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Facebook in Class: The Instructor's Influence on Engagement and Language Play in Online Social Media Forums

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Abstract

Social media engagement strategies are deliberate, collaborative, and dynamic attempts to persuade participation. In the educational context, added participation emanating from instructor-led engagement strategies may increase opportunity for language practice and consequential language acquisition, altogether offsetting negative consequences from passive online student behavior. This study attempts to understand how engagement strategies influence social media participation. A between-samples research design was implemented to compare participation between an English as a foreign language (EFL) class Facebook group with instructor-led social media engagement strategies (n=24) to a comparison group without the instructor's presence (n=26). Social media participation metrics included entry count, words per entry, comment count, words per comment, and use of language play elements, including emojis, pauses (...), and exclamations (!!!) per 100 words. Language play through social media text entails colloquialisms, emojis, pauses, and acronyms to elicit emotion and dialogue from others, therefore considered a valuable participation metric. Findings show that both designs are conducive to pragmatic training and second language (L2) writing practice, yet, instructor-interactions led to sharp increases in comments, words per comment, and use of language play. With instructor-led engagement strategies, students increased their opportunity for language practice and developed a sense of community in the form of more extended dialogues. Further, educators learn new methods in implementing social media in the classroom. The current results lead to positive outcomes in online, distance, and blended learning environments, showing that the instructor's strategic participation produces more meaningful discussions, and consequently, active learning among students.

Keywords: Social media, Facebook, pragmatics, Community of Inquiry, social presence, computer-mediated communication, CALL.

Introduction

Social media interactions are used interchangeably with terms related to social networking communications, sites, tools, blogs, and Web 2.0 (Al-Aufi & Crystal, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), and refer to interactive computer-mediated technology that facilitates the creation and sharing of information through virtual communities (Kim & Kim, 2019). The rapid progress of information technologies makes it mandatory to

promote social media in academics (Sarwar et al., 2019) with millennials who are capable of using media for social, communicative, and academic purposes (Duffy, 2011; Kietzmann & Hermkens, 2011). Facebook groups are one way instructors can supplement the social aspects of learning management system discussion forums (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2018, p. 349). Moreover, the inclusion of collaborative activities with social media compliment discussion forum activities afforded by a traditional learner management system.

Interactions within social networking sites (SNSs) can lead to constructing a classroom community with a sense of belonging to support and scaffold learning (Rovai, 2002) and impact the efficiency of learning development (Offir et al., 2008). Moreover, participation on social media sites positively stimulates student satisfaction with learning practices (Sung & Mayer, 2012). Social media interactions could also open new channels for authentic communication among language learners (Allam & Elyas, 2016), hence developing a measure of pragmatic competence in which learners use the target language in an effective contextual manner (Harting, 2017).

Social media sites like Facebook continue to establish themselves as virtual learning environments for supporting communication among students (Al Qunayeer, 2020). Facebook, in specific, offers an alternative setting for English teaching and learning attributable to its numerous features, including feasibility, easiness, accessibility, and other functions that allow learners to post and share information (Al Qunayeer, 2020; Barrot, 2018; Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). For example, research has provided evidence for students' positive perceptions towards SNS for second language practice and acquisition (Solmaz, 2019). Social media use in the EFL context is not without disadvantages. Ethical considerations regarding personal information privacy, over-sharing, and awareness of privacy settings must be considered when implementing such programs for educational purposes.

Positive experiences related to teacher presence using strategic instructor-led participation can foster a community of inquiry (CoI) among EFL students in social media groups (Lin et al., 2016). Besides instructor presence, language play could further contribute to heightened SNS engagement levels, therefore worth considering alongside other participation metrics. As Lantz-Andersson (2015) stated when referring to social media communication in EFL, "the teacher does not take on the role of the traditional gatekeeper but instead encourages a playful use of the language" (p. 210). The instructor-interventions, which is a set of steps designed for learners to adapt to challenging situations, has a positive influence on L2 learners' perception and participation in the social media context (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013; Lantz-Andersson, 2015; Saylag, 2013), but how that intervention equates to actual turn-taking and language play is unknown. Lantz-Andersson (2018) defined language play as "a collaborative activity that sensitizes students to pragmatic, formal and communicative linguistic aspects of second-language use, offering the possibilities for developing sociopragmatic competence" (p. 708). Language play is a natural part of developing and learning a language and refers to playing with grammatical structures and meaning. In social media, this can entail using exclamation marks (e.g., really!!!), adding extra letters (e.g., haaahaaa), all caps (e.g., WOW), using emoticons, acronyms (e.g., lol), or a combination of any of these (e.g., haaahaaa!!! WOW!!! lol). Social media engagement strategies in the educational context entail the deliberate use of public shares, likes, and comments to persuade students to

participate (Saylag, 2013). These strategies are facilitated by a group host who uses engaging content to increase user traffic.

