The Pedagogical Role of Social Media in Promoting Students' Intercultural Understanding: Second Year American and British civilization M.A. Students at the University of Mohamed Boudief University as a case Study

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Abstract

With the latest technological developments in Social Media, intercultural communication has become a necessity. The present study aims to investigate the pedagogical role of Social Media in promoting students' intercultural understanding. To this effect, a case study was conducted at "Mohamed Boudiaf" University of M'sila (Algeria), particularly in the English department where the Second Year American and British civilization M.A. students were selected as the sample population. The data is derived from a questionnaire administered to students and analyzed through SPSS. The practical outcome of this study has displayed that the frequent usage of Social Media by M.A students constitutes a significant impact on them. It has also reflected their readiness to integrate Social Media into the host culture through a convenient pedagogy.

Keywords: Intercultural understanding, communicative competence, Social Media.

1. Context of the study

1.1. Background to the study

Byram and Wagner (2018, pp. 148-149) call for a reconceptualization of language education by insisting on the multi-dimensional mission of teaching combining knowledge of useful context with skills found in intercultural competence. Byram and Wagner (2018, pp. 148-149) advocate the need to adopt a holistic approach in teaching languages using content that is relevant to the students' lives and society. This is done to foster in students critical thinking skills. Moreover, collaborating with other subjects enables students to understand the utility of language education in their lives beyond the classroom context.

The literature calls for an acknowledgment of the different belongings of students. In this vein, Kramsch (2014, p. 249) draws attention to the greater prevalence and visibility of the multilingual and multicultural nature of national societies due to the advent of globalization and the increased mobility of humans, goods, and capital. It is quite noticeable nowadays that the population of language classrooms is made up of students who do not necessarily speak a common national language and who speak a variety of second, immigrant, or heritage languages. They do not share the same country of origin and are not brought up by parents of the same social class. Such students do not necessarily share the same ethnic background or the same history. "They are multilingual not only in the strict sense of being equally fluent in more than one linguistic code, but also in the sense that they have different outlooks, different upbringings, and have been socialized in different ways. They have less and less of a consensus on what is an appropriate, polite behavior, or even what is expected in school" (Kramsch, 2014, p. 249).
The above reviewed approach to teaching takes for granted the language and culture nexus (Byram and Wagner, 2018, p. 142). Teaching culture as information about a country or countries where the target language is spoken is beset with misinterpretations, although this approach is often present in textbooks and is hence widely adopted because of the reliance on textbooks as the main source of knowledge. These misinterpretations are due to the complexity of the term Culture (Williams, 1983).

What is needed, on the part of teachers and educators, according to Byram and Wagner (2018, pp. 148-149), is to embark on a critical examination of their own professional identity, their views of language and culture, and language education and its goals. This involves stepping out of their comfort zone, by exploring unfamiliar content with students or collaborating with somebody in a subject area that seems unfamiliar to them.

Kramsch (2014, p. 250) detected a significant shift in students' stance towards the use of words from a purely referential, denotative approach to the meaning of words towards a more context-sensitive utilitarian dimension. As has cogently pointed out by Kramsch (2014, p. 250), "nowadays stylistic variation and multiple indexicalities are the name of the game right from the start. Students who play with language in their blogs, tweets, IMs and their everyday ways of talking, tend to become impatient with the grammatical and lexical rules of the L2. They insist

on making themselves comprehensible despite their deficient grammar and, to a certain degree, communicative language teaching has encouraged them to do so". For Kramsch (2014, p. 250), students rely on the group understanding of the shared associations and allusions indexed by the words, and restrict their understanding of each other to pragmatic purposes. Students no longer endeavor to understand every word of a text. Instead, they simply skim and scan the text for information and feel content with getting the gist of its message (Ibid).

It stands to reason that some incongruity has to be disambiguated: Why should language teachers acquire a multilingual mindset if they teach only one language? To answer this question, Kramsch (2014, p. 253) explains that the term *multilingual* stands for a "diversity of meaning, as expressed through the different codes, modes, modalities, and styles that have currency in a global world that is now constantly and ubiquitously interconnected." However, the world where students will be expected to shuttle between languages and to show evidence of cross-cultural pragmatic competence" does not make it mandatory for foreign language teachers to master several languages to design multilingual practices that will help students achieve that goal. Rather, teachers only need to go beyond teaching language formally, but "in the individual variations that speakers and writers bring to language as living discourse" (Ibid).

The second important variable in this paper is the use of social media as a means of achieving intercultural communication. Here, the work of Sawyer and Chen (2012, pp. 2-3) is quite handy. This author argues that the growing importance of new social media in people's lives is because they promote the interconnectedness and interdependence of a culturally diverse world. Such online acts of communication promote interactive dialogues that build an understanding of different points of view because people using social media have the opportunity to express their opinions to the public and participate in conversations and dialogue through a common virtual medium. Social media enable people to have a sense of belonging to virtual communities on the Internet, interacting with others from different cultures, and gaining knowledge and learning about different opinions and perspectives of issues, topics, and events. However, the most important blessing of Social Media is the ability of its users to socialize and overcome cultural differences in terms of behavior and values. To overcome cultural differences, Sawyer calls for the use of Hofstede's five dimensions and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, namely power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term orientation.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Two variables emerging from the reviewed literature need to be investigated in conjunction: the pedagogical importance of cultural context and the use of social media to maximize its relevance in the teaching of culture. The present paper seeks to capitalize on this close nexus between these two variables.

