Facebook in the Curriculum as a Learning and Teaching Tool

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Abstract

This study investigated if Facebook could be added in the EFL curriculum in order to be employed as a learning and teaching tool in a private institution of EFL located in Coatepec, Veracruz, Mexico. To carry out this inquiry, action research was conducted and the first cycle was finished. Three qualitative methods were designed in order to find the results which were a journal, an interview and a questionnaire. The study indicated that Facebook may be efficient and effective as long as students are motivated and willing to improve their English. It was also found out that teachers need to play several roles when working with this social network in their classrooms. Lastly, Facebook proved to be a tool to trigger critical thinking and helped to improve some areas of language such as grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. However, there are some limitations that have to be taken into account to put this project into practice, such as social networks unfamiliarity and dislike. Finally, teachers of English could add Facebook into their curriculum as a teaching and learning tool in order to practise English outside the classroom context to cover current or thought-provoking issues that might not be discussed in class due to lack of time.

Keywords: Facebook, social networks, Facebook advantages and disadvantages in TEFL.
INTRODUCTION

As days go by, every time I see my students outside and inside the classroom I notice that they are not talking to their friends or their teachers. They are just interacting with inanimate devices such as smart phones or tablets that seem to fulfill them with entertainment and fun during their free time. When I approach them I realize that they are playing video games or interacting with people through the social network Facebook. I have realized that my students do this very often, at least when they are not in class. Then I start wondering how much time of their life per day they spend doing this activity. Due to this, I thought that if these events are taking place very often, why not use technology outside the classroom in order to teach and learn English.

Nowadays our students are very exposed to different sources of technology which may make it harder for the instructors to maintain students’ attention. Instructors should be able to use different sources of technology wisely and intelligently in order to address their students’ needs. I consider that it is crucial to be aware of what kind of technological applications our learners are using in order to make use of them and make instruction more appealing, meaningful and interesting for them. For this reason, I thought that Facebook could work as means of practice English outside the classroom.

It has been said that Facebook is a world-wide social network which helps individuals to maintain communication at all times. Sometimes teachers are able to be in touch with students only in class time, or through email. Nonetheless, this is not enough for the purpose of learning. Thus, if students at least in my context are logged on to Facebook most of the days, teachers could provide learning material through this application a few times per week. Such idea is plausible in a context in which students count on the right technological resources to begin with an activity like this. Facebook may provide teachers with a considerable number of alternatives. In Facebook teachers
can create secret groups, upload videos, news, magazine articles, jokes in English, images related to current issues or cultural topics that most of the time are not possible to study in class due to the curriculum time constraints. Students may not have either time to be aware of what it is happening in the world because they are too busy doing homework or they have other responsibilities and when they check their Facebook it is only for leisure time but they are not gaining anything else from it.

Therefore, we could help our students to use Facebook in a more productive way. If they realized that their teacher is posting materials or comments that may be of their interest, they would be willing to participate and extend their learning on English. They would start writing comments related to their teacher’s material and hopefully this would boost interaction among their classmates. Nowadays people find more practical communicating on this basis than speaking in class with their classmates, so why not do it in English by discussing topics that at the same time may spark their critical thinking.
CONTEXT AND FOCUS

Belonging to communities such as Coatepec and Xalapa, Veracruz in which there are several private and public EFL schools as well as elementary, secondary, preparatory and universities who also offer courses of English, it is necessary to take action and investigate about topics related to TEFL in order to address our students’ needs and offer a better learning experience. Doing research in TEFL in my community could be very rewarding, helpful and productive at the same time. As more TEFL schools appear as days pass by, students are offered several choices about where to study English. For this reasons, it may very useful if teachers start developing actions to put into practice and see how they work. The more we do this practice, the more comfortable students from our schools will feel as they may realize that their teachers are finding solutions for learning problems and that might encourage them not only to be motivated to study English but to remain in our educational institutions. For this reason, this paper displays a study that was carried out to find out if Facebook could be added to the curriculum as a learning and teaching tool.

Nowadays becoming technologically literate may be a necessity for teachers of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). More and more teachers seem to be forced to take part in the technological age they are surrounded by. Learners of English from children to adults tend to rely on internet to do their homework or just study English. Moreover, as days pass by, more technological applications for learning English are being released to the market which can facilitate or make this task more interesting. Given these facts, it occurs to me that as a teacher of English I could take these events as an advantage and integrate the social network site Facebook in my curriculum. Social Networking can be an effective tool to encourage autonomous learning within a social environment for students. (Promnitz-Hayashi, 2011) states that Facebook has become a powerful tool for communication among people and mostly teenagers. Thus, if students spend most of their time on line logged on Facebook
commenting on people’s walls, posting links and updating their statuses, they could also do this using English. Therefore, it might be a good idea to practise English through this tool.

The idea of integrating Facebook in my language curriculum seems tangible as my students are widely exposed to technology. My working place is a private English Language school. In the place where I work, most students have access to a computer and internet at home and in their mobile phones. What it is more, most of them like being part of social networks. I chose two groups one of Level B1 and other B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The first group is integrated by 7 students whereas the second one has a number of 5 students. All of them are teenagers and young adults with ages ranging from 14 to 25. The B1 group takes a three hour English lesson on Saturdays. Meanwhile, the B2 class attends English lessons three times a week during one hour and a half each section. Some of these students are not very outspoken in their English class and do not express their opinion very much in conversations activities. Nevertheless, when they write they tend to be more explicit and extensive in their written answers.

