrated today’s generation, as almost every student felt the a constant need to check his smart phone for various reasons.

**Q16.1/ Do you use your phone in your English classroom sessions?**

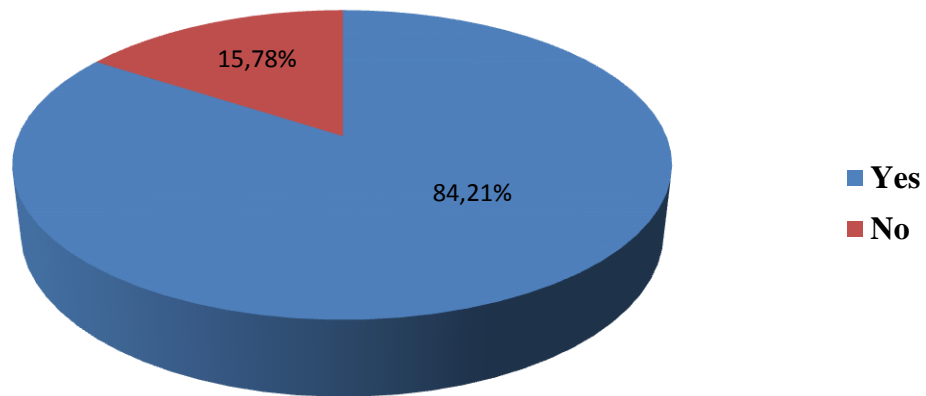
As indicated in the table below, 32 (84%) out of the 38 students used their smartphones in the classroom, while 6 (16%) of them did not.

Smartphone usage	N°	%
<b>Yes</b>	32	84.21%
<b>No</b>	6	15.78%
<b>Total</b>	40	100%

**Table 3.17.** Smartphone usage in the classroom



**Figure.3.17. Smarthpone usage in the classroom**



Stemming from the results above, it is safe to presume that smart phones have penetrated English classrooms too, since the vast majority of students used them inside their English classrooms sessions.

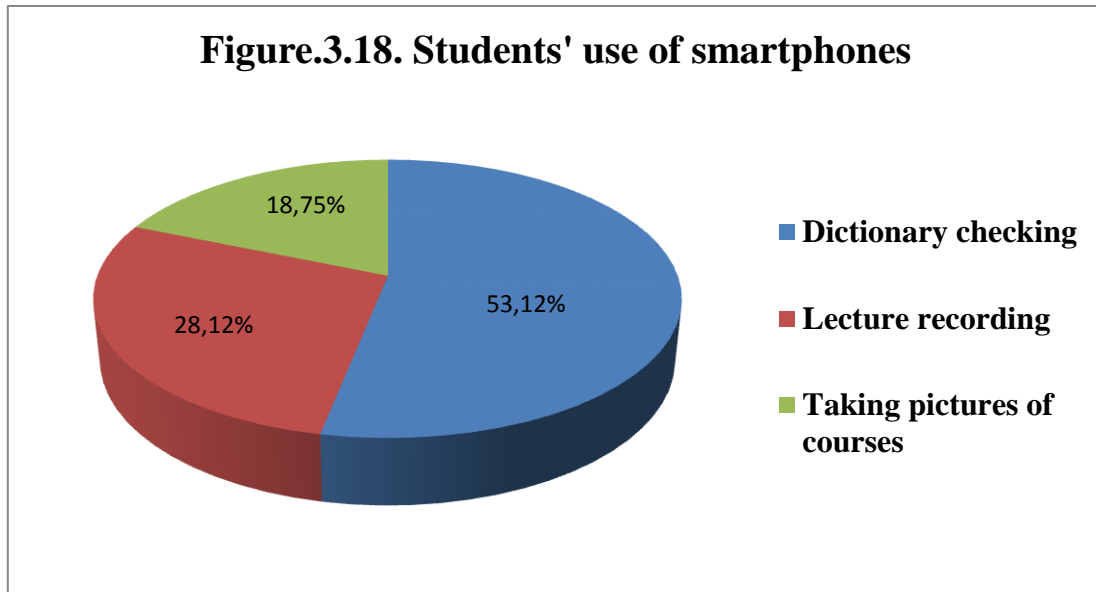
**Q16.2/ Elaborate on the reasons for having chosen either?**

All the 32 respondents whose answers were positive regarding the use of smartphones within classrooms elaborated with their constant necessity for dictionary checking, lecture recording and taking pictures of unattended courses.

