

THUMBS UP OR THUMBS DOWN? NAVIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA DYNAMICS IN AN ESP COMMERCE COURSE ON FACEBOOK

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Abstract

This study explores the social media behaviours of 64 undergraduates specializing in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). These students have chosen to use a private Facebook group as an alternative to the Moodle platform for engaging in online class tasks. This novel approach facilitates the fusion of diverse class sections within a relaxed and informal digital space, allowing for greater freedom of expression as they tackle course assignments.

These learners are enrolled in three separate sections of a second-year English for Commerce Purposes program (BA in Commerce) at a Spanish public university. They convene in person twice a week, dedicating two hours to each session. Over the course of the term, students are tasked with participating in different discussion forums, which take place either on the Facebook group or the Moodle platform. These forums serve as a means to practise writing skills and review course materials covered in class. Each online task is designed to be completed within a 15-minute time frame, and students are regularly prompted to engage with their peers by responding to various simulated scenarios (e.g. endorsing or disapproving email requests, accepting or rejecting apologies, etc.). When responding to their classmates, learners can provide support or take a more critical stance.

Hence, my study aims to dissect how students interact with these tasks on the Facebook platform, exploring their tendencies to support or challenge their peers within the context of these simulations. Furthermore, I will scrutinize the linguistic resources employed when offering support or expressing disagreement. Finally, I will explain how students perceive their behaviours within this social media environment throughout the course.

1. Introduction

Social networks have changed our manner of connecting with our relatives and friends, allowing us to get to know what people are doing, and breaking down distance barriers.. For education purposes, they have been introduced inside and outside classrooms, mainly to motivate students and adapt to their current lifestyles. However, many teachers are reluctant to use them in class, associating social networks with less professional ways of communicating with people. This caused some scholars to disregard social networks altogether, resulting in few studies being undertaken to analyse

the role of platforms like Facebook in enhancing English as a Foreign Language teaching. Now, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid and online education have become paradigmatic, and social networks are seen as innovative and necessary ways of communicating with students.

The present study analyses the use of Facebook in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course taught at a public university in Spain. Three different groups of students studying the same subject, namely, Business English for Commerce students, were invited to join a Facebook closed group to do written activities that would boost class engagement and interactions among peers of different sections. This idea would allow students to talk to classmates from other groups, or even peers in the same class whom they would not normally talk to because their course section has numerous students. Additionally, since the COVID-19 pandemic was still taking place at the time of the experiment, some students were required to attend classes online while others had to attend classes face-to-face. Therefore, creating a Facebook closed group could guarantee students' interaction with one another, regardless of their group.

L2 sociopragmatic competence is key in ESP courses which anticipate using the foreign language in prospective professional contexts. From this perspective, it is interesting to see how students interact with one another, whether they align and support each other when being asked to take fictitious roles (e.g. adopting the role of the boss of their classmates, or simply a friend, or hiring staff at a given company). Therefore, several questions arise when carrying out this experiment:

RQ1: Would students prefer using the institutional online platform or the Facebook closed group created ad hoc for the course?

RQ2: How will students react to their peers' responses to activities on the Facebook wall? Will they support them or go against them? Which linguistic strategies will they use to respond to their classmates' texts?

RQ3: In a more general sense, can Facebook become a feasible didactic tool for an ESP course?

The study is structured in the following manner. After the introduction, a brief literature review of the use of Facebook in EFL contexts will be presented, both in English for General and Specific Purposes settings. Later, a description of the methodology (participants, class activities, and procedures) will follow. Then, the data analysis and discussion of results are presented. Finally, some concluding remarks and a list of references are provided.

2. Facebook as an English workbook

Integrating social networks into English language learning, particularly through platforms like Facebook, offers new possibilities for fostering engagement, community, and authentic language use. Social media tools are becoming increasingly relevant in language learning due to their accessibility, interactivity, and alignment with modern students' digital literacy skills. Unlike traditional learning platforms like Moodle, so-

cial networks offer an informal space where students can participate more freely, enhancing their motivation and providing additional peer support beyond the classroom.