Taking into account what has been mentioned before, I consider that Facebook can be a useful technological resource for my students. One of my main goals is to boost more exposure of English through this means. Students will also have the opportunity to study English in a more realistic way and to communicate with their classmates a little bit more than they would do in inside the classroom as sometimes there is not enough time to discuss current issues or cultural facts about the world. Facebook can also be used as a tool to trigger their critical thinking. Sometimes inside the class, there is not much time to give all students the chance to express their opinion and when they do, they are short of words or do not go beyond what they could do. Additionally, they lack accuracy in their responses. Due to this, Facebook could be of great help by giving them more time to analyze their answers and double
check that what they write is appropriate. Therefore, the main research questions in this study are to find out if students are willing to practise their English by using Facebook. Moreover, I would like to know if Facebook can help them to improve their written English and critical thinking. Additionally, I would like to find out if Facebook can promote more interaction among students than the one existent inside the classroom.

I am confident that Facebook can be a useful tool for my purposes. Boulaid (2012), for example, states that Facebook can help learners to improve their language skills as well as their sense of creativity and life skills on the whole. I totally share his view as students can be exposed to different kind of texts and writing styles which gives students the chance to have a different model apart from the teacher. Besides, Facebook appears to provide a ready space where students can become autonomous learners rather than rely on classroom lecture. It may also be a way to interact more with students. Facebook can trigger more teacher-student and student-student interaction (Lego & Muñoz, 2010). It also can be more learner-centered rather that teacher-centered as students can have more opportunities for participating, without being interrupted by teachers. It also helps in a way that learners might have questions but for some reason they do not ask them during class time so it can provide students with self-confidence on line. For these reasons I decided to carry out a research project in my teaching context to find out if Facebook may be an efficient and effective learning technology.
Literature Review

Nowadays individuals tend to rely on Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, twitter, podcasts, wikis, social network sites, virtual worlds, video sharing and photo sharing. These technologies have mostly been used for entertainment and social communication by a net generation. In other words, young adults (Net geners) who were born around 1982 and grew up with high exposure to the Internet and communication technology which has become part of their daily life (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005, as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012). Net Geners feel comfortable and have a more positive adventurous attitude toward learning through technology and they like to explore the unknown on their own. It is therefore important for institutions and instructors to discover the new teaching possibilities to address various types of learning styles and the needs of Net Geners (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). For these reasons, there seems to be an emerging interest for using them as educational tools throughout the world, (Lego & Towne, 2009). The main focus of this research is to identify if the social network (SNS) widely known as Facebook could be integrated into the teaching and learning in the ELT field as a teaching tool. This section will discussed what social network site (SNS) and Facebook entail; the place that Facebook has been taking in several life contexts; learning English Language teaching contexts; its main advantages in the educational field and how this SNS could be integrated into the language learning curriculum.

Like personal websites and instant messages, Social Networking Site (SNS) is a platform which provides an easy, accessible way to connect and interact with others, share ideas and opinions and gather feedback in a fluid way (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009 as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012). An example of this platform is Facebook which is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep
in touch with friends, family and colleagues. The site, which is available in 37 different languages, includes public features such as the marketplace which allows members to post, read and respond to classified ads. Another feature is its groups that allow members who have common interests to find each other and interact. Additionally, the events function allows members to publicize an event, invite guests and track who plans to attend. Its pages also give members the opportunity to create and promote a public page built around a specific topic. The feature group is the most relevant for the purpose of this research project as it allows people with common interests to interact. In this case the people that are learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

Lego & Towner (2009) claim that communication technologies (e.g. email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, etc.) have been integrated into the way we teach and administer our courses. Social network sites may also have a place in our classroom. Facebook has quickly become the social network site of choice by students and an integral part of the “behind the scenes” college experience (Selwyn, 2007 as cited in Lego & Towner, 2009). Facebook is vastly well-equipped with bulletin boards, instant messaging, email, and the ability to post videos and pictures. Anyone can post information and collaborate within the system. Lego & Towner (2009) state that Facebook has opened up development of downloadable applications which can further supplement the educational functions of Facebook. While many of these technological tools mirror those found in currently employed courseware programs (e.g. blackboard, moodle, etc.), the ability and ease with which an individual (instructor or student) can upload photo and videos, the frequent and seamless updates and maintenance, the generous 1024 MB limit on videos, and the compatibility with a wide variety of web browsers are superior to some courseware options. This may explain why “the popularity of social networking among youth and teachers of the net generation is undeniable” (Schlager et al. 2009, p. 86 as cited in Pilgrim & Bledsoe, 2011)
Facebook is by far the most popular, and it has been gaining media attention. CNBC’s documentary: The Facebook Obsession (2011) reported a variety of ways people are using this network. Police are using Facebook to find criminals, and individuals are using it to find birth mothers. U.S. President Obama uses a social media team to connect with Americans across the country through Facebook and Twitter (Wetzner & Gordon-Logan, 2011 cited in Pilgrim & Bledsoe, 2011). In the world of education, principals are utilizing Facebook to screen potential teacher candidates, and educators have used the site as an interface to promote communication and as a tool to interact with students and parents. Although Facebook receives both positive and negative attention, the fact remains that it continues to grow as a powerful resource for information. We live in an age of digital technology where information is available at any time. The rationale behind the use of social networks as a tool for professional learning includes the idea that the Internet is this generation’s defining technology for literacy (Coiro & Dobler, 2007 as cited in Pilgrim & Bledsoe, 2011)

Apart from the advantages mentioned before, VanDoorn & Eklund (2013) also support SNSs as they argue that a social network such as Facebook has the potential to increase social communication. Students from teenagers to adults spend large number of hours logged on to several internet services to enhance learning outcomes, which means that learners may be constructing knowledge for themselves. Facebook seems to be privileged as the “social site” to which educators turn to develop social connectedness with their students. Facebook as a learning tool and a learning environment seems to offer a win-win. It allows institutions to offer dual-mode courses across on- and off-campus cohorts, and develop learning communities that facilitate positive learning outcomes.

