Le développement de la compétence communicative interculturelle des étudiants d'Anglais comme étant langue étrangère à travers les réseaux sociaux

Developing EFL Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence through Social Media Platforms

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Résumé:
Cette étude explore le rôle des réseaux sociaux dans le développement des compétences interculturelles chez les étudiants d'Anglais comme étant une langue étrangère. Pour atteindre cet objectif, un questionnaire est adressé à une classe de trente (30) étudiants de Master, au sein de département d'anglais de l'Université de Bejaïa. La question principale soulevée est de savoir dans quelle mesure le contact interculturel pourrait développer chez ces étudiants la compétence communicative interculturelle. Les résultats révèlent qu'une grande majorité des étudiants participants ont montré des attitudes positives à l'égard de l'utilisation de ces réseaux sociaux dans l'apprentissage de la langue étrangère.
Mots-clés: culture ; compétence communicative interculturelle; l'apprentissage de la langue étrangère; réseaux sociaux.

Abstract:
The present study investigates the role of social media platforms in developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among EFL students at the department of English, Bejaia University. To this effect, a questionnaire is administered to a class of Master students (n=30). The main question raised is to what extent intercultural contact could develop in the EFL students what is known as ICC, which is the appropriateness of using a foreign language in a situation where different cultures meet. The results reveal that an overwhelming majority of the student participants showed positive attitudes towards using these social media platforms in the EFL learning.
Keywords: Culture; Intercultural Communicative Competence; language learning; social media.

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1. **Introduction**

It has become an incontestable fact that technology has a great influence on all fields of life including language learning process. The real impact of technology could be recognized in terms of the relatively high use of 'CALL', computer assisted language learning. Therefore, the present study deals with the employment of technology, social media sites, in education in general and foreign language learning in particular, for the sake of developing what is labeled intercultural communicative competence.

Social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have become extremely popular among Internet users who desire to share their ideas, videos, and other activities online. This contemporary phenomenon has led the World Wide Web innovation. These Web sites can be accessed easily and freely. Moreover, they are new tools employed by foreign language learners from different countries and different cultures to express themselves in authentic ways, and maintain online intercultural interaction. This latter is considered to be important to enhance learners' mutual intercultural understanding.
Hence, the present research aims to answer the following questions:

> ➢ Is there a relationship between the student informants' use of social media platforms and intercultural competence developments?
> ➢ To what extent do the social networks develop the learners' intercultural communicative competence?

2. Social Media platforms

They are defined as a set of software and electronic websites which are used as tools to allow users interact virtually. Social media brought people from different nations and different cultures together in what is known as the global village. It provides a context where people across the world can communicate, exchange messages, share knowledge, and interact with each other regardless of the distance that separates them. To sustain the idea, Boyd and Ellision (2007) define social networking sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2)articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p.13). In addition,The three popular types of social networking sites are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

2.1. Facebook

It was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. Its mission is to encourage contact and communication between people belonging to different backgrounds and cultures. There are over two (2) billion users in the world with a population of

over seven (7) billion. Moreover, there are more than seventy (70) translations available on the site, and about 70% of its users are outside the U.S. According to Mark Zuckerberg, "If Facebook were a country, it would be the 6th most populated country in the world." (Cited in Sawyer p. 04). In this context, Chartrand (2012) states, "This Web site has hundreds of millions of users and it is an enticing way for students to form an online community… It is, however, an excellent way to communicate as the content that is posted to the site may motivate learners to share ideas and thoughts that would be very difficult to duplicate in a classroom setting" (p. 99). Hence, Facebook is widely used by students for their learning purposes.

2.2. YouTube

It is a video-sharing website, started in 2005, that allows individuals to interact with the global community by viewing and sharing different video contents. It has many advantages, thanks to many videos that are shared by people around the world, traditional stereotypes of groups of people (minorities) begin to decline. Besides, it gives people the opportunity to comment on videos and participate in wide discussions and online-conferences. Therefore, numerous people all around the world have used and still use YouTube. Hence, this innovation "became a driving force for change around the world" (Ostrow as cited in Sawyer, p. 05).

2.3. Twitter

It is a form of social media that allows people to communicate information through micro-blogging. Twitter is a social-networking site created in 2006 to relay real time information to users. "The platform was inspired by creator Tim Dorsey's introduction of an SMS-based concept that allowed members of his then-company, Odeo, to keep tabs on one another. Many people follow friends, celebrities, and musicians on this site in which they feel connected and develop acceptance for the actions and feelings of others. Twitter has influenced intercultural dialogue because many people worldwide are focused on the individual lives of others and have the desire for connection and knowledge of events. This example of social media has shortened the ties of distance into knowing exactly what someone is doing without physically communication face-to-face with another person (p. 05).