2.1. Community building and peer support

A common theme across several studies is the ability of social networks to create learning communities where students feel more comfortable expressing themselves and supporting each other. Facebook, in particular, encourages peer interaction in ways that traditional platforms may not fully facilitate. The sense of belonging in a social network space, which students may already associate with personal and social relationships, extends to their academic work, allowing them to collaborate and learn from each other. This fosters social learning that traditional platforms might struggle to replicate.

For instance, Saylag (2013) and Peeters and Fourie (2016) emphasize how Facebook encourages self-disclosure and helps students adapt to new academic cultures by promoting peer communication and sharing personal experiences. Similarly, Rodliyah (2016) found that Facebook's dialogue journaling feature helps students develop their writing skills by sharing and learning from others' linguistic contributions.

2.2. Motivation and engagement

Another recurring theme is the ability of social networks to enhance students' motivation and engagement. Unlike traditional platforms, social networks allow for more immediate interaction and real-time feedback, which can make the learning process feel more dynamic and enjoyable. The informal nature of social networks can also reduce the pressure that comes with formal academic platforms, encouraging students to take more risks with language. This is particularly relevant in language learning, where learners may hesitate to participate in more rigid environments like Moodle.

Shih (2013) and Saienko *et al.* (2020) highlight that using Facebook in ESP contexts boosts motivation and interest in the course material. Similarly, Salazar Chica *et al.* (2021) demonstrate how Facebook groups foster active participation and help students improve their vocabulary in a less constrained environment, further validating the idea that informality can promote creativity and exploration in language learning.

2.3. Authenticity of communication

Social networks are celebrated for providing students with opportunities to engage in authentic communicative practices. These platforms mimic real-world interactions more closely than traditional platforms, allowing students to practise the language in context through informal exchanges, such as commenting, sharing, and reacting to posts. In contrast, Moodle and other learning management systems may provide structured activities but often lack this level of spontaneity.

Several studies, such as Nikbaht and Boshraadi (2015), have noted that using social networking sites positively influences vocabulary retention because students are exposed to words in a more interactive environment, leading to deeper lexical processing. Additionally, Lantz-Andersson (2018) emphasizes how social networks support pragmatic and sociolinguistic development by exposing students to hybrid language practices (e.g. emoticons, memes) that reflect real-life communication.

2.4. Challenges of mixing personal and academic spaces

While social networks offer numerous advantages, they also come with challenges, particularly in how they blend students' personal and academic lives. Some students may find it difficult to shift from using Facebook for social purposes to using it for university activities. This overlap can create issues of privacy and professionalism, with some students feeling uncomfortable engaging with academic content in a space they typically associate with personal communication.

Rodliyah (2016) highlights this tension, noting that while students appreciate the flexibility and accessibility of Facebook for language learning, they also express concerns about the blurred boundaries between personal and academic spaces. In comparison, platforms like Moodle provide a more formal and controlled environment, which may feel more appropriate for scholarly work, especially in professional settings like ESP courses.

2.5. Blended learning and flexibility

Several studies also advocate a blended learning approach, where social networks complement traditional learning platforms rather than replace them. This integration allows educators to take advantage of the unique strengths of each tool. Shih (2013) suggests that combining Facebook with more formal learning management systems can maximize student engagement and provide diverse ways to support learners. Similarly, Peeters and Fourie (2016) argue that Facebook can be used as a supplementary tool to help students overcome challenges in academic acculturation while ensuring that formal academic needs are met through traditional platforms. This blended approach addresses concerns about privacy and professionalism by giving students the flexibility to choose the platform that best fits their learning style and the nature of the task.