According to Boulad (2012) Facebook appears to provide a ready space where students can become autonomous learners rather than rely only in classroom lessons. Thus instructors are urged to be aware that Facebook is becoming a fundamental
means for higher education and language learning. Optimistically, students Facebook tendency can turn into a language teaching and learning setting. Meanwhile, Promnitz-Hayash (2011) claims that a social networking, such as Facebook, can be an effective tool and encourage autonomous learning within a social environment for students. It results motivating, fun and helps to strengthen social relationships among students. She mentions as well that triggers more critical thinking and language output among pupils. Besides, Facebook seems to be quite available for students, as they might not have a computer at home, or over an internet connection but most of them count with a mobile which allows them to access from almost any point around the world. Additionally to these advantages, Facebook enables learning to become student-centred rather than teacher-centred.

SNS have a high penetration among adolescents. More and more instructors are trying to incorporate SNS to improve students’ learning outcomes. Social networks are prevalent among the young adults because of the multi-functional affordance. A handful studies concerning the application of SNSs with instruction showed that SNSs can make headways in students’ general performance and strengthen their learning motivation and autonomy. Authors such as Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin (2010); Mazman & Usluel (2010); Pasfield-Neofitou (2011). Runapongs a et al. (2011) as cited in Wu & Hsu (2012) support Facebook as a learning and teaching tool as well by arguing that students generally respond to discussions quickly and feel comfortable enough in their ”space” to share their information and opinions. They also mention that the role of the students can also shift from only receiving knowledge to both searching and sharing their knowledge. Moreover, teachers can have more interactions with students through Facebook.

Using Facebook in TEFL allows us to understand that “language learning engages the identities of learners since language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols, it is also a complex social practice. When a language learner interacts with
members of the target language group, he or she is seeking more than just words, phrases, dialects, and idiomatic expression; one is asking to what extent he or she will be able to impose reception and be recognized by his/her interlocutors” (Norton & Toohey, 2002 as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012). By engaging in self-expression, conversation and knowledge sharing with other on SNSs, ESL learner are forming their virtual social identity and gaining the acquisition of the target language simultaneously (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007 as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012). Facebook is a network that connects students with other students, indirectly creating a learning community, a vital component of student education (Baker, 1999 as cited in Lego & Towner, 2009).

In addition Facebook facilitates students and teachers to maintain work, life and technology equilibrium. They should no longer stick to the classroom and to the traditional methodology of teaching as Boulaid (2012) mentions. However, the challenge for language teachers is how to gain their students’ learning retention and extend their participation beyond the classroom. In a study carried out by (Wu & Hsu, 2012) it was found that in order to increase passive participants’ motivation and engagement, facilitators should seek interesting topics from different sorts of material which could be generally accepted.

Topic plays an important role toward students’ motivation and engagement especially when the novelty effects fade away. When the mid-term or final exam is coming, their engagement may be temporary lower, but it can be restored after short period of time by continuing the interesting topic discussion. Overall, facilitator in EFL learning plays an important role toward participant language learning outcome. When seeking interesting topics for discussion and encourage participants’ engagement, the facilitator should maintain the language authenticity within the group.

It is crucial for the facilitator to build confidence, increase their motivation and positive attitude toward language learning. Wu & Hsu (2012) affirm that instructors
should pay close attention to those factors while applying SNS to their instruction. Future studies should focus on how to mitigate the influence caused by those factors and to strengthen EFL learner’s motivation and engagement in other similar environments on SNS or other ICT based learning environment. These scholars also give some tips to how include Facebook in the curriculum. To get students started on Facebook, instructors should create an icebreaker activity on Facebook, such as a posting a topic to boost student discussion or inserting a video accompanied with study questions in order to help develop a classroom community and establish positive relationships. When integrating Facebook into their courses, instructors should designate student involvement on Facebook as an option, as not all students are registered users, and provide students other alternatives. Lastly, if using the site as a course tool, it is suggested that instructors post podcasts, websites, and videos on Facebook, and, using Google Documents, link students to study guides, powerpoints, assignments, and tutorials.

According to Towner (2007 as cited in Lego & Towner 2009) Facebook’s networking and social communication capabilities can benefit both the instructor and the student by tapping into a greater number of learning styles, providing an innovative alternative to the traditional lecture or English class format, creating an online classroom community, and increasing teacher-student and student-student interaction. For instance, if educators are looking forward to engaging learners better in this new trend of communication, they should re-shape their curriculum as that may transform the notion of communication, learning and teaching, (Boulaid, 2012). Teachers may use Facebook as a tool to promote their connection with students. Therefore, they should be encouraged to add their students on Facebook because as nowadays this is how most educated people communicate.
Methodology

The present study aimed to discover if the social Network Facebook could be used as a teaching and learning tool in my teaching context. Throughout this section, the procedure that took place in order to introduce Facebook as means of learning and teaching within my students will be explained. Additionally, I will describe the methods of data generation and how the information was collected, coded and categorized.

In order to begin with this project I selected a group of 7 students of B2 level of English according to the CEFR who are taking an FCE course preparation. Two students dropped out the course four two months before the end of the course. This situation made me realize that I had a small number of participants for this investigation. For this reason, I decided to work with another group. I informed a colleague of mine about this investigation so he asked me if one of his groups could participate to what I totally agreed. This group had got 10 students but only five people participated. The students were B1 level and all of them were teenagers and young adults between 15 to 19 years.