Use of smartphones	N°	%
<b>Dictionary checking</b>	17	53.12%
<b>Lecture recording</b>	9	28.12%
<b>Taking pictures of courses</b>	6	18.75%
<b>Total</b>	32	100%

**Table 3.18. Students’ use of smartphones**

**Figure.3.18. Students' use of smartphones**



As it is indicated in the graphs above, smart phones provided a noticeable help to the students regarding their instructional needs, as they resorted to them every time they needed to check the dictionary, lecture recording and course picture taking.

### **3.5. The Interview**

The following segments comprised the fundamental elements of the interview.

#### **3.5.1. Description of the Interview**

The interview for this study is comprised of six questions. The first question intended to gather information about the interviewees' general knowledge of virtual online communities and the extent to which they connect to them. The second question targeted the interviewees' awareness about whether VOCs were helpful to their English learning proficiency or not. The third question ascertained the interviewees' favourite teaching model. Question number four confronted the interviewees' perceptions of Teachers' feedback. The fifth question inquired about the interviewees' familiarity with multiplayer online games and the assistance provided by them regarding their educational objectives. Finally, the sixth question investigated the interviewees' ownership of smartphones and the way they were handled.

### 3.5.2. Data Analysis

Six copies of the interview were answered out of the six distributed ones; this represented a total response of 100 %. The following table summarized the precise number of the questions asked and answered by the sample.

Academic Institution	N° asked	N° responded	N° returned
Abdelhafidh Boussof university center- Mila	6	6	100%

**Table 3.19.** Interview conduction

**Q1/ Do you often connect to virtual online communities? If yes, give me some examples**

When asked whether they connected to VOCs, all of the interviewees' responses were positive except for one. Facebook was the most reoccurring example they cited, along with Instagram and Reddit.

Therefore, FB is the most common social networking site among youngsters and they use it on a regular basis. As for the rest of the virtual online communities, they did not get very much inclination from the interviewees.

**Q2/ Tell me whether you find them helpful to your English learning proficiency or not? and why?**

All the interviewees agreed upon the helpfulness provided by VOCs. The various reasons stated by our interviewees revolved around VOCs being enabling factors in terms of English language interaction with each other and with foreigners, and global news actualization.

**Q3/Can you tell us which of these two you prefer: traditional in-class instruction or informal online learning? and why?**

The interviewees' responses were disparate regarding their most favourite teaching model. Half of the respondents leaned towards informal online learning, whereas two of them agreed upon traditional in-class instruction. The last one said that both styles are beneficial.

The ones sided with online informal learning justified their answers by saying it was comfortable, boredom relieving, and provided easy access to a wide range of information.

The ones who sided with traditional in-class instruction said it was more organised and less distracting.

**Q4/ Would you please rate the feedback provided by your teachers in online communities? Very good, Good, Not good**

Out of the six interviewees, three of them said it was very good, only one said it was just good. The remaining two could not provide answers.

According to the results provided by our interviewees, the teachers' feedback was deeply appreciated and recognized, for it was available whenever they needed it.

**Q5/ Do you often play multiplayer online games? If yes, what do they provide regarding your instructional needs?**

Almost all interviewees said they did not play any online multiplayer games, except for two whose gaming genres were quite different. The only respondent who played online games said they enrich one's vocabulary.

Building on the answers provided, it is obvious that most of the students were not familiar with multiplayer online games, hence they did not benefit from its advantages regarding their English language proficiency.

**Q6/ Do you possess a smartphone? If you do, do you use it to connect to virtual online communities?**

Amid all the respondents, only one of them did not own a smartphone, while the other five interviewees possessed smartphones and they used them to connect to VOCs.

Smartphones have proven to be a wide spread phenomenon amongst our generation and they become a very efficient way to connect to VOCs.

**Conclusion**

All of the outcomes have positively confirmed our former hypothesis. Naturally, these results were not to be expected and will be further discussed in the fourth chapter.