1.3.   Research Objectives

1- To find out if there is a positive influence of Social Media on students' intercultural understanding.

2- To examine how Mohamed Boudief University students of English build their knowledge through the use of social media.

3- To determine the extent to which Social Media can help improve other features of culture, and

4- To check out students' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of Social Media.

1.4.   Research Questions

Q1: Why is intercultural understanding pedagogically important?

Q2: What is the pedagogical role of Social Media in promoting student's intercultural understanding?

Q3: How does Social Media connect cultures?

2. Theoretical framework: The Intercultural Dimension

The literature has developed the concept of Intercultural Competence. For instance, Byram and Wagner (2018, p. 140) define this concept as means of enriching linguistic competence with deep intercultural competence. The main objective is to empower language educators to assist language learners to acquire more and more sophisticated linguistic and intercultural knowledge and skills to enable them to apply such skills in other courses and experiences.

There is a consensus in the literature on the need for Intercultural Competence. To this effect, Byram and Wagner (2018, p. 140) point out the inadequacy of associating language teaching with teaching in a country or countries where a target language is spoken. This is based on the fact that, nowadays, language teaching has acquired the responsibility of paving the way for learners to interact with people coming from other cultural backgrounds. There is a need to teach learners skills and attitudes as well as knowledge. For these authors, this involves concepts like culture, the language-culture nexus, and intercultural competence. This view of teaching has implications for the teaching approach in terms of the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that should be taught. Furthermore, Byram and Wagner (2018, p. 140) argue that language teaching needs to be linked to other disciplines to develop an approach that integrates insights from citizenship education. Their approach has implications for teachers' professional identity and cooperation across the curriculum (Ibid).

This calls into play the notion of cultural context. In this vein, Hrabcová (2017, p. 13) attributes to the socio-cultural context the power to influence learners to start learning a language; it affects the learning process itself to a high extent as it is a considerably important factor when using the selected language variety in real-life situations. For this reason, Hrabcová (2017, p. 13) advocates its importance in language teaching as learning a foreign language is expected to present learners with new challenges and to open many avenues for them.

This focus on cultural understanding has an ideological human rights dimension. For Starkey (2002, p. 9) language is one of the most important social and cultural markers of identity. Instead of tense relations between language communities (within and between nations), this author believes that "the achievement of equality of citizenship in multilingual communities is a demonstration of the possibility of success of democracy and may be considered exemplary of the very essence of democracy" (Ibid). Instead of being perceived as a marker of difference, "the linguistic capacities of human beings are a unifying feature, distinguishing humans from other species and bringing with them an automatic entitlement to human rights." (Ibid) Indeed, Starkey (2002, pp. 23-24) is emphatic about the need to take language education as a site of learning for democratic citizenship and endorsement of global culture:

"Studying other cultures enables learners to de-centre from their own world-view, accept relativities and develop multiple identities. Acquiring the ability to communicate in a new language is the first step to identifying with other speakers of that language community. This intercultural dimension of language learning has the potential to promote antiracism as a positive principle of democratic citizenship" (Starkey, 2002, pp. 23-24).

However, cultural awareness has to be critical. For Starkey (2002, p.9), *critical cultural awareness* is the ability that learners should acquire "to evaluate critically and based on explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries." This involves the ability to identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures, using a range of analytical approaches to contextualize a given document or event and lay bare its ideological underpinning. The notion of benchmarking through a referential code is at the heart of this critical cultural awareness. Any potential evaluation of documents is to be made by reference to an explicit perspective and criteria such as human rights, liberal democracy, religion, political ideology. This vantage point also involves the ability to interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges, to be cognizant of possible zones of conflict between one's own and other ideological positions and to be ready to search for common criteria, or at least to negotiate the agreement on places of conflict and acceptance of difference (Byram, 1997).

Operating within the context of European integration referring to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages), Starkey (2002, p. 25) argues against the prevalent perception of the national dimension as the most salient and draws attention, instead, to other significant determinants of different cultural identities such as class, gender, ethnicity, language, education, political or religious affiliation, and individual dispositions. In this respect, Starkey (2002, p. 25) advocates the concept of citizenship, which is highly mediated by institutions (European Language Council, 1997). In this vein, a quote from Starkey (2002, p. 29) clarifies what is at stake:

"Citizens in a democracy need intercultural skills for living in communities where cultural diversity is the norm. They need critical cultural awareness to understand the world around them and challenge injustice, complacency, social exclusion, and unwarranted discrimination. The construction of a peaceful, democratic and multicultural Europe requires plurilingual citizens".

Braskamp (2008, p. 1) identifies the concept of "global citizens" having intercultural competence, maturity, sensitivity, global learning, and world citizenship. For this author, students are human because they are simultaneously thinking, feeling, and relating to others. Braskamp (2008, pp. 4-5) calls for the need not to limit our perspective to time-infested cultural differences between nations and countries. Instead, educators need to foster mutual understanding and respect for justice, equity, fairness, and equal opportunities as virtues and values. There is no other option for today's students but to be global citizens. The onus is on teachers to provide the experiences that integrate how students think, feel, and relate to others, i.e., develop students to become global citizens.