In conclusion, using social networks like Facebook in EFL and ESP contexts introduces new ways to engage students, foster a community spirit, and support authentic language practice. However, these platforms also bring challenges related to privacy, professionalism, and the blending of personal and academic spaces. By exploring these themes across various studies, it becomes clear that social networks, when used strategically and in conjunction with traditional platforms, can greatly enhance the language learning experience, particularly in fostering motivation, peer support, and real-world communicative competence.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

This study's sample consists of 64 second-year students (ages 19-21) who are enrolled in the same English for Commerce Purposes course at a public university in Madrid (Spain). However, they are divided into three different sections. Group 1 and Group 2 (21 and 24 students, respectively) go to class at the same time in the morning but are taught by two different professors, and Group 3 (19 students) attends classes in the afternoon. However, they all take two-hour classes twice a week for 15 weeks. The total number of students enrolled across all sections is 160 for all the groups combined. They follow a blended learning approach, meaning that only one-third of the students enrolled in each group attend classes every week while the remaining students fol-

low the class through a Google Meet session. Lastly, students are mostly intermediate learners (B1 CEFR), but there are some A2 students as well.

3.2. Class activities

Since all 64 students are covering the same content and doing the same activities, students are offered to join a Facebook group to interact with each other when doing certain written activities in each class. However, all students are also allowed to do those activities in their official Moodle course from the Virtual Campus.

Students have done a total of 20 activities throughout the course, which are mostly linked to the course topics, which, in turn, follow the logical structure of a job application process (writing a CV, writing emails, interviewing for a job, and delivering a pitch). From this perspective, regarding the description of previous experiences, students have to explain their fictitious past job experience (Act 1) and apologize for past wrong behaviour (Act 2). To improve their CVs, students approach action verbs by imagining they become CEOs of a company (Act 3).

For interview practices, students attempt to convince someone to go for an interview (Act 8). They have to describe the flaws of a previous manager in a fictitious job (Act 14). Learners also deal with methods such as RESA (Relevant, Experiences, Skills, Achievements and Awards), DLCT (Did, Learned, Contributed, Transformed), or STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Results) to inform and persuade the interviewer (Activity 15). Also, students practise pitch scripting and delivery in Activities 18 and 19.

Additionally, also related to business management and dynamics, students have to choose an approach to business (Act 4), make their own approach to Sustainable Development Goals (Act 17), see how to address superiors or inferiors at a company (Act 16), and they have to show resilience by adapting to changes in the office (Act 10). They also have to give advice (Act 7), make both informal and formal proposals (Activities 5 and 6, respectively), make a formal request via email (Act 12) or present plans for a Halloween office party (Act 13).

Learners are also required to show their creative and leadership skills by canvassing for a project (Act 9), creating a startup (Act 11), and individually convincing their professor why they are the student of the month (Act 20).

3.3. Procedures

All 20 activities aim at practising different linguistic functions in a 15-minute writing activity done in most of the classes. Now, only 64 students have decided to participate in the closed Facebook group, while the rest have preferred to work on the Moodle platform. In fact, for each activity, we have a different Facebook participation rate, depending on whether students have come to class or not. While the participation rate among students who stay on Moodle is around 66%, only half of the class who join the Facebook closed group have come to class and do the activities.

The reason why many students still prefer using Moodle over Facebook can be due to their familiarity with the platform, as it is used in all the other university courses they have been taking in the last year. None of the students publicly raised any concern about Facebook, but the lack of anonymity could be a worry for some of them. Finally, some students might resist the change because they prefer more traditional learning methods.

Now, the main difference between the two systems is that learners who have opted out of joining the Facebook community can see and interact with students from other groups rather than just their own and can make anonymous comments, since students are not required to join the group with their real names, thus leading to more opportunities to develop or pretend to be a new persona. Students are thus prompted to engage with their peers by responding to various simulated scenarios (e.g. endorsing or disapproving email requests, accepting or rejecting apologies, etc.). When responding to their classmates, learners can provide support or take a more critical stance.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Results

Students were asked to react to their peers' activities written down on the wall of a Facebook closed group created *ad hoc* for the course. The first activity was explicitly used as an introduction and did not require students to comment on their classmates' activities, and we all voted aloud the best profile for a given job offer. Since then, students have reacted differently towards their classmates. Out of 19 activities done on the wall of the closed Facebook group, 499 answers were generated by students (an average of 26 per activity), who also provided 378 comments (an average of 19 comments per activity) to the different answers throughout the course. This means that not all students who wrote an answer to each activity then commented on another classmate's work. The main reason behind this difference may be due to students not attending class synchronously: they might have just done the first activity in most cases but avoided doing the second half.