To better understand the influence a group host has on student engagement, this study compares social media participation and language play elements between a treatment group with instructor-interactions to a student-only group. Instructor-interactions include leaderboards, engaging questions, and memes. The instructor acted as a class influencer in the treatment group to facilitate participation among group members, while no such instructor-intervention occurred in the comparison group. To understand the effect instructor-interactions have on content production, the following research question was asked:

Research Question 1: How do instructor-led social media engagement strategies influence EFL participation in a class Facebook group?

Utilizing humor particles (e.g., ha ha), emojis, and language play elements (e.g., lol, ???, !!!, or OMG) are considered indirect engagement strategies because such elements often symbolize positively toned text-based utterances in an attempt to attract attention. Examples of such strategies also include drawing attention to post or comments by clicking Facebook like or emotion buttons. Language play is a collaborative activity that sensitizes students to pragmatic, formal, and communicative linguistic aspects of second-language use (Lantz-Andersson, 2015). Humor particles, along with emojis, are omnipresent throughout Facebook thread comments and replies and serve as floor sharing devices because they prototypically appear at the beginning of a message or stand-alone to either invite a reply or indicate a follow-up message. Text-based features including paralinguistic elements, emoticons, abbreviations, repetition of letters, and use of formatting (e.g., uppercase and exclamations) are considered to be important metrics for Facebook participation. Increased use of these text-based features are posited here to indicate actions towards ongoing interaction, and therefore help triangulate findings regarding the influence instructor-intervention has on Facebook group participation. To this end, research question two heeds Konig's (2017) call for research to analyze how paralinguistic elements are displayed. Instructor-intervention in the treatment group utilized text-based features like laugh particles by regularly showing emotion (e.g., likes, love, laugh, and cry) towards student threads and liking comments and replies. To understand how modeling of language play elements by the instructor influences social media discussion threads, the following question was asked:

Research Question 2: How do instructor-led social media engagement strategies influence the use of language play elements in a class Facebook group?

Literature Review

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) was initiated in higher education in 1983 to use computational methodologies and report their outcomes (Higgins, 1983; Kenning & Kenning, 1983). With CALL, social media platforms are commonly employed as an intellectual computational tool to support language learning and assessment. Accordingly, the current study concentrates on trends in CALL research that

are relevant to supporting EFL writing tools and comprehending the effect instructor-interactions have on learner engagement and use social media pragmatic competence to introduce language play elements as a social media participation metric (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Harting, 2017; Özdemir, 2017).

Social Presence and Community of Inquiry

Social presence goes back to 1960-1970 when Mehrabian (1968) described it as 'immediacy' that occurs when individuals perform and connect with each other, and was further defined as the extent to which people participate, psychologically and physically, in social discussions (Short et al., 1976). For instance, learners' social media presence reflects engagement frequency and content development. Drawing from the social presence framework, a CoI emerges to complement learners' role in describing, reconnoitering and predicting learning in mediated online environments (Garrison et al., 1999). In other words, the learners can contribute to their social presence (i.e., participate in social, physical, and psychological activity) in face-to-face or online environments. Although the theory of social presence predated the CoI framework, CoI added a more extensive description to the learning environment than social presence in that it takes account of learners' cognitive presence (i.e., inquiry, analysis, and construct meaning) and teaching presence (i.e., plan, facilitate, and direct). Akyol and Garrison (2008) and Garrison (2016) argue that learners' social presence is influenced by instructors' acts, for example, guiding the discussion topics, monitoring communication exchanges, and facilitating active learning.

Within a CoI, the process of second language acquisition can occur unconsciously or incidentally through social media participation. With computer-mediated communication on social media platforms, learners detect grammatical features first and then learn from them, and this indirect cognitive processing is assumed here to be an essential starting point for language acquisition. Second language acquisition occurs in social media groups when the learner encounters knowledge gaps and then takes steps to fill those gaps, modifying their output (i.e., posts, comments, and replies) accordingly. Further, the process of CoI through computer-mediated communication (e.g., social media activities) allows instructors and researchers to observe pragmatic competence through the interactions students have with one another (Harting, 2017). Understanding mechanisms relating to students' pragmatic competence is critical to maximizing the opportunity to detect and direct correct language use. Students within the CoI are encouraged through pragmatics training to have more pragmatic competence, more frequent interactions, and more input contribution for their less capable L2 speaking counterparts (Kim & Taguchi, 2015).