What transpires from the reviewed literature is a movement from teaching to education. In this respect, Porto and Byram (2015, pp. 27-28) emphasize that "in addition to giving learners language competence for instrumental purposes, foreign language teaching is and should be foreign language *education*, with all that that means in terms of personal development and societal improvement." These authors advocate the need for foreign language education to develop criticality, which should lead to action in the world. This is corroborated by empirical evidence to the effect that foreign language education does in developing criticality in courses in higher education, and that the attainment of transformative critique in action beyond the classroom is potentially feasible.

It ensues from the above review that education is inevitably related to teaching moral values as a means of offsetting purely cognitive skills. It has turned out that the teaching of culture is not without problems. For Çakir (2006, p. 139), due to the strong relationship between language and culture, language teaching forces educators to integrate FL culture effectively into the FL curriculum. In this vein, Alt and Reingold (2012, p. 1) highlight the growing interest in the role of teachers as active nurturers of common moral democratic values and norms. This goes hand in hand with the increasing dissatisfaction with the fruits of the postmodern child-centered approach beginning in the second half of the 20th century. Moreover, Nwafor and Nwogu (2014, p. 417) advocate the humanization of the classroom context, whereby human attributes and values such as honor, respect, love, dignity, friendship, etc., are given to other people irrespective of their social status, age, and level of education. For these authors (Nwafor and Nwogu, 2014, p. 418), to humanize the classroom implies the attribution of desirable human qualities, values, attitudes and interests to the learners to enable them to acquire commendable affective qualities of human beings. One main condition for this state of affairs to be realized lies in securing a healthy (warm and cordial) interaction between the teacher and his/her students, which in turn would engender effective learning (Emeh and Enukoha, 1994); a relationship that acknowledges and respects the personality of both the teacher and the learners. In a nutshell, all interactions in the classroom should have the stamp of humanism and pragmatism (Onoguere, 2000).

The main focus of the present paper is the correlation between media use and cultural competence. Following Jakubowski (2018, pp. 42-43), it is argued that social media have a

positive impact on our cultural competence. This is achieved through the process of acculturation, since "the longer we integrate with different cultures, the more often we use local media, which affects the acculturation process positively." For this author, the role of the media is usually positive, "Thanks to them, learning new languages is made possible and more effective. Media also give a great opportunity to acquire knowledge about a new place of living, a local society, local mores, codes of conduct, etc. Thus, media use may help prevent culture shock, bringing people forward in the adaptation process and being a tool for entering into contact with other people." Consequently, Jakubowski (2018, pp. 42-43) concludes that "new media are a very promising platform in supporting the process of learning intercultural competence. Using new media intentionally and including them in our cultural experience may be very useful for people who study, work or stay in a multicultural environment".

3. Methodology
3.1. Research Design

The present study aimed to investigate the Pedagogical role of Social Media in promoting students' intercultural understanding at the university level. A case study was conducted at "Mohamed Boudiaf" University of M'sila (Algeria), particularly in the English department where the second-year M.A students had been selected as the sample population. The rationale behind the choice of this group of subjects is their specialization in Culture Studies. It is assumed that they are expected to be made more sensitive than their fellow students to the cultural context of EFL. Thus, to discover the impact of Social Media on students' intercultural understanding, an online questionnaire was conducted to analyze students' attitudes towards the use of Social Media and the opportunities they give for understanding and communication in the present cultural era that is foreign to them.

The questionnaire comprised a total of 10 questions that aimed to investigate the role of Social Media in promoting students' intercultural understanding and encompassed two categories of questions: structured (closed-ended questionnaire), unstructured (open-ended questionnaire). The questionnaire also comprised a combination of Likert scaled dichotomous multiple choice, and ranking scaled questions. The rationale behind using the students' questionnaire is that questionnaires are "certainly the most often employed data collection devices in statistical work" (Dornyei, 2003, p. 3) as they are efficient data collection techniques consisting of different questions prepared in advance and addressed to several respondents to collect data to serve the research objectives. Another rationale behind selecting this instrument was the opportunity for the participants to express their thoughts freely, identify their problems, and suggest new solutions.

3.2. Participants

In the current study, the researcher has relied on a random sample that involved sixteen students: at "Mohamed Boudiaf" University of Msila (Algeria). Students who participated in the questionnaire enrolled in the second year M.A American and British civilization specialty and

belonged to different regions in Algeria. This diversity of cultural origins and regional belongings is meant to secure the representativity of the participants. It is assumed that they should have different attitudes to the use of social media.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Regarding the research instrument of this study, it was administered online to 60 students at Mohamed Boudiaf University of Msila (Algeria). The respondents answered the questionnaires on the same day. The data was collected personally by the researcher and later analyzed based on descriptive statistics and frequency distribution.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings and Discussion

The questionnaire has yielded the following results. They will be exposed in detail, first, and then they will be followed by a discussion of their significance.