Moreover, this difference can be explained by the students' English proficiency disparities. Most ESP courses taught in Spanish universities have students with different levels of English, from A2 to C1 (CEFR). Therefore, not even intermediate and advanced students can deliver similar results in the same 15-minute frame given to do the activity. Then, depending on whether this online writing task was the last activity in the class or not, those students with lower levels would try to complete the second half of the activity or not. 78% of the students who did the first activity also did the second one, which seems to highlight these competence disparities or the number of times this writing task was followed by a different activity so that lower-level students could try to finish commenting on their classmates' answers.

As we mentioned, 378 comments were generated by students replying to other students' answers. Now, students mainly chose to respond positively (n=289, 77%) to their classmates by means of supporting them or agreeing with them in their original answers to the class activity, as opposed to students who preferred to defy, oppose, criticize, or go against their classmates' first answers (n=89, 23%).

4.2. Students' reactions to their peers on social media

Students mostly responded positively when answering their classmates' first answers to the activities. However, in two out of 19 situations, they decided to go against their peers. The first case deals with an activity in which students are to practise action verbs in future verb tenses (simple, progressive, perfect simple, or *be going to*) where they imagine becoming CEO of a company. Then, learners are asked to "Choose

somebody's predictions and support them or question them. Come up with a story of your own and explain why that prediction/plan will or won't be happening. Remember this is a fictitious world that we use for English practice". In this activity, 90% of the answers criticize their peers. Students employ different techniques, mockery being one of the most common strategies to reply to other learners:

- Simply disagreeing

(1) Student 1' answer: "If I am CEO at HUAWEI, I will negotiate marketing strategy with department managers".

Student 2' comment: "You should negotiate marketing with [the] marketing department, instead of negotiating it with all department managers".

- Against socialism

(2) Student 1' answer: "When I'm CEO at Zara, I will reduce the [working] hours of the employees".

Student 2' comment: "Don't implement socialism political measures, it doesn't work".

- Mockery

(3) Student 1' answer: "When I was* the CEO of Apple, I will set up a new policy to encourage employees to innovate".

Student 2' comment: "I don't think you will be the CEO of Apple. Because you have never tried to innovate. How are you going to encourage your employees while you haven't done it well? 😏".

(4) Student 1' answer: "When I'm CEO in Carolina Herrera, I will motivate my employees and give them sales and presents".

Student 2' comment: "I don't think you will give your employees a present because you didn't even give me anything for my birthday".

(5) Student 1' answer: "When I'm CEO at TOEI ANIMATION I will be advising the animators so that they make the best animations on the world".

Student 2' comment: "u wont be CEO at TOEI ANIMATION first of all because* I will be CEO at MAPPA and I'm going to buy TOEI ANIMATION, if u want to u would be second in comand*. In adition*, u wont be skilled enough to take the position".

These examples show which strategies students used to oppose each other. We do not witness any sort of constructive criticism, but students want to be funny to avoid losing face in front of the other classmates who might be reading these responses. Personal attacks are not rare, especially when it comes to workers' rights, which students tend to associate with socialist policies.

In the last activity of the course, students are asked to sell themselves to win the award of the best student of the course. Then, they must reply to their classmates' messages as if they were the English teacher and explain to their classmates if they think those reasons are good enough to be the best student or not. In this case, humour is only used once, when one student comments on his answer:

(6) Student 1' answer: "Good morning, as you know, one reason is that* always I go early to the class and I pay attention at all times to the explanation of the teacher, others reasons* are that if one student ask me for help, never I say no and I do it the best that I could and I have the best note* in the class".