Social Media and Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a subset of linguistics and semiotics that examines how context contributes to meaning. Bardovi-Harlig (2013) describes pragmatics as the study of "how-to-say-what-to-whom-when" (pp. 68-69) and is thought of as one of the essential aspects of second language acquisition (Abe, 2019; Özdemir, 2017; Yeh & Swinehart, 2020). An implicature is a defining speech act of pragmatics and describes something the speaker suggests or implies with an utterance, even though it is not expressed verbally. Commonly,

implicature statements occur through speech; however, the textual counterpart can be seen in multimodal communication with language play elements on platforms like Facebook (Blattner & Fiori, 2009, 2011; Özdemir, 2017).

Through earlier research, contributions were made to explore what drives engagements in EFL social media groups. The social media interactions facilitated through interest-driven topics result in pragmatic competence displays (Lantz-Andersson, 2015). For instance, EFL students' popular social media topics consist of online microblogging with classmates about daily routines. Further, the low-stakes writing that occurs in low-risk social interactions provides learners with ample space to take chances with interest-driven and spontaneous writing (Lantz-Andersson, 2017). However, it is critical to understand that the instructor's social presence facilitates social media interaction. The instructor aids in promoting a community of inquiry to enhance students' motivation and participation through self-disclosure and interest-driven activity engagement (Saylag, 2013).

Kwon et al. (2019) argued that learning in online discussions is challenging; however, practical instructor guides in online discussions can help stimulate more profound learning levels and provide a constructive experience. Social media participation is one tool to practice pragmatics and, therefore, possible features of pragmatics training. Language learners gain pragmatic competence by observing correct language use and by interacting with their classmates and instructor. Harting (2017) explored ways of using Facebook as a tool to improve the pragmatic competence of students studying German as an L2. Through voluntary participation using a blended learning approach, students wrote Facebook posts about their daily routines onto the class Facebook group. The frequency and accuracy of speech acts were analyzed, and the results suggested that Facebook facilitates a large number of speech acts with varying levels of appropriateness. Students felt that social media, like Facebook, is an appropriate tool for language learning. Among speech acts recognized, expressing wishes (n=70), describing activities, and expressing feelings were the most common reasons for reporting opinions on articles while asking explicitly for help on language learning (n=19) ranked lowest. Due to CoI being encouraged during the course, the participants were able to develop their acquaintance with German speech use and speech acts.

By the same token, Lantz-Andersson (2018) explored EFL students' use of language play when communicating on Facebook to investigate their improvement in sociopragmatic competence of L2 use outside school environments. The findings revealed that the social media context provided an informal context for communication in which the students used “diverse and unplanned linguistic repertoires” (p. 706) to play with the language. In this sense, language play on social media can be observed as a beneficial activity to EFL learners in increasing sociopragmatic competence in and outside the classroom. Similarly, Lantz-Andersson (2015) carried out a case study to examine low-stakes, mundane communication in L2 that occurs on social media. Findings revealed that students transferred socialization from their first language (L1) to the L2 when writing social media entries to their peers, providing evidence that Facebook enabled students to practice language play elements from their everyday L1 vernacular in a second language.

To date, most Facebook studies in the EFL context have explored student perceptions (Lin et al., 2016; Özdemir, 2017; Rodliyah, 2016), and the emerging evidence supports the integration of social media in the classroom (Rodliyah, 2016) for purposes including second language acquisition and intercultural communication (Özdemir, 2017).

Facebook allows EFL teachers to start online discussions, post articles to develop reading comprehension activities, and start online chats (Kabilan et al., 2010). Classroom interventions have observed fewer errors over time with Facebook participation, and the nature of the application itself helped students get more engaged in-class activities (Altakhaineh & Al-Jallad). Facebook writing has also been used to assist with digital literacy training (Androutsopoulos, 2014), journaling about daily life (Bailey et al., 2017), writing practice for accuracy training (Bailey & Judd, 2018; Rodliyah, 2016), vocabulary acquisition (Bani-Hani et al., 2014) and pragmatics training (Lantz-Andersson, 2018).

Through the questionnaire, interview, and class observation, Fithriani et al. (2019) found that Facebook use in an EFL class heightened levels of L2 language confidence, encouraging class participation and increasing L2 proficiency (Fithriani et al., 2019). Facebook could also increase engagement by having students use Facebook groups as a substitute for course learning management system online discussion forums. For example, Aydin (2014), Kabilan et al. (2010), and Harting (2017) used Facebook as an online discussion forum to assign questions for students to answer and then comment on each other's answers (i.e., Facebook discussion thread).