First of all, students were questioned about the use of Social Media (i.e., Facebook, YouTube, What's App...etc.) in their life to have a better understanding of their practices. For question one, it has been found that the majority (70%) of the participants use Social Media always in their life, 16% of the subjects often use it, 10% of the participants use Social Media sometimes. However, a small number (3.33%) use it rarely. Figure 1 represents the responses to this question.
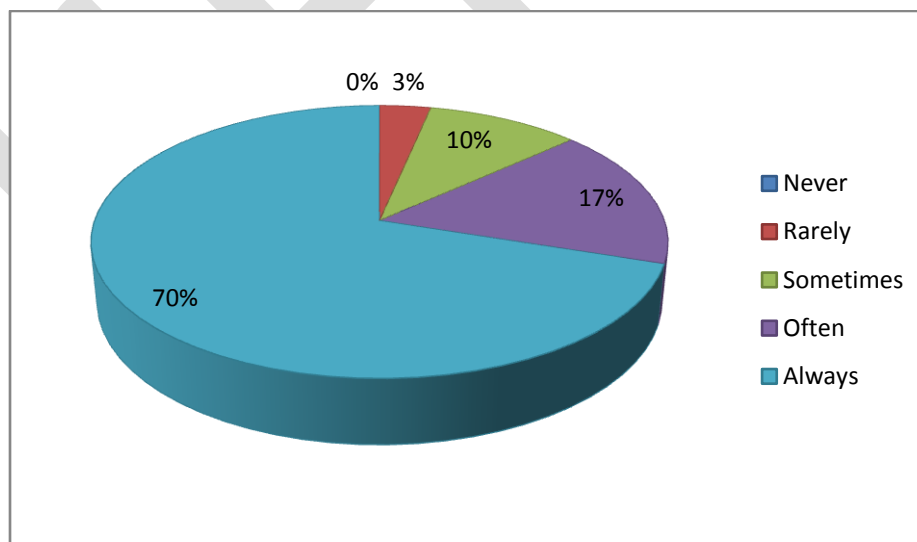

Figure 1: Frequency of the students' use of Social Media in their life

From the above findings, one can safely argue that university students are emotionally attached to Social Media in varying degrees. This confirms the findings of Al-Menayes (2015, p. 23) to the effect that, in the UK, Internet addiction is prevalent among 18% of young people (Neimz, Griffith and Banyard, 2006), in Italy, it is only 0.8% (Poli and Agrimi, 2012), whereas, in China, the rate is at 12% among males and 5% among female students (Lau, 2011). Research has attributed this variation in the rates of addiction to psychological and social reasons among the various social strata investigated.

For a better understanding of students' attitudes towards the pedagogical role of Social Media inside and outside the classroom, the next question investigates the pedagogical role of Social Media and the extent to which students agree with its use (To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Social Media have a pedagogical value and should be used as a way of communication inside and outside the classroom"?). The answers to this question yielded the following results: 40 % of the participants agreed that Social Media have a pedagogical value and should be used as a way of communication inside and outside the classroom. A total of 36.66% of the subjects strongly disagreed with the concept, whereas 11.66% disagreed; as for the remaining 5%, they were not certain about their responses. The findings are graphically represented in Figure 2
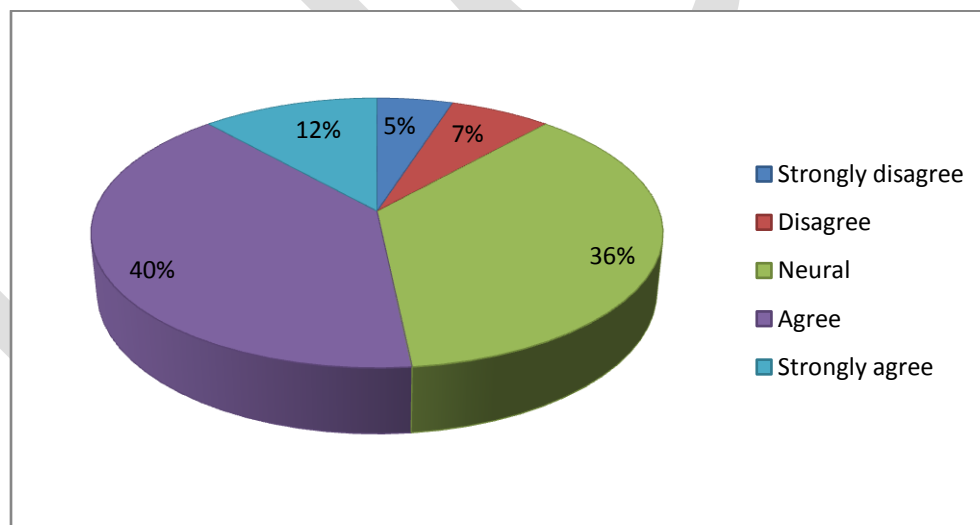

Figure 2: Students' attitudes towards the pedagogical role of Social Media inside and outside the classroom

This finding is following the literature review (e.g. Kramsch, 2014, Byram, and Wagner, 2018, and Jakubowski, 2018); it highlights that most students have positive attitudes towards the use of Social Media. In the literature, Baruah (2012, p. 1) believes that Social Media are means of social interaction that increase communication skills among students of educational institutions. In the same vein, Ellison et al. (2007) revealed that Social Media increase students'

and teachers' and students' and students' interaction. Waycott et al. (2010), and Wheeler (2010) also confirmed that Social Media have different pedagogical potentials such as open publishing new communication style and text, expressing personal identity and experience, co-creation and collaboration, and content management. Thus, Social Media are acquiring a vital role in daily communication with learners.