Before introducing Facebook to these groups I designed a list of regulations (appendix 1) in order to give Facebook a proper academic use and avoid misbehavior and future problems with students. A lesson of how to introduce Facebook was also designed (see appendix 2 and 3) in order to show students how Facebook can be used and I also explained about privacy issues to students. Lego and Towner, (2009) suggest teaching Facebook professional etiquette to instructors. They recommend creating an additional Facebook profile for professional use with personal detail such as email addresses and contact information, and some photos, post items or list of favourite quotes. I consider that they are right in suggesting this. Nevertheless, I think that if students are totally opening their Facebook for their teachers, we should do the same. In my case I did not create another profile but I deleted some pictures and I used my Facebook more for academic purposes rather than entertaining ones but from time to
time I also posted links aside the class and I was very careful in my comments and the material I posted in order to avoid any controversy among my students.

Lego and Towner (2009) also state that teachers should tell students that they will not be viewing their students’ profiles or other kinds of activities they do except from the work on the secret group and encourage students to designate them on their “limited profile”. By following their advice I did this with my students and all of them said that this was not necessary because they did not mind that I looked at their profile. Nonetheless, I told them that I really appreciated their trust and that I would not do it. I remained in this position and we did not have any trouble related to privacy. My colleague also followed the same procedure.

Once I explained students the dynamic of this project I told them that I would post videos, pictures, news items or articles twice per week, one on Mondays and the other on Fridays. Unfortunately, two of my students told me that did not like Facebook and were reluctant to create a profile so I suggested sending them the activities through email in order not to leave them outside the project. In group B, all students accepted to be part of the English secret group. During three months students were working on this basis. I encouraged group A to work on Facebook by telling them that the only thing they could gain from it was to practice their English and that I could not give them any grade because my course an introductory one and there were no formal marks whereas group B were told that if they were frequent participants of Facebook, they would receive an extra point in their writing skill as they got a formal mark. Nonetheless I could not take away any point for lack of participation due to curriculum policies in the school.

During this action research project I followed the cycle AR model based on (Kemmis & McTaggart (1988 as cited in Burns, 2010). According to them the first step is planning. In this phase researchers identify a problem or issue and develop a plan of
action to bring about improvements in a specific area of research context. It has to be considered what kind of investigation is possible within the realities and constraints of your teaching situation and what potential improvements are possible.

The second phase is called action. The plan for action is carefully considered and should be one which involves some deliberate interventions into the teaching situation that the research puts into action over an agreed period of time. The interventions are critically informed as the investigators question assumptions about the current situation and plan new and alternative ways of doing things.

The third phase, observation, involves the researcher in observing systematically the effects of the action and documenting the context, actions and opinions of those involved. It is a data collection phase where you use ‘open-eyed’ and ‘open-minded’ tools to collect information about what is happening. Reflection is the fourth step. Here the researcher evaluates and describes the effects on the action in order to make sense of what has happened and to understand the explored issue more clearly. A researcher may decide to do further cycles of AR to improve the situation even more, or to share the ‘story’ of the research with others as part of the researcher’s ongoing professional development. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, pp.11-14 as cited in Burns 2010).

Throughout this research, I just finished the first cycle already explained. In order to collect my data, I worked with qualitative research. Nelson et al. (1992, p4) state that qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and usually counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Its users are sensitive to use several multi-method approaches. Practitioners are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience.
Hopkins, (2002) also claims that qualitative research is less of a methodology and more of a way of life. It is an approach that is applicable across a range of settings, describes and analyses phenomena on their own terms, and helps us to think constructively and to generate meaning out of complex and problematic situations. At the same time, it is also an approach that empowers individuals and increases feeling of efficacy. This sense of efficacy can only develop if we share and report our methodological procedures and establish a genuinely collaborative and critical research community that is committed to informed action.

While working on this basis I decided to use two qualitative data collection methods to discover if Facebook could be considered a learning and teaching tool. The first one was a journal log in which I wrote a weekly entry. According to Lengeling (2012) we can use as reflection tools of the developmental process of participants in a research project and a way to give possible meaning to what it is being studied. Journals are tools for the research participants’ or the teacher’s internalization of the experiences Lengeling (2012). The use of journal in research can offer an abundance of data. Journal writing is one way to document thoughts, ideas and feelings for qualitative research. They promote reflection which is conducive to qualitative research, Lengeling (2012)

After gathering the information from a journal, Lengeling (2012) advises to code it and analyze it. She mentions that the key question of the coding and analysis phase center on how to organize and reflect the journal information. Research in this area mentions that at this point, it is convenient to raise questions such as: What is a unit of meaning? How to interpret oral or written texts? What are the structures of patterned regularities? What do these regularities infer? However, it is crucial to understand what units of meaning are. Lengeling (2012) defines them as having two attributes:
1. Aimed at some understanding or some action that the inquirer needs to have or to take.

2. The smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself, that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out. (p. 354)

When units of meaning are detected and selected, Makut and Morehouse (1994) “describe that they are compared to all other units of meaning and categorized and coded with similar units of meaning. In this process initial categories are changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered” (p. 134).

By following these procedures that the scholars suggest, I decided to follow similar steps to the ones that Lengeling (2012) recommends. First I read through the data several times, looking for units of meaning. Then, I wrote each unit of meaning on an index card, which was the coding stage. Afterwards, the units of meaning were sorted through, looking for related concepts. Later, I compared sources of data and found what emerged from the data. In the finding sections, I will show with detail how these steps developed.