Many recent studies in the broader literature have examined EFL learners' involvement in online discussions through Facebook groups, blogs, and wikis (Abe, 2019; Al Qunayeer, 2020; Andujar & Salaberri-Ramiro, 2019; Börekci, & Aydin, 2020; Özdemir, 2017; Reinhardt, 2019; 2020; Solmaz, 2019; Yeh, & Swinehart, 2020). In one study, Facebook was found to be useful in using peer writing to promote confidence, increase participation in writing tasks, and improve writing through feedback discussions (Friatin, 2018). Barrot's (2018) study revealed that Facebook aided in creating a collaborative learning space for students to practice writing and expand writing skills through teamwork and communication with peers. Further, the Al Qunayeer (2020) study findings indicate that the students' engagement in active online participation played a significant role in increasing the intensity of participation in terms of the on-task, around-task, and off-task characteristics over three months. Facebook also plays a role in promoting learners' motivation in peer writing and rendering peer writing an enjoyable experience for learners (Friatin, 2018). There is now a clear need to understand how direct instructor-intervention influences student participation directly through posts and interactions and indirectly through paralanguage, including humor particles and emojis.

Methods

This study utilized a between-group comparison method with two EFL classes that participated in different Facebook groups. In a between-group comparison study, two or more groups are placed under observation where one of the groups is subjected to treatment. In this case, the instructor used social media engagement strategies in the treatment group, which consisted of 24 members (M = 22.69 years old, SD = 1.19), with 12 males and 12 females. No instructor-intervention occurred in the comparison group of 26 members (22.25 years old, SD = 3.47), with 10 males and 16 females. Students were all third and fourth-year English majors at a university from a central province in South Korea. Participants in both groups were administered the Oxford Quick Placement Test to measure L2 proficiency before beginning the Facebook program. The experiment group had a mean score of 23.3 (SD = 5.48), and the comparison group had a mean score of

22.1 (SD = 3.55); t = 1.33, p = .192, showing no statistically significant difference in L2 proficiency between groups. Further, no statistically significant difference was recognized between overall course grade between the treatment group (M = 90.17, SD = 5.48) and comparison group (M = 88.41, SD = 5.12), t = .182, p = .261.

Procedures

Facebook was chosen as the social media platform because most students already had an account, and it allows for private groups which consists of a shared wall or web page to upload posts and comments for group members. The treatment group underwent instructor-driven engagement strategies described in Table 1, while no instructor-intervention or engagement strategies were carried out in the comparison group.

Social Media for Language Learning Activity

A Facebook thread generally consists of the original post, followed by comments and replies. The main post is a post that people make within a Facebook group. The following is an example of a main post about action movies.

> This is a picture of Wonder Woman. I watched it last weekend at my friend's house. I really like this movie because the actress is so amazing. She is a good fighter and really pretty. My friend and I ate pizza and drank a couple beers during the movie. It was fun. I like action movies about superheroes. Iron Man is my favorite hero movie. What about you? What did you do last weekend?

A comment is a statement someone makes regarding a main post. Students were shown examples of popular comments and were informed that comments are a good opportunity to give their opinion of the main post and ask questions. The following is an example of a comment within a thread:

> That sounds like a great movie. I want to go to see a movie soon. My girlfriend doesn't like action movies. She says they are silly and sooo stupid!! haha. She likes scary movies ^^.

For weeks one and three, 15 minutes of class time were dedicated to supervising Facebook participation during class. Students were told to create a thread and reply to the threads of at least two other students. For homework each week, students were asked to create at least two original threads and four comments. Participation in the five-week program was given five percent weight to the total course grade, and grading was weighted from both word count (.50) and a number of entries (.50).

Social Media Engagement Treatment via Instructor Posting Methods

Table 1 lists the types of interaction strategies used by the instructor (Macarthy, 2018). Humor was a common theme across most SNS engagement posts. Other forms of instructor created interaction elements included animations, images with humorous text,

funny visuals about English study, humorous puns, humorous text, humorous animation, humorous dialogues, funny videos, and humorous quotations.

Table 2 displays text presented to students as memes, overlaid (imprinted) text on an image creating a meme meant to facilitate dialogue. In addition to memes, the instructor created self-disclosure threads referencing personal life events, engaging students with online discussion, and providing examples for students to follow when creating their threads. An example of a thread about a personal story is as follows:

> Hey everybody, I hope you had a good week. I taught my son how to play basketball. It was a lot of fun. It was really hot so we only played for 30 minutes. Check out this video of my son making a basket! We went to a restaurant afterward and got some burritos. What about you? Any good stories about this week?