**CHAPTER FOUR: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **Introduction**

After the process of collecting and analysing data, we have deduced that first year L.M.D students adhered to virtual online communities and are convinced by the positive impact they had on their English language learning proficiency. Both qualitative and quantitative results are to be thoroughly discussed after. In addition, we are going to include some recommendations addressed to teachers, students, as they are all to be held accountable for the best possible exploitation of these virtual online communities' pedagogical and didactic potential. Eventually, in this chapter we will recommend a few suggestions towards fruitful future research concerning the topic of informal learning in virtual online communities. Alongside the limitations that might have constrained the validity, reliability and scope of the study.

### **4.1. General Discussion**

According to the results that we have gathered regarding the use of Facebook among first year L.M.D students, we have reached the conclusion that Facebook exhibited viral attributes amongst the young generation. Furthermore, for the majority of students Facebook has become not only a casual site but has rather turned into a habit that they cannot shake off.

The virtual ground set by Facebook has given birth to an English speaking community, as students used it to interact in the target language with each other on a daily basis, thus the vast majority of students came to agree that, Facebook indeed is a helpful tool in learning, and an unmatched reservoir for vocabulary enrichment. Nevertheless, there is still a minority of students who consider it an entertainment platform, rather than an instructional one.

Building on these results we can confirm that FB has deeply infiltrated youngsters' lives and has become a basic need according to them, as they felt a persistent need to browse this social networking site on a daily basis.

From the results we have gathered regarding online gaming, we have noticed that most students are not drawn into multiplayer digital gaming but a few of those who do play, do so regularly.

The most commonly preferred gaming platforms go as follows:

- Tablets/Smartphones, because of their widespread availability.
- Gaming consoles, because their main purpose is actually playing games.
- Laptops, because of both their mobility and practicality.
- Personal computers, because of their hardware suppleness.

Evidently, foreign player interaction within the field of online games is statistically varied for a few reasons, which are

- The necessity for discovery.
- The inevitable need for interaction as a basic condition for one to be able to play.
- Contradictive cultural norms.

The totality of the players have witnessed major developments regarding their English learning proficiency due to interaction with English native speakers, along with rich vocabulary and valid grammar, which the games' content comprise.

The vast possession of smartphones by students allowed them to benefit from their diverse scholastic applications. Illustratively, students employ smartphones for these various reasons.

- Dictionaries.



- English learning applications (Duolingo, WordWow, Bookworm).
- Recording lectures.
- Easy contact with faculty members.

In addition, the teachers' allowance of smartphones' use in the classroom helped further realize the reasons above. However, the students asserted that their teachers only permit the use of smartphones for instructional objectives.

According to the majority of our interviewees, connecting to VOCs has become a basic need, especially, Facebook, because of its worldwide popularity and easily accessible affiliation.

All of our interviewees agreed upon the fact that VOCs indeed are helpful to their English learning proficiency, since that our interviewees said they usually interact with one another for various study related reasons or with foreigners using English.

Online informal learning received notable acceptance among the interviewees because of the comfort, convenience, boredom relieving properties and facilitations in terms of data accessibility.

Traditional in class instruction, had been recognized to be much more organized in terms of feedback, teachers presence, program guidance and attention.

In general, the feedback provided by teachers was positive according to most of our participants because of the feedback's constant availability on VOCs, whereas the rest have no connection with their teachers whatsoever.

Multiplayer online games, apparently have not received enough recognition amongst our interviewees since only one respondent acknowledged the influence they hold over enhancing one's language learning proficiency through their vocabulary enrichment properties.

Evidently, almost every interviewee possesses a smartphone and they usually use it to gain access to virtual online communities. As a result, of their practicality, mobility, convenience, flexibility and so on.

Building on the results of both the questionnaire and the interview, we could confirm our hypothesis, which stated that the English language students would have positive perceptions of virtual online communities as informal English language learning tools.

## **4.2. Recommendations**

Based on our study's outcomes and after realizing the importance virtual online communities hold concerning a better enhancement of English learning proficiency, we would like to provide some helpful recommendations to students, teachers and university administrators.