A questionnaire (see appendix 4) was my second method for data collection. I personally find questionnaires useful as they have several advantages. Hopkins, (2002 p. 117) states that “questionnaires that ask specific questions about aspects of the classroom, curriculum or teaching methods are a quick way of obtaining broad information from pupils.” I designed a six open-ended and two guided items questionnaire. According to Burns, (2010), open-ended questions look for a free-form response and you can get a different perspective. Usually, the responses may be fairly short but give you information that may not be easily captured numerically. Open ended-questions can be constructed along a continuum form completely open to
guided. Whereas guided items are less open as they suggest the kind of things that you want informants to comment on further. Guided items allow participants to clarify or expand on a response and give information that is not obvious.

In order to observe the results from this data collection method, first I collected and went through the data to look for broad patterns that could answer my questions. Secondly, I coded my data into more specific categories. In the section below I will describe what the main findings were from group A and group B.

After having worked with these data collection tools, I established a number of hypotheses, and categories that began to explain if Facebook could be used as a teaching and learning tool. Nonetheless, I realized that I still had not validated my main hypothesis so I had to work with the technique triangulation. Elliott and Adelman (1976:74 as cited in Hopkins, 2002) argue that triangulation involves contrasting the perceptions of one actor in a specific situation against those of other actors in the same situation. By doing this, an initial subjective observation or perception is fleshed out and given a degree of authenticity. In other words, triangulation involves gathering accounts of a teaching situation from three different points of view, namely those of the teacher, his pupils, and a participant observer.

Each point of the triangle stands in a unique epistemological position with respect to access to relevant data about a teaching situation. The teacher is in the best position to gain data access via introspection to his own intentions and aims in the situation. The students explain how the teacher’s actions influence the way they respond in the situation, whereas the participant observer is in the best position to collect data about the observable features of the interaction between teachers and pupils. By comparing his own accounts with accounts from the other two standpoints a person at a one point of the triangle has the opportunity to test and perhaps revise it on the basis of more sufficient data.
By taking into account the triangulation technique, I opted for designing an interview in order to administer it to the teacher who helped me to carry out this research project with his students. He has observed all the ongoing process with his group. For this reason, I considered that the interview could be a useful tool so I could compare and contrast his perspective and insights to those of my own, my students’ and his as well.

According to Hopkins, (2002) interviews can occur between teacher and observer. Individual interviews are often very productive sources of information for a participant observer who wants to verify observation he/she had previously made. Burns (2010) describes them as conversation with a purpose. She mentions that the three types for action research are structured interview, guided or semi-structured interviews and finally open interviews. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this dissertation, I will only focus on guided or semi-structured interviews. They are organized but also more open. This kind of interview allows some flexibility according to the interviewee’s responses. For instance, if there seems to appear a relevant answer the researcher may want to ask more follow-up questions that may lead you to new discoveries. These interviews also allow you for diversity and flexibility. Another advantage is that you are likely to find out about some things in more depth and get richer information.

After writing my interview, I showed it to my tutor in order to look for improvements. Then, I explained the purpose of the interview to my colleague and that I needed to audio-record him using a digital voice recorder in order to transcribe and analyze his answers later on. Additionally, I told him that I would check with him later on the information provided by him. While interviewing him I was sensitive to his responses and I thanked him for his contribution. Later on, I typed a transcription of the interview. I went through the data in order to look for broad patterns. Then, I
started coding these broader patterns into more specific ones. Once I finished coding I compared this data with my other sets of data from my journal and questionnaires in order look for similarities or contradictions. Afterwards, I reflected beyond the superficial details by looking for more abstract concepts by identifying connections and developing explanations about if Facebook can be considered as a teaching and learning tool.

**FINDINGS**

Throughout this section I will describe how I analyzed all the emerging data from my collection tools, as well as the description of the results and a summary of the
main findings. After having coded and categorized the emerging data from each of the three data collection methods employed, I gathered all the data and read it several times. First of all, I highlighted the main units of meanings that seemed to be relevant, surprising or unexpected. Then, I gave a label to the main ideas expressed in order to begin with my first categories. After that, I looked for more information in later sections of the data that could also go under my first label. I kept repeating the same dynamic in order to develop a number of different labels. I also found some information that did not fit into any of my labels so I created a miscellaneous category. I went back over the labels later to check if they form categories of their own or related in some way. After finishing with the first round of categorizing I was able to fit some of the miscellaneous in other categories. Once I had finished writing my categories I asked one of my tutors to check it in order to see if she agreed with the way I had grouped them.

My results present the seven categories that emerged in the data analysis. There were seven categories that emerged in which my results were grouped. The first category was related to teacher’s roles. In here the most relevant roles of a teacher who would like to set up a Facebook group are participant, feedback provider, motivator, active and creative. During the interview my colleague Santiago told me that when he started working with Facebook groups, he noticed that his students showed more interest in the activity. This also happened to me, at the beginning of the project I just focused on sending them activities but I did not interact with them. After having changed my dynamic, students began to contribute more in the secret group. Additionally the teacher should be a feedback provider. Apart from participating, an expressing an opinion, teachers should comment on students’ opinions in order to develop longer conversations. In my journal I observed that when I did this, they were more willing to express their opinions. Santiago and I also agreed that the teacher should be creative. This will help him/her to look for appealing material for group members. Students also agreed that when the teacher posts creative material they feel
more invited to take part in conversations. Below there are some quotations from students, whose names are fake in order to protect their identities.