Since the focus here is on improving students' intercultural understanding through Social Media, the next question aimed to collect data about students' purposes behind using Social Media (What is your purpose behind using Social Media?). The analysis of this question showed that 20% of the subjects use Social Media to share information, and 6.66% use it to meet people. A total of 63% use it to learn new things. However, the rest 3.33% use it just to waste time. The data are schematically presented in Figure 3.
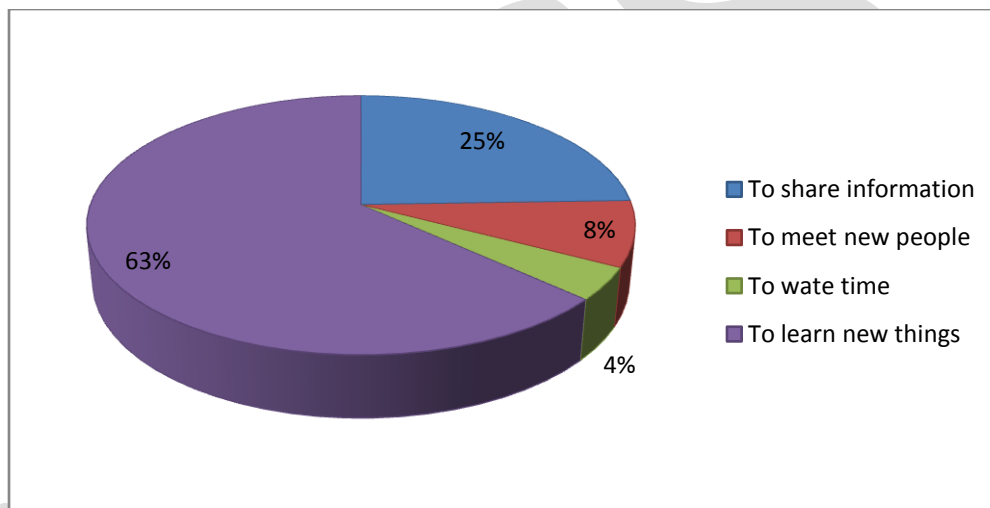

Figure 3: Frequency of students' use of Social Media for educational purposes

A careful analysis of the above data brings to light that Social Media have done a commendable role in bridging the learning gap among people; more specifically learners. In Algeria, at the University of Mohamed Boudief (Msila-Algeria), findings confirm that students use Social Media to learn new things. This finding is in line with many research findings which show that ICT provides different opportunities to make a strong learning environment (Smeet, 2005, p. 344). Its use is not limited to improving the learning environment only, but also involves preparing the new generation for future careers (Wheeler, 2001, p. 16). Many scholars suggested that Social Media Provide a number of advantages in education: a) they are a way to make friends, b) they help learners share knowledge and access information easily, c) they give learners the chance to learn from different sources, and d) they allow learners to express what they feel and think (Akram and Kumar, 2017, p. 350). Hence, the uses of Social Media in education give students the ability to get more useful information and help them to establish beneficial connections for their careers.

In an attempt to enrich the present discussion and clarify the pedagogical role of Social Media in improving students' intercultural understanding, an explicit question was asked to students about their familiarity with the Western culture through the use of Social Media (As a student in the English department at the university, to what extent did you use Social Media to connect and become familiar with the Western (American and British) culture?). According to the results obtained from students' answers, 43.33% of the participants use Social Media almost every time to connect and become familiar with the Western (American and British) culture, 21.66% of the participants opted for sometimes. The other category's answer, 13.33%, was rarely and 15% of the subjects use Social media frequently, while the rest 6.66% stated that they never use Social Media to become familiar with Western culture. The findings are graphically represented in Figure 4.
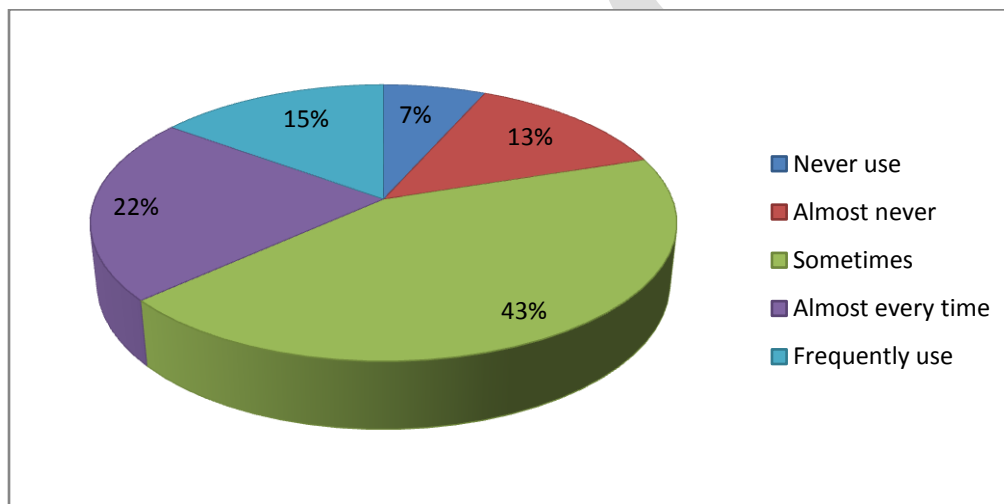

Figure 4: Frequency of students' use of Social Media to connect and become familiar with the Western (American and British) culture

The findings above show that the Algerian students, particularly M.A. students, consider Social Media as a channel that connects them with other cultures. This is in line with Sawyer and Chen (2012, p. 9) acknowledgment of the positive integrative role of social media, enabling immigrants not only to electronically communicate with their family and friends in their native countries but also with the local people in the host countries. In an online environment, host social communication and ethnic social communication are important components that can facilitate or impede adaptation (Chen, 2009). Thus, social media has a social, physical, and cultural influence on intercultural adaptation. The literature has attested to the positive role of Social Media in maintaining the intercultural integration of immigrant minorities into their host cultures (Prakapiene and Prakapas, 2016, p.168). Chen and Brayr (2012) state that Social Media not only influence the form and content of information, but they also affect how people understand each other in the process of human communication, especially for those from different cultural and ethnic groups. Moreover, the literature has indicated that the process of

adaptation of new members, which is particularly important in multicultural communities, may be facilitated through Social Media. Indeed, various media, especially Social Networking sites, have been shown to have a positive impact on the success of cultural adaptation (Raman and Harwood, 2008). According to Crousher (2011, p. 260), Social Networking sites have gained in popularity among immigrants as a way not only to keep in touch with members of their in-group but also to foster relationships with members of their new dominant cultural milieu.