Table 1
Engagement Strategies

1. Ask questions, start discussions, and ask for likes
2. Engage with students regularly through comments and likes
3. Like (or other emotions) student posts during peak traffic time
4. Avoid creating multiple threads at the same time
5. Post consistently, with high-quality content and content that resonates with students
6. Identify posts that get the most engagement
7. Thank the most engaged members
8. Share popular memes that ask conversation starters
9. Use humorous GIFs
10. Acknowledge popular and/or active group members outside of the group
11. Hold contests on Facebook (e.g., reward students with the highest engagement)
12. Use breaking news, holidays, and special events to inspire content ideas
13. Share inspirational, aspirational, motivational, and nostalgic quotes
14. Post during peak traffic time
15. Self-disclosure regarding weekend plans or events

Table 2
Messages Within Memes

1. If money didn't matter, what would you be doing for work?
2. Name one type of food you refuse to eat.
3. What's the worst Christmas or birthday present you've ever received?
4. I am thankful for…
5. What is something you would like to learn how to do?
6. What is one thing you do for you?
7. What was your favorite meal growing up?
8. Thankful Thursday! What are you thankful for?
9. Using just a GIF, what kind of morning person are you?
10. Life would be boring without…

Finally, strategic use of language play elements was implemented to draw attention to the comment section of discussion threads. This entailed the use of language play elements including exclamation marks (e.g., really!!!), adding extra letters (e.g., haaahaaa), all caps (WOW), emoticons, acronyms (e.g., lol), or a combination of any of these (e.g., haaahaaa!!! WOW!!! lol).

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS (version 25.0). Non-parametric testing using the Mann-Whitney U was used. The Mann-Whitney U test performs well with skewed data or data with high standard deviations and is often used when the independent samples' assumptions for *t*-test are violated (Pearce & Derrick, 2019). Comments to and from the instructor in the treatment group were removed before the data analysis was done in order to pool data strictly from students. For research question one, post count, words per post, comments per post, and reactions per post were first compared between the treatment and comparison group (Cinkara & Arslan, 2017). Next, comments, comment count, words per comment, replies per comment, and likes per comment were compared. For research question 2, an initial ranking of language play elements from both groups altogether was carried out. Next, non-parametric testing with Mann-Whitney U was used to compare language play elements between the treatment and comparison groups.

Results

Table 3 shows results for significance testing of participation metrics between the treatment and comparison groups. A series of Mann-Whitney U tests indicated that comments per post were greater for the treatment group (Mdn = 5.87) than for the comparison group (Mdn = 3.142), U = 100.5, $p < .001$, r = .53. Moreover, it was also indicated that reactions per post were greater for the treatment group (Mdn = 3.00) than for the comparison group (Mdn = 0.90), U = 130.00, $p < .001$, r = .50, likes per comment were higher for the treatment group (Mdn = .17) than comparison group (Mdn = .11), U=187, p = .015, r = .35. These findings indicate differences in patterns of participation with the addition of instructor-intervention to the class Facebook group.

There were some similarities in participation between groups. Overall, students wrote considerably more in their posts compared to comments. Both groups wrote a similar number of posts, words per post, and replies per comment. While not statistically significant, the treatment group revealed a greater number of comments per student and words per comment.

Both groups contained a combination of active and passive students, resulting in high standard deviations for participation metrics. The skewness was 1.93 for comments per student, which indicates significant skewness according to Kline (2011) but within more relaxed rules set forth by Sposito, Hand, and Skarpness (1983), who recommend 3.3 as the upper threshold.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for participation in posts and comments

	M	*SD*	Median	Skew SE= .464	Kurt SE= .902	Percentile		
Treatment (n= 24)						25%	50%	75%

posts/ student	6.32	3.66	7.00	0.18	-0.85	2.50	7.00	9.00
words / post	56.03	24.12	51.70	0.51	-0.11	41.00	51.70	68.80
comments / post	6.64	2.78	6.50	0.70	0.25	4.75	6.50	8.45
reactions / post	3.88	3.96	3.00	1.60	2.70	1.50	3.00	5.50
comments / student	48.96	50.57	34.00	1.93	3.21	17.50	34.00	57.50
words / comment	9.72	4.08	9.87	1.28	2.51	6.56	9.87	11.40
replies / comment	0.32	0.20	0.35	0.83	1.50	0.17	0.35	0.39
likes / comment	0.16	0.08	0.17	-0.02	0.21	0.09	0.17	0.19
Comparison (n= 26)								
post count /student	7.84	5.25	8.00	0.58	-0.61	3.00	8.00	12.00
words / post	63.70	23.55	55.80	1.37	1.29	47.00	55.80	76.40
comments / post	3.45	1.92	3.30	0.21	-0.26	1.90	3.30	4.75
reactions / post	0.82	0.48	0.80	0.59	0.58	*0.50*	0.80	1.10
comments / student	27.76	23.70	20.00	0.69	-0.86	7.00	20.00	48.50
words / comment	9.48	9.02	6.83	1.80	4.21	2.68	6.83	16.09
replies / comment	0.37	0.20	0.37	0.04	-0.21	0.20	0.37	0.50
likes / comment	0.11	0.08	0.11	0.83	1.48	0.07	0.11	0.14