- Students should not be prohibited to use Facebook but rather advised on how to better use this boundless opportunity to better meet their educational needs.
- Since digital games offer vast vocabulary and valid grammar, we advise students to exploit this industry's tutorial potential. However, they should remain wary of the addiction related issues that might occur if they excessively play those games.
- Students should minimize the use of smartphone technologies for recreational purposes, and maximize their use for didactic purposes, in order to benefit from these revolutionary gadgets.
- When facing scholar hardships students should not yield to their smartphones all the time, or they may reduce their cognitive skills productivity.

- Teachers should consider using Facebook and other online communities, for they will provide reliable instant feedback for the students.
- Teachers should advertise the use of multiplayer interactive games, and remind their students to take everything in moderation, especially gaming.
- Teachers should be more tolerant, when it comes to smartphone classroom utilization for educational endeavors only.
- Administrators should engage in promoting internet accessibility within the university and acknowledge students' necessity to remain constantly interconnected.

### **4.3 Limitations of the Study**

Due to spatiotemporal restraints, the questionnaire and interview were conducted in a hasty manner. The target participants comprised a sample size of only 40 first year L.M.D students and 06 interviewees. The outcomes of these researches cannot be generalized since they reflect just the case of these participants. If we continued long-term researches on a wider scale, we could include more genuine, authentic and broad-spectrum outcomes, besides, only two tools of research were used , which are not sufficient nor reliable results. That is, triangulation is not guaranteed.

Moreover, not every applicant was comfortable with the target language; we thus had to translate both the questions and answers to complete our tasks.

Additionally, the results we have gathered are not to be considered variants, since we did not conduct the study, on middle/secondary school students, given they are just as concerned. Subsequently, we need to further investigate the subject matter on a wider scale, in order to decide whether there is indeed a rapport between virtual online communities and informal learning or not.

#### **4.4. Suggestions for Future Research**

While this research may have promoted some perceptions into understanding the nature of informal English learning that occurs in virtual online communities, a more ample grasping of the issue will only be attained through exhaustive investigation of each of our research's constituents. Since informal learning occurs in diverse virtual online communities, another possible area of research would be to investigate how Facebook contributes to realizing a viable learning experience.

This research also rises essential questions about finding obvious relations between informal English learning and digital games, as well as mobile learning, thus future research is required to make further clarifications on the examined phenomenon from different viewpoints and angles, because the current research has only scratched the surface.

These research outcomes may greatly differ from ours if conducted on different institutional levels.

## **Conclusion**

The outcomes of the questionnaire and the interview displayed an undeniable and direct relationship between virtual online communities and informal learning of English, for the former has proven to be quite a fertile ground for the latter to grow and thrive. According to first year LMD students of Adelhafidh Bousouf University Center-Mila, a simple but positive formula dictates that, as platform users interact, knowledge accumulation takes place; consequently, informal learning occurs.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The Internet has drastically transformed how people are updated, interact and communicate in the twenty first century. Dissemination of information and knowledge is currently supported more and more via the Internet.

Facebook is not a magical wand that will satisfy all your communication needs. It is merely another tool in your communication toolbox; its aim is to *go where the eyes are* by providing information on websites that you know people visit, share and interact with; therefore, resulting in implicit learning.

In concordance with our research findings, Digital Games Based Language Learning succeeded to accomplish a complex task, which is affording users implicit learning styles as the learner unwittingly grasps the input.

The best rewarding facet of mobile phones is that all learners could pursue knowledge that is important and having something to do with them. Incorporating technology, especially mobile technology, trains students to adapt to the modern era of media.

Online technology led students to improve their cognitive abilities, on contrary to face-to-face classroom interaction; in addition, students felt more comfortable with online communities than they did with the classroom environment.

The social web's strength lies in its ability to bring unlike cultural parties together, this combination then foams into a meticulously intertwined web of knowledgebase each member can profit from; thus, due to the power of interaction in ubiquitous and dependable sources, informal learning results.

The questionnaire and interview were conducted with freshmen L.M.D students, to collect both quantitative and qualitative Data. What the outcomes have shown on a quantitative scale, is that the vast majority of students are indeed accustomed to virtual online communities, via social networking sites and multiplayer online games. The propensity for continuous connectivity and technological consumption has grown so large in fact; students now feel the need to carry that technology with them so that

wherever they go it may occupy their lives; smartphones, tablets, mini laptops and countless other new inventions will satisfy that need. Hence, informal learning depends entirely not on the technology itself but on how the users use it, for learning in communities.