Ana: “Yes but I would like some comments to be a bit different which can be interesting”

Maria: “Yes, I really like when the teacher posts interesting or creative material”

Susana: “When the teacher and my classmates comment or answer my opinions I like participating more”

According to my triangulation technique, my students, colleague and I agreed on the advantages that Facebook provides. Several participants said that Facebook was a way to practise English. They also said that they could interact more with their classmates. Although I did not see much interaction in my group, my colleague’s students were interacting and discussing among themselves which made practising English more real. It also helped students to be friendlier inside the class as some students who did not talk to each other started to talk after interacting in Facebook. Facebook also helped some students to decrease their shyness as the ones who were not very participative in class, at least participated in the secret group. Facebook also proved to be a tool to put into practice what was studied in class. In several of my journal entries, I emphasized the fact that students were using some of the language studied in my class and Santiago also said that he had observed this as well in his students. Santiago said: “I feel happy when I see them using new structures and vocabulary studied in class” Finally, Facebook may be very advantageous for students who are keen on English, those students who are exceptional at English and had expressed that they love this language, were extremely participative from the first moment that they took part in this activity.

Interestingly enough, another emerging category was Facebook fondness. Most of the students interviewed had an extremely positive opinion about using Facebook as
a learning tool. They said they found this activity appealing because it was something different as they have never used Facebook in this way. Some others mentioned that they liked the fact they were offered other learning alternatives. Students from the two groups said that it was handy and convenient as every time they logged in they could stay posted and access the comments no matter where they were. Additionally, Hugo mentioned that he found more relevant to express his opinion by this means than in a notebook.

Mary: “It’s a really innovating idea because FB is a popular place”
Susana: “It’s ok for me. It’s a good option to change the books”
Silvia: “I think it’s very useful because it allows me to keep in English and nowadays topics”
Samantha: “I think it’s a good idea because that prove that FB is not only to lose time or something like that. You can have a good use for it.”
Hugo: “Yes, because is better than write in a boring notebook”

Another emerging category from the raw data was Facebook language benefits. Through the questionnaire administered students said that maybe Facebook could help them to improve in different language areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. I also made some notes in my reading journal in which I noticed that students tried harder to write long responses. They also tried to think of more complicated words to express their ideas. This resulted very surprising to me as I had established a limit of ten words per comment. However, they exceeded that number. When participating orally in class they do not usually do this so it was very pleasing to see this in Facebook. They also made some spelling mistakes but when they became aware of them, some of their classmates corrected them indirectly by writing their comments without mistakes. This action helped them in the sense that later on they did not make that same mistake again. Below there are some quotations from students’ responses:
Mary: “In the way that I can think about my opinion and then post it, compare with my partners’ opinions and discuss something about the topic.”

Susana: “I can express myself.”

Silvia: “It gives me the opportunity to express myself easier and more fluent.”

Samantha: “It can help us maybe because we are practising English in something we like so we pay more attention and look more interested.”

Juan: “In the way that I can think about my opinion and then post it, compare with my classmates’ opinions and discuss something about the topic.”

Hugo: “In the spelling.”

Diego: “In writing”

Esteban: “It helps in my written and my vocabulary”

Mateo: “In the spelling”

Informants mentioned that what encouraged them the most to participate were Facebook activities. At the beginning, I posted classroom style activities and there was very little response from students but after having studied their opinions I changed the material contents. My colleague Santiago also suggested doing the same. Hence, I started posting funny and interesting images with messages, videos, funny and controversial articles about teenagers and current topics. After doing this, the rate of participation increased and students seemed to be more pleased with the activities which at the same time promoted a little bit of interaction among themselves.

Simon: “Maybe more visual content”

Delia: “It’s ok but I’d like articles with sports or art.”

Samantha: “Activities maybe funny, and comment things funny.”

Diego: “I don’t know maybe more funny things.”

Facebook tips was another emerging category. Through this project I discovered that it is important not to lose the sense of leisure and entertainment in Facebook as
my colleague suggested and my students mentioned. Students said that they did not wish to have a formal Facebook so I really had to keep up with Facebook standard entertainment in order not to lose my students. I also found out that we had to understand what our students like and hate. One student told me that he loves sports and before knowing that I never posted anything related to that topic so that student barely participated. My colleague also told me that it would be a good idea to have students answer a questionnaire as this would give me crucial information on my students’ likes and in that way I could be able to encourage them to participate more. I also found out that not everyone loves Facebook, so teachers have to keep in mind other alternatives to integrate all of our students in a project. Ana, a student of mine, said that she wanted to participate but that she would only do it by email so we proceeded in that way. I always sent her the activities by email and she replied back.

Another category was Facebook disadvantages. Not all the participants were fond of this social network or ever worse not everyone was a digital gener. One student told me that he did not like computers but that he would try to participate. However, he never did. Even though students said that they had found the material appealing they were not always are in the mood to think very deeply as some students said that they would have liked the post but were tired to express their opinion at that moment and then they just forgot to write something. Others said that they did not have time to answer something because they were in exam periods so as Facebook is an entertainment activity they had to close it in order to study and not waste their time so Facebook in exam period is not very recommendable. That is way it is relevant to be aware of this situation. Roman, a student from group B, mentioned that he liked to participate on Facebook but only for relaxing purposes so I should post funny things because he did not want to worry about complex topics. Lack of internet or connection problems were major issues in this project. Barbara said that she did not participate several times because her family had stopped paying the internet service and Sandra told me that she had intended several times to post something but her internet
connection was too slow so this had made her lose her patience and avoid writing. Finally Facebook can become operant conditioning. In group A students did not receive any point for their participation so their response was slower, whereas in group B students who made more contributions would receive an extra point and the rate of participation was a little higher. This makes me think that if there is no any kind of reward there is no participation unless students count with other characteristics. This takes me to the last category.