3. The Review of the Literature
3.1. Culture vs. Language Learning in the Globalization Era: An overview

The relation between culture and the language teaching and learning has been evoked by many teachers and scholars. It has glimmered a very hot debate as

well as it witnessed different changes of interest from the past to nowadays. In the last decades, culture has been treated as a secondary element in ELT. Therefore, its role is restricted since the scholars' interest is diverted to the study of the formal side of the language that consists of structural and grammatical aspects. They have considered language as being autonomous and independent from any social or cultural considerations. As a result, in neglecting the cultural aspects in English language teaching, teachers encountered many problems and obstacles. Teachers tend to teach the formal aspect of the language regardless of its culture, unfortunately they formed students who mastered the language but not its cultural context. Hence, this students fall into the category of "Fluent fools", a fluent fool is someone who uses a foreign language well, but who does not understand the social and philosophical content of this language (Bennett, 1993 as cited in Onalan, p.217).

Later, many scholars and linguists tried to look differently to language and culture. They claimed that, in ELT, culture and language have a complementary relationship, as Kramsch (1993) claims: "it is a truism to say that teaching language is teaching culture" (p.177). Hence, when a foreign language is taught, culture is taught inevitably. Moreover, the task of foreign language teachers is no longer transmitting only its superficial structure, they should rather diffuse knowledge of the manner that people of that culture actually use that language to express their particular way of thinking and living. In this context, Simone.V (1987) asserts: "language is culture, when one teaches a language, one does not simply teach words, the names of things, and how they strung together; one teaches a way of thinking, a way of ordering the universe and finding one's way in it" (p. 37-8).

Before going further, even though the concept of "culture" has been defined differently by different scholars; from artistic, anthropological and sociological points of view, it is important to provide it a specific definition in order to allow the reader to understand the way this concept is perceived and referred to in my work. Duranti (1997) defines "culture" as "a common view of culture is that of something learned, transmitted, passed down from one generation to the next, through human actions, often in the form of face-to-face interaction, and of course, through linguistic communication" (p.24).

In the light of what has been said previously, it is slightly obvious that culture plays a crucial role in learning a foreign language. First of all, including the cultural aspects while learning a foreign language permits to the learners to interact with the native speakers of this foreign language successfully without facing any difficulties in terms of communication such as deciphering meanings available in that target speech community, cultural differences, idiomatic language, taboos etc. Hence, in addition to linguistic competence, intercultural competence is needed. In the same vein, Byram (2000) argues, "(…) when using a

foreign language to communicate with someone of different cultural origins and different identities, mere linguistic competence is not enough. It is necessary but not sufficient. We also need intercultural competence" (p.97). The term intercultural communicative competence refers to the knowledge of values, beliefs and behaviours of the target society for successful communication. It is the knowledge, skills and abilities to participate in activities where the target language is the primary communicative code" (p. 109).

Consequently, integrating culture into ELT permits to the foreign learners to become culturally aware of the social conventions and behaviours of the people whose language is being studied. As Byram (1988) also suggests: "to acquire and use a foreign language is to enter another way of life, another way of rationality, another way of behavior" (p.17).

Language teaching classrooms are usually places where knowledge and skills are the primary focus. However, Intercultural competence is not always restricted to classrooms and formal situation, but it can be developed in different ways through different types of education like Informal education i.e. without being controlled by the teacher. Nowadays, the accessibility to Internet and social media platforms allows students of different nationalities, identities and cultural belongings to exchange and to share knowledge that helps them to see things from different perspectives, and to be exposed to the real situation where the target language as the case of English is the primary code. This kind of situation makes the learners of a foreign language in direct contact with the language used as well as the culture that it bears. Thus, social network sites as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube have been used for the aforementioned reason. Indeed, new social media platforms became increasingly popular mainly among the students in their everyday lives in today's globalizing society because it satisfies their different needs whether social or educational.

4. Methodology

The present study is a mixed methods research, in that both quantitative and qualitative data are used. This was obtained with the use of the Questionnaire, the unique tool used in this research, which comprised both close, multiple choice and open-ended questions, and which was administered to the student informants. The obtained quantitative data was analysed with the use of descriptive statistics, whereas the qualitative data was analysed through content analysis.