Student 1' comment: "Hi. It is true that you always come so early and ever pay attention to the class, also your classmates say to me that you help with everything and also it is true you have the best note* in the class. For all reasons, I think that you deserve this award".

Most typical replies simply consider that the reasons given to win the awards are not enough:

(7) Student 1' answer: "Hi everyone. I think I am the best student in the "English for Business Management I" course because I come to class on time every day and I listen carefully every time. I actively participate in the group discussion activities assigned and I have done well in every assignment".

Student 2' comment: "As your teacher I have the responsibility* to choose who will win this award. I think that arriving to class at time every day doesn't give you the award, but I know that your interaction at class is always good. So you could be probably one of the best students in class".

However, due to the importance of becoming the best student of the course (this award gives students an extra grade), not all students go against each other, and some (probably because they are not simply classmates but also friends at this point of the course) try collaborating by replying to one another supporting their candidacies.

(8) Student 1' answer: "Sorry I don* feel that I was the best student at the class, but if for a one* moment I would think about this, I would say that I have been at the* every classes and I have participate* in every activities* with all my fort*. I have working* with few resources learned before and I have got make* every homework's successfully.

I have got growing* my level of vocal expression, I have been a creative student and I have try* growing the level of the different ways lo* learn English. I have the intention of follow* learning after".

Student 2' comment: "Hello, I might* you are best student. because the* faithful is the most important thing. So already I know you got good attitude for learning English*. In conclusion*, I think you are the best student".

(9) Student 1' answer: "Good afternoon. I think I am the one of the best student in this class. Because I attented* the whole* of class. Also, I got good score in my assignment. Therefore, I am looking forward to take* a time with you, and I'm prepared to communicate with you".

Student 2' comment: "are you* really a perfect candidate to win this award. I have seen that you are a* active student, an* student that know* about the vocal techniques and expressions and I have so much* ideas help* you to be the winner. We are going to talk so soon".

Now, as we mentioned before, students preferred to respond positively to their peers. For instance, when students are asked to apologize for previous behaviour, and then accept or reject the apology (which is a good opportunity to show off wittiness and mockery), only three comments do not offer hope and forgiveness. Even in some activities designed to lead to mockery (i.e. when students are asked to accept or reject a date), the majority of answers simply accept the romantic date (57% vs. 43%), or just an invitation for a fun plan (84% vs. 16%), although mockery appears often in both activities (example 10 and 11, respectively).

(10) Student 1' answer: "Hi there gorgeous, I was thinking about getting a drink after class, wanna go to Starbucks and get to know each other?"

Student 2' comment: "Are u dumb? Have u seen it face, u really think u could handle me? It may happen in ur dreams so can u disappear pls?"

(11) Student 1' answer: "For my Halloween* holiday I am going to a big party at trinidad*, Madrid. I have paid 40\$* for the party, but includes free alcohol, custom party and shots gun* to get drank. My idea is to forget everything about university and just enjoy because the night is young".

Student 2' comment: "Hello, I have no plans that day, but 40 euros is crazy!!! I'd rather stay home with my four cats and watch a good scary movie before I go to that drunken party. But thank you very much for your invitation. I will make you a summary of the movie on Monday. A greeting".

Positive comments respond to the social nature of Facebook which, in the context of an English course, creates a peer-supportive dynamic fostered by a culture of "likes". Social network rules dictate students' lifestyles nowadays, which somehow leads them to desire social approval and to avoid social friction.

Students are also offered opportunities to be mean to their inferiors in a company, but even in these cases almost 70% of the learners were nice and offered some days off when requested by their employees. It is noticeable that several students use mental health excuses to obtain the permission:

(12) Student 1' answer: "Dear boss, I feel very tired recently, and my mental state is not very good. I hope to apply for a three-day vacation to adjust my state so that I can work better. Thank you for your approval".

Student 2' comment: "I understand you believe me. Sometimes we need a little break to calm down and keep working so yes, you should try to rest these days and when you are back you should also try to work in a different way so that you dont* get so tired".