Finally, key ingredients for participation. Some students were not autonomous. They said that when the teacher did not push them more they tended to forget about the project. Therefore, if there is lack of learning autonomy on the students’ side, their teacher has to be reminding them constantly to participate which sometimes can be a bit annoying for students and for teachers as well. Students must also be eager to participate. The students who said that they would participate because they did not want their English to be rusty were very participative

Simon: “I only remember to post when the teacher reminds me”
Diego: “I don’t like studying much English but I participate if the teacher gives me points”
Discussion and Reflection

After having analysed my emerging data and classified it into categories, I preceded to compare the outcomes to the views of the scholars. Most of my results matched very accurately with the experts’ beliefs about using Facebook as for teaching and learning. However, there were some discrepancies that will be discussed later on in this chapter. Additionally, it will be considered the contextual, pedagogic and methodology variables that may have caused the final findings. Finally this chapter will offer a proposal related to Facebook that could improve my teaching context.

Firstly, when setting up a secret group in Facebook in order to promote teaching and learning, teacher’s roles are crucial. According to my findings, the teacher should be a feedback provider, a motivator, and he/she also needs to be an active participant in this activity. Most of the students agreed with those characteristics including my colleague Santiago and myself. Wu & Shu (2012) mention that instructors should pay close attention to motivation and positive attitude while applying SNS to their instruction and encourage participants’ engagement. Participants also said that they found useful to receive feedback from their teacher as this caused them more interest in participating, and this finding can also be supporting with Norton & Toohey (2002 as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012) statement that language learning engage identities of learners and it is a complex social practice. For this reason, when a language learner interacts with the group he is asking to what extent she will impose reception and be recognised by his/her interlocutors. I noticed that when students did not receive my feedback at the beginning of the research they did not give long answers. However, when I replied back the conversations had a greater length and students were more willing to participate. This could also have motivated students to contribute as they realized that they were not on their own in the project and there was someone there to recognise their entries.
Facebook has some advantage inside the classroom according to my findings. It promotes interaction, overcomes shyness and sets up a friendlier atmosphere in class. During this process, I could notice that Santiago´s students were very interactive among themselves, they did not only comment on my links but they also replied to their classmates which made conversations more interactive. This may be due to the potential of Facebook increase communication as VanDoor & Eklund, (2013) argue. Nevertheless, my students were a bit reluctant to interact with their classmates as they only replied to my links. A factor that could have caused this is students´ personalities. Nonetheless, Facebook helped some students to become less shy as they were able to express their opinion in an alternative way without the pressure of being in front of their classmates. What is more some students who did not talk much before the project, became friendlier. For this reason this social network can be very helpful if students like to communicate their ideas and interact with others, so teachers could take advantage of it.

Facebook is also appealing for almost every one. Most of the participants in this project enjoyed working with this tool because it is innovative, different and more real. I consider that teachers need to bear in mind these characteristics and employ this tool with our students. Schlager et al. (2009, p. 86 as cited in Pilgrim & Bledsoe 2011) state that “the popularity of social networking among youth and teachers of the net generation is undeniable”. Almost all students were keen on using Facebook, which is a good reason to use this appealing tool in the curriculum. If students are exposed to this social network every day, teachers could take this as an advantage and transmit English through it so students can do something more fruitful such as learning or practising their English outside the English classroom.

Facebook may be an aid for language improvement. Boulard (2012) states that Facebook can help language learners to improve language skills and creativity on the whole. Most students´ responses agreed with this statement since all students in this
research mentioned that Facebook could help them to improve their grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. I also noticed that this could be helpful as sometimes students tried hard to be accurate in their answers, while others tried not to make mistakes. Nevertheless, I think that it takes more than three months to help students improve in these areas. Additionally, students would have to be very participative by making several contributions per week, and receiving feedback from teachers and classmates in order to demonstrate real improvement. Facebook may also help to improve creativity and critical thinking. It is essential to post material that can boost our students thinking so students really feel invited and interested to write an opinion. I noticed that when I posted controversial topics they tended to reply soon and with thoughtful answers. They went beyond saying I agree or I disagree. (See appendix 6) This action was rewarding as sometimes inside class students tended to be very brief in their insights. Therefore, teachers should take this into account when setting this tool in their TEFL contexts.

For this reason one of the main important tips to follow in order to have a good management of a Facebook secret group are the activities to be posted so as to keep students motivated. Apart from being current and controversial, topics have to be funny, fun and quite appealing for students. According to Wu & Su (2012) it is necessary to seek interesting topics which could be generally accepted and most importantly it should never be forgotten that Facebook is a leisure activity. At the beginning of this project my postings were much related to school activities. Nevertheless, when I changed school material or mixed it with humouristic issues, students began to be frequent participants and their answers much more extended. Due to this, I fully recommend being very creative and take our time in order to look for the activities.

Unfortunately, there have been some disadvantages while setting this social networking in my TEFL context. Students cannot be fully engaged due to several
reasons. It is essential to keep in mind that students will not be participating because of their homework, exams, or because they just did not have time to think of a good opinion to post on Facebook. Wu & Su (2012) also argue that when mid-term or final exam is coming students ‘engagement might be temporarily lower. Most of my students said that although they wanted to participate it was not possible for them to do so because if they logged into Facebook they could get distracted very easily and waste lots of time. It is advisable not to forget about these factors and try to be patient when these events take place. Another strong disadvantage is that students tend to operate under condition: if they know they will be given an extra point for their marks, they will definitely work more. At least this happened in my research period. While I did not give extra points for student participation and as a result they were slower. Santiago, on the other hand, gave an extra point and his students wrote more entries than those in my group. These events made me think that if we give students academic rewards, the Facebook tool can become more popular among students. At the same time this emerging data is telling me that Facebook does not promote autonomy as has been suggested by Promnitz-Hayash, (2011) when she mentions that Facebook encourages autonomous learning within a social environment for students. Therefore, no matter how popular Facebook is if there exists lack of autonomy in my TEFL context.