On a qualitative scale however, we have attempted to investigate how the students feel about the new technologies, how they manage them and what they think about them. We realized that students in general are indeed aware of the educational potential these social networking sites and multiplayer games supply but seem to take them all for granted. Simply because they grew up with technology; they are habituated to it.

In spite of the limitations that this study exhibited like its non-generalizability and lack of population diversity, its results were more or less reliable.

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## Appendix

### STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

In this Questionnaire, you will be asked a few questions regarding your use and level of acquaintance to virtual online communities and how you think it might have affected your English language learning proficiency, please do as advised and accordingly answer the following questions with due honesty, thank you.

#### Section I: Background knowledge

Tick the appropriate answer and respond to the follow up questions with smart concision.

1. Are you?

Male student  Female student

2. How long have you been studying English?

8 years  9 years  10 years  11 or more

3. How old are you?

.....

#### Section II: Students' experience with Facebook

4. Do you use Facebook?

Yes  No

5. If yes, how often do you use it?

Always   
Sometimes   
Often   
Rarely

6. Do you use English to interact in Facebook?

Yes  No

7.1. Do you find Facebook a helpful tool for learning English?

Yes  No

**7.2. Elaborate on the reasons for having chosen either:**

.....  
.....  
.....

**Section III: Students' attitudes toward online digital games**

**8. Do you play online games?**

Yes  No

**9. If yes, how often do you play them?**

Always   
Sometimes   
Often   
Rarely

**10. What platform do you play on?**

Personal computer   
Laptop   
Tablet/phone   
Gaming console

**11. Can you name a few of your favourite multiplayer games?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**12. How often do you interact with foreign players?**

- Always
- Sometimes
- Often
- Rarely

**13.1. Does online gaming help improve your English learning proficiency?**

Yes  No

**13.2. Elaborate on the reasons for having chosen either:**

.....

.....

.....

**Section IV: Students' use of mobile phones for connecting to virtual online communities**

**14. Do you possess a smartphone?**

Yes  No

**15. If yes, how often do you use it?**

- Always
- Sometimes
- Often
- Rarely

**16.1 Do you use your phone in your classroom sessions?**

Yes  No

**16.2 Elaborate on the reasons for having chosen either:**

.....

.....

**Thank you very much for your most appreciated cooperation, do know that your answers shall be of great help, and do remember that total discretion regarding your identity will be guaranteed.**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**In this interview, you will be requested to answer a few questions concerning virtual online communities and how you believe it has influenced your English language learning proficiency, please do as instructed and consequently respond to the following questions with sincerity, thank you.**

Q1/ Do you often connect to virtual online communities? If yes, name a few.

Q2/ Do you find them helpful to your English learning proficiency?

Q3/ Can you tell me which of these two you prefer: traditional in class instruction or informal online learning? and why?

Q4/ Would you please Rate the feedback provided by your teachers in online communities? Very good, Good, Not good

Q5/ Do you often play multiplayer online games? If yes, what do they provide regarding your instructional needs?

Q6/ Do you possess a smartphone? If yes, do you use it to connect to those online communities?

**Thank you very much for your highly valued cooperation, do know that your answers will be of great help.**



## ملخص

من خلال هذا البحث أردنا تحديد الرابط الذي يكمن بين التعليم الغير رسمي للغة الإنجليزية و المواقع الافتراضية. للتحقق من صحة الفرضية قمنا بإجراء استبيان و حوار مع طلبة السنة الأولى جامعي لغة إنجليزية. النتائج المتحصل عليها لا يمكن تعميمها ولكنها أظهرت عالقة واضحة بين قدرة التلاميذ في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية و المواقع الإلكترونية بالإضافة إلى الألعاب الإلكترونية و الهواتف الذكية. المواقع الافتراضية بكل أشكالها انبثت بما لا يدع مجالاً للشك أنها تساهم بشكل مباشر في تحفيز الطالب, تدعيم قدراتهم الاملائية و النحوية, ومنه نستنتج ان التعليم الغير رسمي عن طريق التكنولوجيا المعاصرة يلعب دورا كبيرا في تحسين قدرات التلاميذ على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل أكبر.