The research participants are a group of thirty (30) student informants who are enrolled as first year Master students of English, who are specialized in Literature and Civilization at the University of Bejaia. Since this group of students volunteered to take part in the study, therefore, they are a convenient sample.

5. Findings

The present study seeks to find out whether there is a relationship between the student informants' use of social media platforms, and intercultural competence development, as well as the extent to which their use of social networks develops their intercultural communicative competence. The analysis of the obtained data led to a number of insights. The following are some of the major findings.

Figure N° 1. Social media platforms used by the student informants.
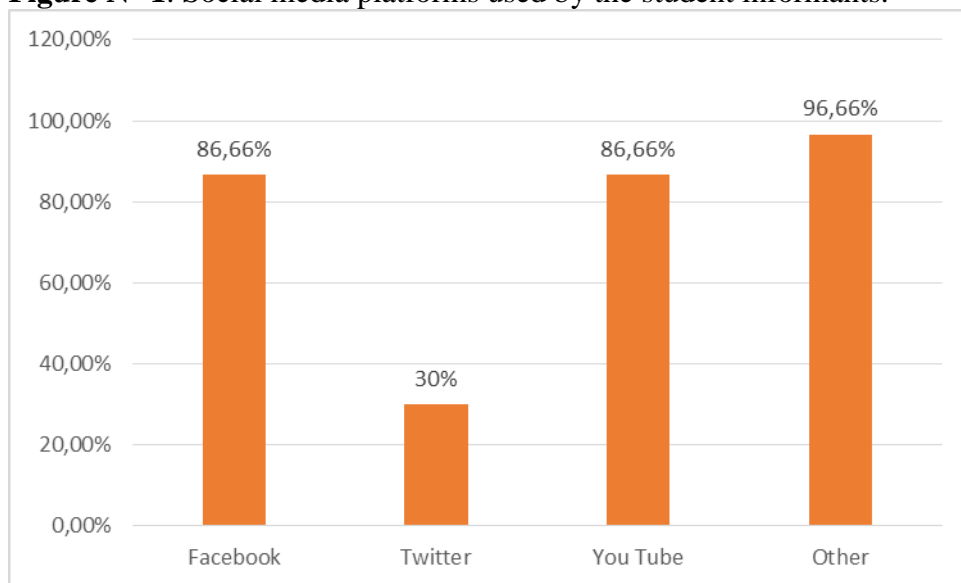
As can clearly be noticed on figure 01 above, the majority of the students use more than two (02) social media platforms at the same time, especially facebook and You Tube. The student informants also maintain that they use even other platforms mainly Instagram, nearly 40% of the student informants state that they are using this site.

Figure N°2. The Insufficiency of Linguistic Competence for effective communication
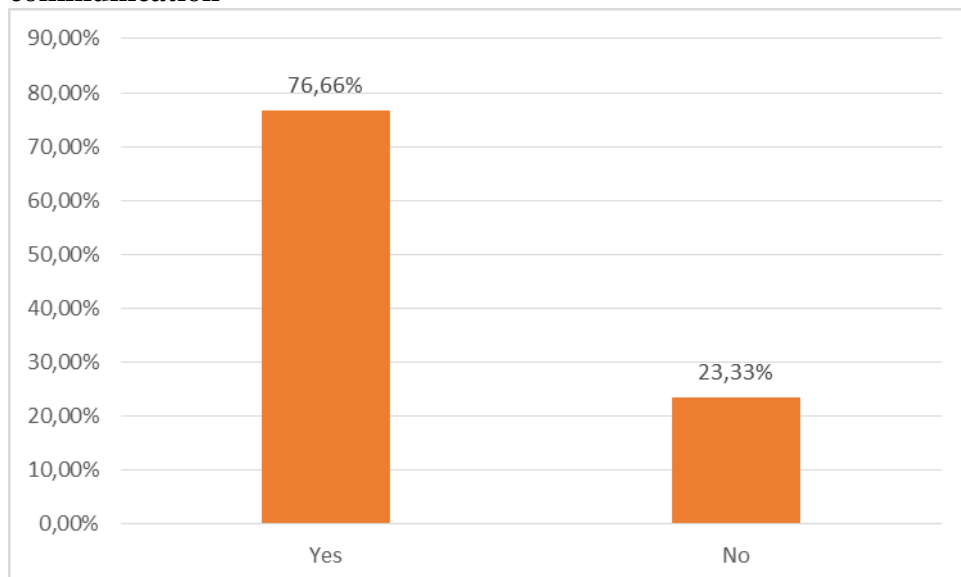

Figure 02 also shows that most of the student participants (76.66%) argue that for a communication to be effective, it requires other competences in addition to linguistic competence.