Table 4

Mann-Whitney U-Test for posts and comments

	Mdn Treatment	Mdn Comparison	*U*	*z*	*p*	*r*
Post Count	7	8	267.0	-.886	.376	.13
Words / post	51.7	55.8	269.5	-.834	.404	.12
Comment / post	6.5	3.3	100.5	-4.115	.000	.58**
Reactions / post	3	0.8	130.0	-3.553	.000	.50**
Comment Count	34	20	232.0	-1.562	.118	.22
Words / comment	9.87	6.83	246.5	-1.281	.200	.18
Replies / comment	0.35	0.37	250.5	-1.205	.228	.17
Likes / comment	0.17	0.11	187.0	-2.442	.015	.35*

Note: *p = .05; **p = .01

Findings from research question one illustrate the direct participation emanating from two Facebook groups. Research question two offers insight into paralinguistic features that serve to draw attention and ongoing participation by conveying emotion, adding an inquiry, and sending likes.

Answering research question two begins by ranking language play elements used overall by both groups. Exclamation (!) and pausing (…) were the first and second most used. Both exclamation and pausing are used to convey intonation and dramatic effect in textualized language. The thumbs-up, "hah," and smiley face emoji were the following most used language play elements, all used to promote a positive tone in messaging. While question marks (?) themselves are not considered language play elements, double or triple question marks (??, ???) and a question mark plus exclamation (?!) are deemed essential play elements because they indicate strong feeling, emphasis, or high volume to a question. Figure 1 displays a rich lexicon of language play elements used by both groups of students during the five-week Facebook program.

Figure 1
Ranking of Language Play Elements (Both Groups Combined)

rank	total	element	rank	total	element	rank	total	element	rank	total	element
1	2078	!	11	141	ooo	21	52	?!	31	32	
2	912	..	12	94	??	22	52		32	32	
3	708	…	13	94		23	50		33	30	???
4	472		14	94	□	24	44		34	28	
5	375	hah	15	85	)	25	42		35	27	lol
6	304		16	82	ㅋ	26	42		36	26	
7	224		17	68	:)	27	42		37	26	
8	221	~	18	68		28	40		38	25	^
9	194		19	64	(	29	38	ㅠ	39	26	
10	144		20	62		30	38	:(	40	27	LOL

A review of actual posts and comments revealed that some students were more prone to use language play frequently in their entries, while other students chose not to use them at all. For posts, both groups used similar levels of language play elements, with the only noticeable difference existing between the use of question marks. With instructor-intervention, students asked each other more questions and used language play such as ??? and ?! when asking questions.

For the second part of research question 2, language play elements were first standardized by their frequency use per 100 words, and then mean scores were compared (Table 5). Pauses per 100 words for posts in the treatment group, non-emoji language play elements per 100 words for posts in the comparison group, and emoji per 100 words for comments in the comparison group revealed high levels of skewness (Sposito et al., 1983), indicating a combination of students that actively use language play elements and ones who do not.

Table 6 shows the significance testing of question marks and language play elements between the treatment and comparison groups. A Mann-Whitney U test indicated that questions per 100 words in main posts were greater for the treatment group (Mdn = 3.17) than for the comparison group (Mdn = 0.65), $U = 81.5$, $p < .001$, $r = .64$. Moreover, it was also indicated that emojis per 100 words in student comments were

greater for the treatment group (Mdn = 6.27) than for the comparison group (Mdn = 0.64), U = 126.00, p < .001, r = .51.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for Language Play Elements per 100 Words

Posts	*M*	*SD*	Skew	Kurt
Treatment Posts			SE= .472	SE= .918
Questions Asked	3.98	2.87	1.271	1.284
Lang. Play Total	7.44	8.54	2.214	6.200
Emoji's	2.54	4.51	2.111	4.156
Non-Emoji	1.18	1.14	1.836	2.948
Exclamation	2.02	2.39	2.225	5.942
Pauses	1.45	3.82	3.707	15.089
Comparison Posts			SE= .456	SE= .887
Questions Asked	0.85	0.99	1.063	0.704
Lang. Play Total	6.56	6.21	0.444	-1.501
Emoji's	1.78	3.30	1.955	2.531
Non-Emoji	1.08	1.64	3.308	12.874
Exclamation	2.56	3.21	1.390	0.970
Pauses	1.16	2.05	1.642	1.112
Treatment Comments			SE= .472	SE= .918
Questions Asked	1.91	2.30	1.969	3.788
Language Play Total	24.24	13.61	.632	-.034
Emoji's	10.80	11.43	1.675	2.529
Non-Emoji	5.97	9.27	2.041	4.000
Exclamation	5.62	3.98	.778	.302
Pauses	2.53	2.76	.770	-.690
Comparison Comments			SE= .456	SE= .887
Questions Asked	1.40	1.60	1.161	.910
Language Play Total	19.98	19.00	2.838	10.898
Emoji's	4.18	9.80	3.926	17.175
Non-Emoji	5.05	7.23	2.336	6.562
Exclamation	7.10	5.39	.730	.102
Pauses	5.19	6.96	1.794	3.131