When asked to respond to the statement (Do you share your cultural features with people from different cultures through Social Media?), the majority (90%) share their cultural features with people from different cultures through using Social Media. However, few of them (10%) do not share their cultural features. The findings are graphically translated in Figure 5.
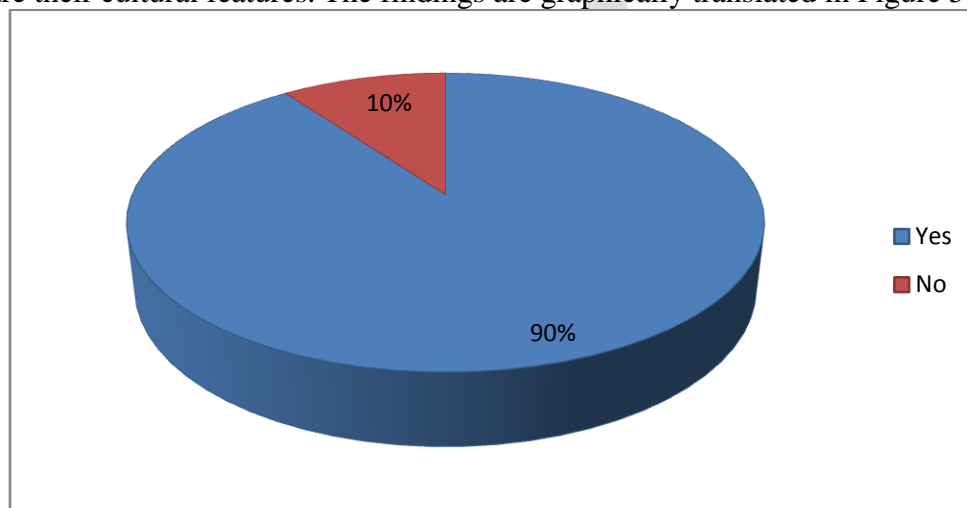

Figure 5: Students use of Social Media to share their cultural features

This finding is interesting as it shows how the Algerian students care for and respect their cultural features in terms of traditions, beliefs, costumes, identity, dialects, values, history and especially religion. In this respect, Bouherar (2020, p. 1) argued that most of the Algerian society is still conservative, with special sensitivity to religious dogma, a point confirmed also by Bouherar (2020, p. 12). However, the rest 10% do not share their cultural features. Building on Bouherar' (2020, p. 12) view, "globalization effects may have influenced the way some Algerians consider religion in society nowadays and this is not a guided movement towards secularism. A foreigner walking to any Algerian city can still notice many forms that entail people's attachment to Islamic rites". This is highlighted in the coming question.

The answers to the question (To what extent do Social Media influence your culture?), yielded the following results: 10% the participant's culture was negatively influenced. 40 % maintain that their culture was influenced positively; the figure above also shows that the majority 45% feel neutral. However, the rest 5% of the subjects' culture was influenced very positively. When presented in a figure form, these data could be represented as follows:
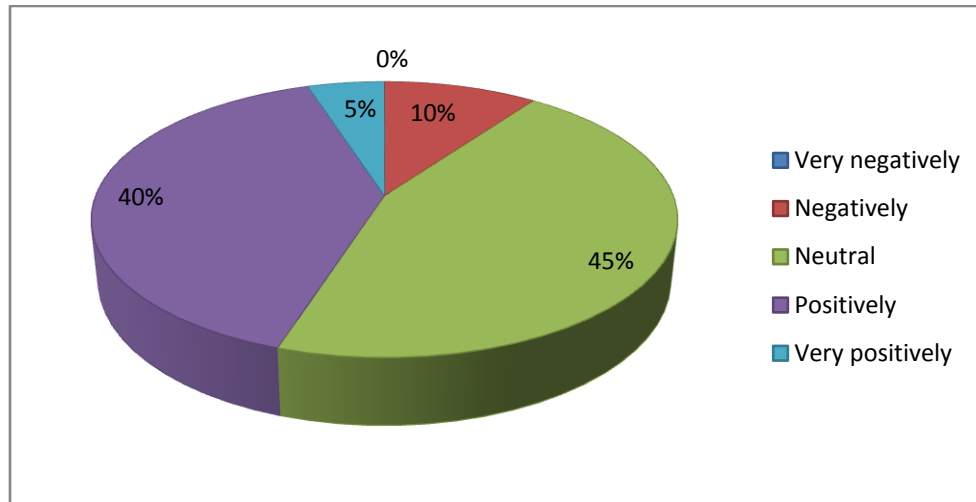
Figure 6: The influence of Social Media on students' culture