Nevertheless, we also saw an attempt at mockery:

(13) Student 1' answer: "Hi boss, I was wondering if u could give me some free days as I have to rest after all the hard work u may know I have done".

Student 2' comment: "Sorry but you may not take vacation, I was thinking that you can do something else, you must arrive soon[er]".

Mockery is sometimes quite acerbic, leading to the use of swearwords to pretend to be funny (example 14) or simple accusations as in example 15 regarding the choice of the most important Sustainable Development Goal.

(14) Student 1' answer: "There are some positive reasons to be a self-employed, I think that *is a lot of people in Spain *very creative and with good ideas, so they create amazing business, you will be your own boss that the best reason to be and* self-employed. If you do good and your business like*, you will be rich in a few years. You can invest with your best friends, and I think that you learn a lot when you became* your own boss".

Student 2' comment: "Hi, I don't know what's wrong with that fucking head of shit that you have. I think you should take a walk-in fucking reality and stop being silly. Watch the news more and please be more realistic".

(15) Student 1' answer: "The most important one it's* the quality* of the education, because if we improve the education of our children, the future of the country it's* go-int* to be better guaranteed, and also we can be one of the potential* countries in the world".

Student 2' comment: "You are the perfect example of why education is important and how bad it is because only such an incompetent person would say that education comes first when we are running out of planet* to live on".

Similarly, one student uses irony to mock another peer when learners were required to apply for a position as Amazon's new CEO:

(16) Student 1' answer: "Dear Mr Bezzos, I have heard your need of a new CEO for your company and I would be the best candidate possible for that job. I can manage companies nearly as good as you do, that is why I was the CEO of Walmart for 25 years and made the sales increase in more than 260%. I would be a great learner if you allow me to observe your work for a few days and I will treat the company as if it was mine. I am capable of making the companys sales continue growing as if your were still there. If I caught your attention, please call to my tlf and will meet to have an interview. Best regards".

Student 2' comment: "I dont* know who u are and I dont* really care, u just disrespected myself so dont* even think of it, best whises whith* ur "incredible" company".

We have witnessed mockery every now and then. Yet, it seems that students did not reply to those remarks afterwards. The only case that shows an answer to a previous humorous reply is seen when students were asked to provide advice to the CEO of their fictitious company on buying TikTok. Student 1 finds it hilarious that Student 2 blatantly just answers "No" to the advice.

(17) Student 1' answer: "I think you might buy Tiktok, because it has already reached 1 billion active global users. And the number must keep growing during the Covid-19 pandemic. If you want to further our company, you must take actions as soon as possible".

Student 2' comment: "No".

Student 1's reply to Student 2: "XD".

In summary, we have seen a strong tendency to avoid confrontation or harsh criticism, resorting to humorous responses when producing a negative answer. This face-saving behaviour is ingrained in students' social network culture, which is transferred to the context of the class. A hate attitude is thus avoided, as students cannot hide behind a mask or name in order to criticize others (as people tend to do in social networks). When students do provide criticism, they often employ indirect strategies or hedge their language to soften the blow, using strategies such as humour.

Another social behaviour shown by students is that they tend to copy grammatical structures used by other students, even if they are wrong ("I'm agree", because of the influence of Spanish *Yo estoy de acuerdo*, appears in many responses) or they are not canonical ("I'm in the side of Adi" is used numerous times in activity 4). In a peer-learning environment like the Facebook wall used for the course, when a student sees a classmate using a grammatical structure, s/he may repeat it, and that iteration may lead more students to think that such a construction is well-formed or is acceptable. In this sense, students might not question the use of structures that they frequently see because they trust the majority usage, assuming it aligns with standard English. The lack of immediate correction in a peer-driven, informal platform like Facebook can reinforce this behaviour. The instructor read some of these comments aloud at the end of the activity, raising awareness of students' mistakes. However, students were not asked to correct these wrong linguistic uses and they were expected to pay attention to the teacher's explanations and apply them to future activities.