Table 6
Mann-Whitney U-Test for Language Play in Posts and Comments

	Mdn Treatment	Mdn Comparison	*U*	*z*	*p*	*r*
Posts						
Questions	3.17	0.65	81.5	-4.526	.000	.64**
Language Play	5.09	4.60	284.5	-.535	.593	.08
Emoji's	0.00	0.11	308.0	-.084	.933	.01

Non-Emoji	1.39	1.37	284.5	-.535	.593	.08
Exclamation	0.00	0.00	278.5	-.654	.513	.09
Pauses	0.67	0.56	283.0	-.645	.519	.09
Comments						
Questions	1.30	0.96	275.0	-.728	.466	.10
Language Play	24.81	14.37	239.0	-1.418	.156	.20
Emoji's	6.27	0.64	126.0	-3.631	.000	.51**
Non-Emoji	1.67	2.83	305.0	-.141	.888	.02
Exclamation	4.73	6.73	262.0	-.971	.331	.14
Pauses	1.75	2.25	264.5	-.945	.345	.13

Note: *p =. 05; **p = .01

Students in the treatment group asked more questions in their posts and comments, which led to longer dialogue chains, cultivating more language production and a more sophisticated community of inquiry. Longer discussion threads were also associated with more language play elements. The strategic use of sending likes and emotions, emoticons, and language play elements within instructor-interactions were associated with the heightened levels of similar language play use among members in the treatment group. While students used language play less frequently in their main posts, such elements were commonplace in comments, providing evidence that language play was key to ongoing participation in the comment chains.

Discussion

Several findings ensued from this study, beginning with recognizing increased sociability and enjoyment attributed to the Facebook activity (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2018), which is amplified by instructor-interactions (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Garrison, 2016). The instructor-intervention differences revealed themselves as longer discussion threads but not total word count or the total number of entries. Students were allowed to choose their writing topics, which have been shown to elicit more writing and increased motivation when participating on Facebook (Promnitz-Hayashi, 2011). The free choice may have contributed to the amount of content written regardless of instructor-intervention. Students in the treatment group asked more questions in their main posts resulting in more comments, and this heightened level of inquiry in the treatment group may have led to the higher use of emojis. Further, participation in the treatment group consisted of more frequent use of the symbolic language of emojis. Overall, results support Kwon et al.'s (2019) recommendation for creative instructor-intervention in online discussions that promote and encourage student comments, seek the elaboration of ideas, assist in active interactions in online discussions, and foster the use of meaningful language play for developing interactions and knowledge construction.

In regards to answering research question one, a few noteworthy differences materialized between the two groups. The treatment group with instructor-interaction had three times as many reactions (e.g., likes, other emotions, or language play element) per post than the comparison group. This result ties in well with previous studies wherein instructor presence through social media interactions promote a vibrant community of

inquiry, providing clear evidence of enhanced levels of motivation and participation through a process of communication (Altakhaineh & Al-Jallad, 2018; Lantz-Andersson, 2015) and interest-driven engagement with communication activities (Saylag, 2013). These findings confirm the significance of the instructor's presence in increasing students' participation in social media.

Findings from research question one also revealed that posts in the treatment group resulted in longer discussion threads through more commenting. Students in the treatment group asked more questions in their posts, received more likes, and received more comments, which led to longer conversation chains, fostering a more engaged CoI. High standard deviations were noticed across most metrics because of the presence of both active and passive students.

In research question two, participation was triangulated by accounting for language play elements. The researchers looked at questions asked and language play used by both groups. Overall, pauses (...) and exclamation marks (!) were the most common language play elements used, followed by thumbs up and an assortment of happy face emojis. A great variety of emoji animations were observed, which is consistent with similar social media programs. For example, multiple pronunciations (??? and !!!) were used for humorous framing (Davies, 2012). Moreover, colloquial language combined with an exclamation (e.g., I hear you! you can do it! and cheer up!) was a recurring pattern here, echoing findings from past studies on social media (Kern, 2014). Words like "awesome" and "amazing" were used continuously in both groups as playful jargon. Androutsopoulos (2014) also recognized similar terms associated with language mixings, such as expressive use of punctuation and spelling variation.

Even though this study did not explicitly replicate pragmatic competence studies in the context of social media (Lantz-Andersson, 2015) and there was no assessment outside observation used for measuring students' pragmatic growth, our results suggest that there is substantial evidence of a more extensive exhibition of pragmatic competence within the treatment group. A similar conclusion was reached by Kim and Taguchi (2015) in which students who were trained and encouraged within the CoI to have more pragmatic competence resulted in more frequent interactions and more input contributions. The instructor guided the students' experiences to offer a tangible cognitive learning involvement, facilitate continued ownership of learned material, and tactile pragmatic and sociopragmatic representations.