The present question is intended to clearly discern the extent to which students' culture was affected by Social media. Thus, it transpires from students' responses that social Media did not affect their culture negatively and they still preserve their culture. This finding was expected, as students must benefit and learn from Social Media's good aspects and not their bad ones. In this regard, Mouhadjer (2018, P. 831) reiterates the conception of an intercultural perspective for online classes using social media technology. Based on the work of Byram (2008) and Alred, Byram, and Fleming (2006), this author summarized this conception into three essential elements: attitudes (they adopt the others' perspectives in order to contrast and compare with the dominant evaluations in their society. During the video link which places them in a context of phases of acceptance and rejection, these students will be able to cope with their different kinds of experiences with a different culture, and try to conform to the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction of the others), knowledge (about events, significant individuals and various interpretations of events, how to use social media and telecommunications that facilitate interpersonal and cultural partnerships across frontiers, conventions of communication and interaction in their own and the foreign culture, and about alternative interpretations of shared concepts, gestures, customs and rituals. about the national memory of their own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries) and skills (when observing a social phenomenon to identify ethnocentric perspectives in an event and explain their origins, how to identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems, and how to use their explanations of sources of misunderstanding and dysfunction to help interlocutors overcome conflicting perspectives, finding compromises, seeking consensus, accepting majority decisions, tolerating minorities, promoting encouragement, balancing rights and responsibilities, and showing trust and courage are on the list, how to take seriously the opinions and arguments of others by putting oneself in the position of others and start to accept criticism and listen, how

to make their own opinions, needs, interests, feelings, and values clear, speak coherently, explain clearly, and abandon every kind of violence, humiliation, or insult).

Students were also asked to respond to the statement (How do Social Media impact your own culture?) This question was set to determine the participants' opinions on how Social Media impact their culture. The students' responses show that they hold a positive attitude towards the use of Social media (i.e. Social Media did not impact students' culture negatively). However, some students felt that Social Media have some strengths and weaknesses and that people must use it carefully. Thus, the data obtained from the above question are as follows:

"I corrected some wrong beliefs and bad things I used to do", "Being familiar with strange values that are not acceptable in our society", "I discovered new things that I didn't know before", "It helped me build relationships with foreigners", "It may represent my own culture in a good way", "Social Media have two sides, the positive side and the negative side, so people need to perceive things they hear or see with a critical thinking not just following what others do".

In this regard, Mouhadjer (2018, p. 830) argues that Social media tools provide an environment for all varieties of content to be discussed, shared, and negotiated. The list of merits of chat rooms, includes discussing topics of common interest, forming communities with compatible visions, and finding soul mates or short-term relationships. With new advances in technology, people continue to chat online with the possibility of using voice and/or video, to converse with friends and family members, conduct classroom lessons, and carry out business negotiations, or even in multiplayer computer games and virtual online worlds. Moreover, Mouhadjer (2018, p. 830) added that visual connection is an interactive communication medium that enhances understanding and helps participants feel connected to each other, supports collaboration among traditionally isolated institutions, and builds relationships in a way that e-mail, telephone, or online chat systems cannot, which can only enhance motivation.

Additionally, they were asked about the advantages that Social Media provide them regarding communication with different people. Some students' answers are presented in the following lines:

"It helped me to introduce my culture", "It helped me to develop my language skills", "It helped me to learn new things, share my knowledge, "It helped me to show others my talents and skills", "To communicate with my classmates to share lessons", "It helped me to interact with people from different places", "It facilitates my learning", "It is my second teacher", "It breaks down fear, anxiety and shyness that happened in the face to face conversation", "I learned new languages such as English", "I can get information easily"

The present findings are in line with Sawyer and Chen's argument (2012, p. 1) that intercultural adaptation involves the process of promoting understanding through interaction to increase the level of fitness so that the demands of a new cultural environment can be met.

Indeed, people tend to use new social media to become more integrated into the host culture during their adaptation and to maintain connections to their home countries. Sawyer added that, while cultures around the world value their traditions, beliefs, and norms that make them unique, social media links people around the world regardless of differences and geographical boundaries. Moreover, according to Chen and Zhang (2010), new social media has brought people from different cultures together in the "global village" through the process of intercultural adaptation. Thus, communication and interaction are key factors that influence how social media impacts intercultural adaptation (Sawyer and Chen, 2012, pp. 1-2). Similarly, Siddiqui and Singh (2016, p. 72) enumerate a number of functions of social media: pedagogical, political, and economic.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to report how satisfactory the use of Social Media was in helping them develop their intercultural understanding (i.e., to be more aware of and empathetic to the American and British culture). The majority (about 63% of the total) were satisfied with the use of Social Media in helping them develop their intercultural understanding, whereas some others (13. 33) were very satisfied. And only 1.6% of them had a negative experience with the use of Social Media and they were very unsatisfied. 5% of the participants were unsatisfied with its use. However, the rest 16.66% felt neutral. The data are presented schematically as follows:
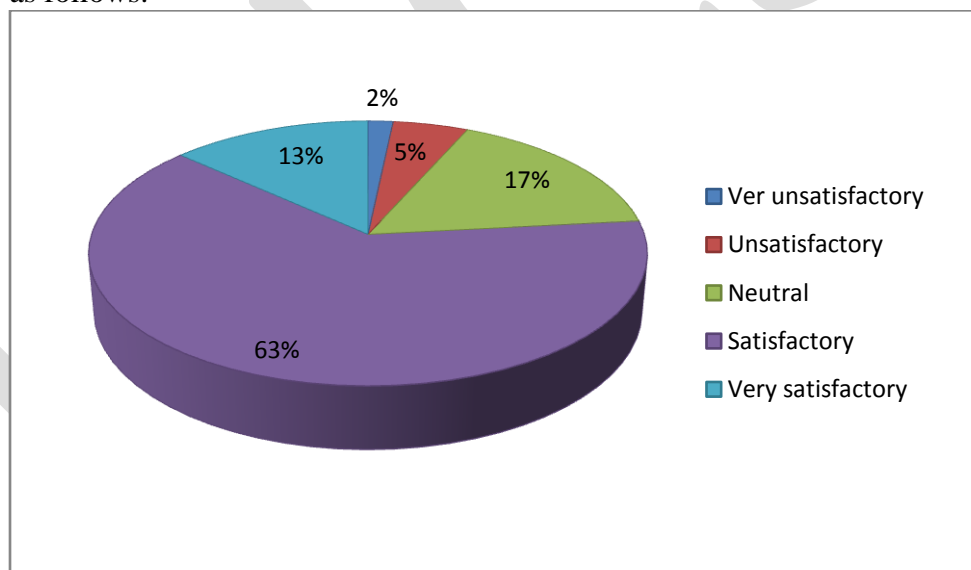