As to the follow up question, which sought to obtain respondents' reasons for their answers, the justifications that they provided revolve around the following:

- "Cultural Knowledge"
- "Be aware of the culture of the person you are talking with".
- "Cultural competence, historical background and knowledge of the colloquial language".
- "Linguistic competence is not enough, the learner needs to practise his competence in a real setting".
- "You need social competence, cultural competence".
- "Cultural knowledge, developing social communication skills, tolerate the differences".
- "We should get to know the culture of the person we're speaking with".

Figure N°3. The Importance of Connecting with Natives in Understanding the Target Culture
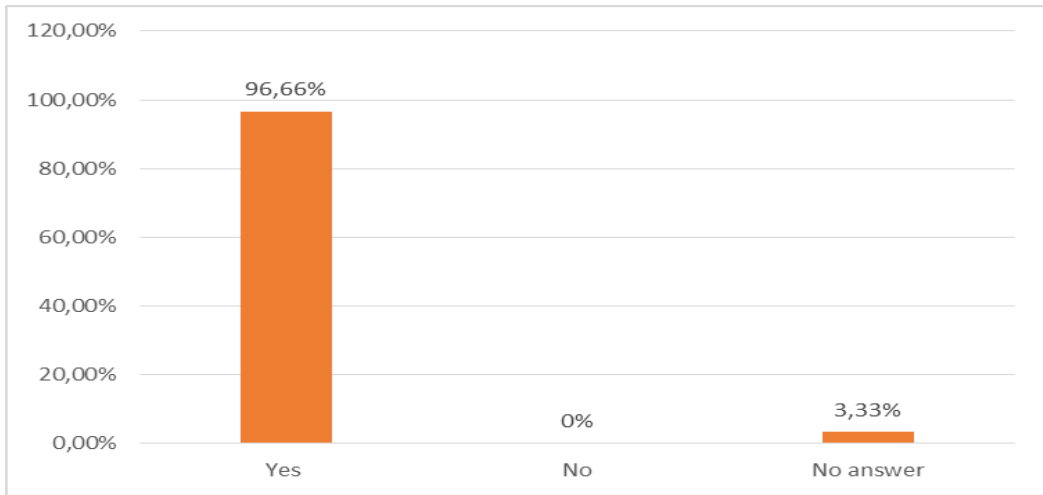

Figure 03 shows that the striking majority of the student participants (96.66%) agree with the idea that establishing connections with the native speakers via social media platforms is very useful when it comes to the understanding of the target culture.

Figure N°4.The Role of the Target Culture in Leading to Better Communication and Openness to the Other's Culture
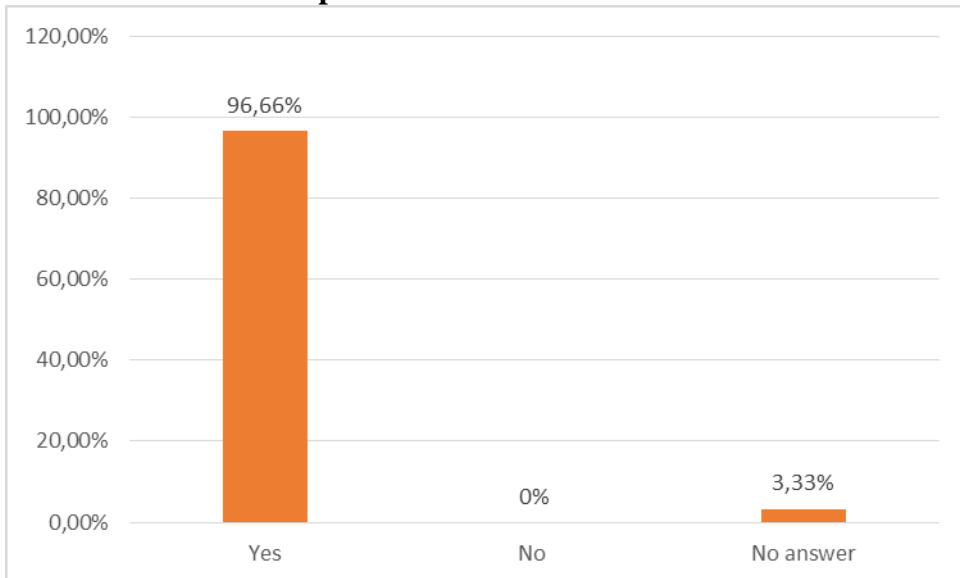
Figure 04 displays the student participants' views about how effective their use of a foreign language is after they are exposed to the target culture. Indeed, almost all of the informants (96.66%) give a positive answer, since they think that having access to the target culture is one step forward towards opening another horizon, and tolerate the other's culture.