Moreover, students sometimes rely on cognitive shortcuts to complete tasks efficiently, that is, they might copy phrases from peers to participate in class activities without having to devote much time to constructing sentences from scratch. Moreover, not all students have the same linguistic proficiency, and some attempt to copy their peers' structures because they do not have the same level of English and prefer to produce content at the expense of their grammatical processing. This could be the case of those who repeat the structure "I'm agree", which they do not consider incorrect because they have read in their peers' answers and because it sounds like the Spanish linguistic counterpart.

Students do pay attention to all comments, and they normally have time to reply to just one comment, and depending on their mastery of English those comments are either longer or shorter. Students do not always side or do not side at all with their classmates, but they vary their answers depending on the topic, as it is true that they do not always use the same strategies to reply. Learners do not decide who to reply to depending on the original message length (although there is a tendency to avoid the longest reply to the original activity). We also see certain students prefer to try to reply to the same classmates because they are sitting together and can later comment orally on their answers, which is also good because it helps them practise not just written but oral skills in class (although some of the post-activity comments would be done in Spanish, even more when they are cases of mockery).

5. Concluding remarks and future lines of research

This study has analysed the use of a Facebook closed group created *ad hoc* for an English for Specific Purposes course at a public university. 64 students have joined the group to do 20 activities, 19 of which led to written interaction among participants. In all cases, learners were always given two choices: supporting their peers or going against their applications, requests, apologies, etc. Students produced a total of 499 answers throughout the course, an average of 26 per activity (as opposed to 64 students who had joined the Facebook group). They only commented 378 times on their classmates' original answers (an average of 19 per activity). 77% of those comments were positive, meaning that students preferred supporting their peers rather than opposing them. However, regarding negative comments, it was interesting to see that many students resorted to humorous responses, mainly using mockery (accusations and irony among other techniques).

The first research question (*RQ1: Would students prefer using the institutional online platform or the Facebook closed group created ad hoc for the course?*) has been answered considering the large number of students who preferred using the institutional Moodle platform found in Virtual Campus. This result was unexpected since Facebook was understood as being more genuinely aligned with students' preferences and lifestyles. Nevertheless, learners were registered in Moodle by default, and many students did not use Facebook at the beginning of the course, as they now use Instagram and TikTok. Future research should try to use these social networks instead, which could boost student participation.

The second research question (*RQ2: How will students react to their peers' responses to activities on the Facebook wall? Will they support them or go against them? Which linguistic strategies will they use to respond to their classmates' texts?*) shows that students preferred to be faithful to their peers and respond positively to their classmates. Learners were adequately formal or informal depending on the context of the activity, but they were always polite when replying positively. They showed concern for their peers and their mental health and were always interested in helping in any way possible. Now, when students wanted to oppose their peers, comments ranged from neutral answers in which they simply and objectively stated their point of view to clear examples of mockery. Some of these cases included direct accusations against their classmates because of their behaviour in class, (more rarely) insults, or even the use of irony. The number of linguistic mistakes (considering their level of English was A2 or B1, CEFR) shows that students used the foreign language naturally, without artificial intelligence. Future studies could try to analyze how students can use tools like ChatGPT to correct their mistakes before submitting their answers and comments.

Finally, answering our last question (*RQ3: In a more general sense, can Facebook become a feasible didactic tool for an ESP course?*), this study has proved that Facebook can be a motivating tool. During the 15 minutes students devoted to these writing activities, learners were fully engaged with them, just reading their peers' texts to choose who to respond to. These activities led to more reading comprehension practices, which can be a sort of intensive reading opportunity for students who do not tend to read texts in English. Future studies could combine intensive reading of more text genres other than students' short texts and writing practices to make learners' written practise

more exhaustively. In this respect, some of the activities could be combined with other modes of communication, such as listening activities that introduce the activity *per se*. In conclusion, using social networks in class has proved to be quite useful for reading and writing practice and leading to class engagement. Future lines of research could also focus on using these sites outside the classroom, to assist learners in their daily study and perhaps thus substituting their use of social networks for leisure purposes.

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