Figure 7: Students' attitudes towards the use of Social Media in helping them develop their intercultural understanding

These findings are interesting in the sense that, if the students are interested in developing their intercultural understanding, they will be engaged in reading about other cultures. And it is apparent that this technology and the materials which are used by students in their daily life are helpful for learning, and improving learners' intercultural understanding.

These findings are in tandem with Seyfi and Güven's insight (2016, p. 28) that, by hosting many activities in the course of one's day, social media takes important role in occurring social events (Peltekoğlu, 2012, p.5). For these authors, providing freedom and partial deterritorialisation, social media enables individuals to realize themselves and to want to use this environment actively. Indeed, social media brings people together, as well as communities organized around the same objective. Seyfi and Güven (2016, p. 28) further add that, with globalisation, very rapid and important relations have developed between intercultural communication and social media (Lazar, 2012, p.291; Engin, 2011, p. 37) as there endless uses for digital media (Wooley, 2013, p. 41). Seyfi and Güven (2016, p. 28) contend that, besides being a practical tool in the spreading of messages, social media plays a very important role in creating new forms of multicultural relations (Piechota, 2014, p. 38). Thus, it transpires that, beyond being related concepts, social media and intercultural communication are mutually interdependent phenomena. To this effect, with the use of social media in intercultural communication, and adjustment (an essential factor in intercultural adaptation) and a sense of community emerge.

As an attempt at a deeper understanding of the importance of understanding intercultural differences, an explicit question was asked (Why is it important to understand intercultural differences?). Some students' answers were as follows:

"It is important to understand people from different cultures", "To be able to study abroad or make researches", "It provides a sort of respect between races (e.i., knowing their traditions and norms and the ideology of the ethnic group will certainly guide you to behave in a certain way is respectful to the group", "To understand better how we see things and how we should deal with things especially cultural aspects and it's ok to get to know everything but not to follow it just because it is a trend", "Each speech community has its customs, way of thinking and traditions. People need to recognize these differences in order not face racism or misunderstanding", "To maintain a cultural identity that shows the world the beauty of any country regardless of its wealth or political power in the world", "To avoid misunderstanding and to gain a successful flexible communication", "To have an overview on the interrelated values and historical events", "To be more civilized", "To reduce Islam phobia and racism", "To see things from different perspectives", "To learn new languages".

There is a clear relevance, here, of Mouhadjer's insight (2018, p. 829) that new improvements in information and communication technologies have made geographical boundaries irrelevant. This online communication, most of the time, transcends the boundaries of one culture to engage interlocutors in an intercultural environment where understanding how to effectively communicate using the different types of social media might represent a challenge. The present findings confirm Mouhadjer's prediction that communication is going to vary cross-culturally and this is something that one needs to take into consideration when addressing social media and communication across cultures other than his or her own.

5. The Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

With the rapid growth in communication technologies, cultures have integrated like never before and began to influence each other. Especially with the development of Social Media usage, it has become a necessity to explore the influences of Social Media in intercultural understanding. Through this article, we attempted to show the pedagogical role of Social Media in improving students' intercultural understanding by both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The qualitative and quantitative data acquired from this study shows that Social Media are means of communication that facilitate students' faster adaptation and improve their intercultural understanding. By the use of Social Media, students get the chance to increase their cultural awareness through building knowledge, embracing new skills and strategies, and reconsidering - if not changing- attitudes.

Moreover, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of Prakapienė and Prakaspas (2016) about the impact of Social Media on intercultural communication, and Sawyer and Chen (2012) who made the research about the effects of Social Media in the process of cultural adaptation and analyzed the use of Social Media by USA students. Thus, three findings can be drawn from the current study: First, improving students' intercultural understanding through the use of Social Media in Algeria could be possible if Social Media are properly used. The good use of Social Media provides the condition for intercultural understanding improvement. Second, intercultural understanding would be built in the context of real-life social interaction and social media use. The third and last finding of this study is that Social Media affect intercultural understanding positively which is clearer nowadays than it used to previously to the host country, whereas this positive impact would not be independent of real social interaction with the host culture.

Consequently, Social Media is tremendously important for students to enrich their learning process with the appropriate use of it and to promote their perspectives about the target cultures and ameliorate their communicative competence to interact and communicate with people from different cultures effectively and appropriately.

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