Figure N°5. The Role of Social Media in Gaining Access to the Target Culture and in Bridging the Gap between Learners' Culture and the Target One.
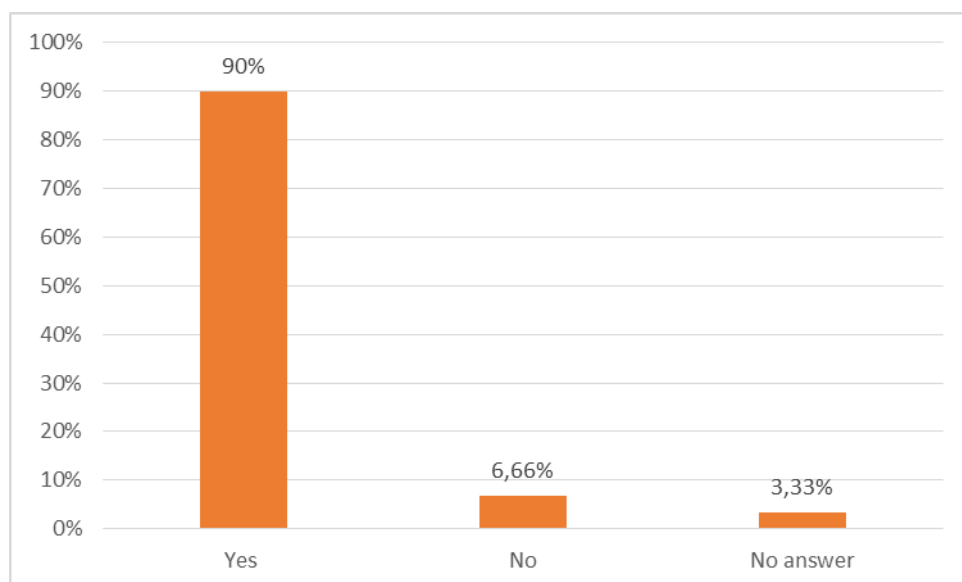

Figure 05 exhibits the student participants' awareness of the utility of the social media platforms to bridge the gap between the native culture and the target one while communicating with others. (90 %) of them consider this virtual encounter as an advantage; whereas a tiny minority of the student informants (6.66 %) does not share this view.

The questionnaire item through which the results displayed in Figure 05 were obtained contained a follow-up question, which asks the student informants whether social media sites help them to gain access to the target culture and bridge the gap between their culture and the target language culture. Those who agreed provided reasons such as the following:

- "That exposes the other cultures to me and it makes me travel virtually to gain so much experience without physically moving in a short period of time".

- "Social media is a very useful and helpful tool to understand the target language and its culture, because you can be able to see their lifestyle, their music, and their other cultural aspects through many forms, like blogs, short videos and you can be able to make the difference between your culture and the target one".

- "Culture can be spread and shared through a lot of ways and social media is one of them."

- "It helps discussing other's cultures and presenting our culture to others. Thus it helps to bridge the gap between the different cultures".
  Those who disagreed gave justifications such as:

- "Native speakers sometimes hide their true image as they expose things which do not really exist in other's culture"

- Some sites do not help, you can't really know the target culture unless you communicate or engage with people of that culture personally."

4. Discussion

The need for language learners to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been strongly advocated as an essential component in foreign language learning, since it helps learners to understand how intercultural interaction takes place and how social identities and cultural values, opinions, ways of thinking are part of all interactions. It exposes the learners to discover how they perceive other people (native speakers of the target culture) and the latter's perceptions of them that can influence the success of communication and dialogues in intercultural contexts. In other words, since the social media platforms establish these intercultural contexts, they also develop their ability to ensure a shared understanding of people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with other learners or with real intercultural situations. Never the less, to become competent intercultural speakers, learners need to be open-minded of the people of other cultures so that they will develop their awareness about the other's cultures which are different from theirs. By so doing, they will be able to understand cross-cultural perspectives with non-judgmental attitudes and respect (Bennett 1993).