The treatment group asked more questions in their main posts, which contributed to extended discussion threads. Further, twice as many emojis were used in the posts among the treatment group members. This is consistent with what has been found in Lantz-Andersson's (2018) exploration of EFL students' use of language play when communicating on Facebook, where results explained that the social media context presented an informal context for communication. Students used various and unplanned linguistic collections to foster ongoing participation within Facebook threads, which is in contrast to the passive behavior observed by Börekci and Aydin (2020) in a study on class Facebook groups.

In general, the only difference in language play used in the commenting was in connection with the use of emojis, with students in the treatment group using twice as many emoji animations in their text when writing comments with one another. High skewness levels suggest the difference can be attributed to a smaller group of students frequently using language play elements, acting as leading role models for participation.

These results go beyond previous reports, showing that the implemented modality guides the current outcomes of this research by the instructors and facilitates low effective learning environments where learners have the authority to explore, investigate and invest in their learning to develop pragmatic and social skills.

Thus, along with others, this study found benefits for pragmatics training and L2 writing practice when integrating social media activities in EFL courses (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Harting, 2017; Lantz-Anderson, 2018; Reinhardt & Ryu, 2013). Pragmatic training occurred in that students could use transfer L1 colloquialisms from the L1 to the L2 (Lantz-Andersson, 2015; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2013). For example, SNS engagement tools could be utilized to practice pragmatics (i.e., noticing correct language use and interacting with their classmates and instructor) to gain pragmatic competence (Lantz-Andersson, 2018). In line with extant literature, supplemental writing practice through social media proved to be beneficial for EFL learners who do not have frequent opportunities to practice the target language outside of class (i.e., Abe, 2019; Andujar & Salaberri-Ramiro, 2019; Börekci, & Aydin, 2020; Özdemir, 2017; Yeh, & Swinehart, 2020).

Conclusion

The findings indicated that perspective-widening social presence through instructor-interactions contributes to EFL learners' engagement when participating in social media for second language acquisition purposes. Results from this study revealed that the treatment group with instructor-engagement had significantly more input concerning interactions through commenting than the comparison group. While this research is not intended to evaluate learners' pragmatic competence, specifically, the findings suggest that learners with the advantage of guided engagement would be more likely to gain more knowledge and produce extended output. Results here support Kwon et al.'s (2019) recommended practical guides for instructors in online discussions that include promoting encouraging comments, seeking the elaboration of ideas, assisting active interactions in online discussions, and fostering the use of meaningful language play for developing interactions and knowledge construction.

This research considers the potential effects of exploring the connections between interlanguage pragmatics and the facilitated engagement within SNS contexts. The study further suggests unexplored areas where specific technological aids and innovations could be utilized to aid the development of pragmatic competence and inform second language acquisition research. Also, this study was a between-samples research study, thus bears some of the limitations embodied in this research design. One concern about the findings is that social network analysis may provide insight into how social currency in the classroom influences participation; however, students with fewer class acquaintances may have higher levels of inhibitions to participate. Furthermore, it would be more informative if extended mixed methodologies (i.e., online interviews, focus groups, documents, artifacts, and records) were obtained. Future exportation related to experimental designs in Facebook interactions is necessary to validate the conclusions drawn from this research.

Future research is recommended to explore when and how specific SNS engagement strategies should be provided to enlighten instructors about the significant insights into designing interactive social online discussions and facilitating a higher

degree of knowledge construction. Further investigation should also address how education researchers can apply social network analysis to EFL participation in social media groups. More research is needed to apply and test to explore the influence of language play on writing quality and designed pragmatic competence measurement in the social media context. Future studies could also look into what type of students are more prone to use language play elements and how they vary. Furthermore, Facebook is only one of many social media platforms that can support instructor-led engagement strategies. Future research should explore similar engagement strategies on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Kakao, and Weibo.

Bringing this to a close, evolving interactive practice of social media enables learners to engage others using various linguistic repertoires for knowledge construction. As educators strive to provide the proper desirable experience for their students, a social presence within a community of inquiry should conduct social media in asynchronous environments due to time and physical disconnection. The current results lead to positive outcomes in the online, distance, and blended learning, and in so doing, showed that Facebook groups guided by the instructor's support foster more meaningful social interactions.

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The Research and Publication Ethics Statement

No ethical considerations were violated in this study.

The Conflict-of-Interest Statement

In line with the statement of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), I/we hereby declare that I/we had no conflicting interests regarding any parties of this study.

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