According to the findings, the student informants are aware of the usefulness of their use of the social media platforms since they allow them to gain access to the target culture, therefore, their communication will be effective, and

that chances for their intercultural competence development are created. Moreover, Figure 02 shows that (76.66%) of the student informants affirm that linguistic competence, even though it is vital, is insufficient for effective communication since it cannot be isolated from the intercultural competence, which is in its turn crucial when using the language of the target culture.

Additionally, (90%) of the respondents insisted though their answers that connecting via social media platforms with the native speakers is another opportunity for them to be in direct contact with the target culture away from the protocols of the classroom. Even though this encounter is informal, it puts the foreign language learner in a real context where the native and the target cultures meet. This virtual experience is unique since it prepares the learners of a target language to be acquainted with people of other cultures, therefore, bridging the linguistic and cultural gap between people of different cultures. This will result in understanding and accepting people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviors; and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience. As Figure 05 displays, the student participants are fully aware of the utility of the social media platforms to bridge the gap between the native culture and the target one while communicating with others and (90 %) of them consider this virtual encounter as an advantage. To sustain this idea, one of the informants declares, "Culture can be spread and shared through a lot of ways and social media is one of them… It helps discussing other's cultures and presenting our culture to others. Thus it helps to bridge the gap between the different cultures".

5. Conclusion

The use of social media platforms to encourage EFL learners to listen and interact with their mates in a virtual way by using internet is a crucial tool with which to enhance EFL learners' linguistic, cultural and intercultural competences. The present study revealed that the learners tend to use these online tools to improve their ability as far as the foreign language is concerned. This is a very positive trend for students of foreign languages, and learning how to use these social media sites will allow learners to develop communicative language skills including intercultural communicative competence. Accordingly, the student informants, through their answers, showed positive attitudes towards using social media in their learning of English as a foreign language, as this latter is not just learning about its structure and how to use it correctly, but requires appropriateness or a cultural dimension when it comes to connecting with the native speakers. Moreover, motivational, pedagogical, and affective factors are persuasive arguments for making an effort to experiment with learners' use of the different social networking sites, which can contribute significantly to the

learners' progress in learning a foreign language.This is useful, but challenges remain.

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6. Appendix

Dear students, this questionnaire, which is anonymous, is a part of a research that I conduct. I will be pleased if you answer the following questions.

1. Gender:
   Male ☐
   Female ☐

2. Age:
   20-23 ☐
   23-26 ☐
   Other ☐

3. Do you use social networking platforms
   Yes ☐
   No ☐

4. If yes which ones
   Facebook ☐   twitter ☐   YouTube ☐
   Other …………………

5. How much time do you spend on these social media platforms

   Less than 01 hour a day   ☐
   Between 01 hour and 2 hours a day   ☐
   More than 02 hours a day   ☐

6. Why do you use these social media sites:

   Exchange information   ☐
   Connecting with people   ☐
   Learning a foreign language   ☐

7. Since you are EFL students, do you use them to learn the language?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐

8. What are the language skills that you can acquire while using the social networking platforms?
   Reading ☐
   Writing ☐
   Listening ☐
   Speaking ☐

   Other skills:…………………………………………………………………….

9. Among your contacts, do you have native speakers from English speaking countries?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐

10. Do you find difficulties when communicating with them?

Yes ☐
No ☐

11. Explain in both cases

    ……………………………………………………………………………………
    ……………………………………………………………………………………
    …………………………………………………………

12. Do you think that a good knowledge of English as a foreign language (linguistic competence) is enough to decipher messages of the native speakers

Yes ☐
No ☐

If yes,
explain ……………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………

If no, explain why?
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

13. For your communication to be effective, do you think that linguistic competence requires other competencies?

Yes ☐
No ☐

If yes, please cite them………………………………………………………………..
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

14. Does connecting with the native speakers help you to understand their culture (the target culture)?

Yes ☐
No ☐

15. Does it contribute to your knowledge of the English language?
    Yes
    No

16. Does having access to the target culture make your communication more effective and more open to the other's culture (s)?
    Yes
    No

17. Do social media platforms help you gain access to the target culture and bridge the gap between your native culture and the target one?
    Yes
    No

    Explain in both cases…………………………………………………………………………
    …………………………………………………………………………………………
    ………………………………………………………….

Thank you for your precious collaboration