Last but not least, commitment and willingness are key factors for using this social network as a teaching and learning tool. Willingness and commitment must be present on both sides. My colleague Santiago told me that it was sometimes time consuming for him to be checking his students’ activity on Facebook and to look for the right material for the secret group and this also happened to me. I consider that if there are teachers with little patience, this could not work either. On the other hand, if students do not want to improve their language or they just do not care they would not even enter to check the secret group. For this reason if autonomy, willingness and commitment are not present, it will be hard to set up a project like this in our learning context.
The results already discussed may have emerged in this way because of different factors such as contextual, pedagogical and methodological factors. First of all, most of the students may have accepted this technological tool due to their context as all of them have internet, smart phones and computers at home. They are all teenagers and young adults who are part of the Net Generation and most of them are keen on this technological age. Regarding the pedagogical aspect, as a teacher I like to include new and alternative ways of teaching inside my classroom because I also belong to this technological age. I am always looking for interesting and appealing ways to transmit my knowledge of English, so that is why I decided to work with Facebook. Finally, I believe that the methodology I used, was enough to discover helpful findings that will help me to carry on this project with different groups of students. Nevertheless, I would have to design more interviews and questionnaires to make a more effective use of Facebook.

To summarize, I personally believe that Facebook is a great tool to teach and learn English at least in my teaching context. Teachers could create a secret group with students in Facebook, always taking into account Facebook privacy etiquette and regulations in order to establish a group of respect and safety. After that, the teacher has to make sure to include two entries per week in which it is advisable to post current and appealing material and at the same time thought-provoking for students from images to magazine articles. If necessary, the teacher could add more entries but that will depend on his availability and that of his students. Furthermore, the instructor must make sure to boost interaction and be aware of his students’ performance during the week. Additionally the teacher may encourage his/her students to post their own material. Hopefully, this proposal will help students to continue their study of English outside their classroom and in a more real way away from course books and workbooks.
CONCLUSIONS

Before ending this report, it is crucial to remark that adding Facebook to the curriculum has several limitations. First of all, people need to be technology friendly, otherwise this may be reluctant to participate. Additionally, school policies play an important role, many private schools or public schools do not authorize their teachers to have their students as Facebook friends in order to ensure students’ and school safety. Apart from this, students do not want to have teachers as their friends. Students’ trust towards teachers needs also to be present so students feel comfortable participating. Moreover, Facebook tool may not be practical in school contexts in which students lack of technological resources, mostly at home, since if teachers ask students to participate, students may want to go out and look for the resources which it would mean to make them spend money and as a consequence parents’ annoyance. There might also be students who do not like Facebook due to bad experiences with it. For this reason I advise any person interested in working with this social network in this way to keep these aspects in mind before launching it.

However, if this project is carried out in a similar context to mine, it could be successful. I consider that I had many advantages since the beginning of this study. Most of my students were willing to take part in it. What is more, the majority were digital genera and spent some part of their time during the day logged on Facebook. Besides, they trusted me and I totally respected their private life. This could have helped me to have more participation from them. Maybe if they had not liked me, the secret group could not have flowed as the way it did. Another point to remark is the economical status of students; most of them were able to afford mobile phones, computers, an internet connection at home. Despite of all these advantages, students worked on this when they were reminded to do so and they did not show to be very autonomous. However, their participation in this project was creative and well-thought when they wrote their entries, only the people who received an extra point contributed.
more. For this reason in the near future I would like to do a follow-up with the second cycle of action research in which I would work with Facebook as an optional activity in order to discover if the students who decide to participate may do it often without me reminding them to write comments on the links I post.

Finally, I found very rewarding to do this research on Facebook because it taught me that leisure sense Web 2.0 applications such as social networks can be turned into educational tools and we as teachers can help students learn or practise their English through different tools that may be closer to their likes. I also believe that teachers should always be looking for different alternatives to teach English and see what works best with our students as this will give us the opportunity to experiment and at the same time enhance and improve our professional development.
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APPENDIX 1
Facebook secret group regulations

- Any kind of post must be in English
- Students are not allowed to write swear words
- Students can post images, videos, articles or links in English as long as they are not offensive.
- Participants are not allowed to offend their classmates’ links or posts.
- Students must at least make one comment about their teacher’s links.
- Teacher will post two links, videos or articles per week. Teacher will start making the first comments or food for thoughts questions.
- Students will receive a point in the writing section.
- When students type a comment, they should write sentences of more than 10 words.
- Students are not allowed to post the same comments than their classmates. In case students have the same opinion they must paraphrase.
**APPENDIX 2**

**Facebook lesson plan: Group B2**

**Goal**: By the end of the class students will have had a small practice of how they will be working with Facebook in the future weeks. They will also have become part of a secret group in order to practise their English outside the class through a social network.

**Material**: The Roswell UFO accident article, stripes of colour paper: 4 per student, tape, computers, internet.

1. Teacher will give students an article about a HOAX and will have students read it. Later on, she will give students a food for thought question. She will paste the question on the board.

2. After that she will give each student slips of paper (each student will receive a different colour that can distinguish him from other classmates) and they will have to write an opinion about it, they have to use ten words minimum.

3. Once they finish, she will ask them to paste them below the food for thought question. Then, she’ll have students to read their classmates comments. After that, teacher will ask them to reply to one of their classmates comments on another slip of paper. Student will paste this next to the comment.

4. Again, teacher will ask students to read their comments or replies and will have them write a second reply. It does not have to be necessarily to the same person. They can reply to another comment they find interesting.

5. After that the teacher will ask them to sit down and will inform of the purpose of this activity and the regulations. Teacher will tell them that they will use Facebook in order to practise their English outside the class and develop their critical thinking.

6. After that, students will go to the computer lab in order to become part of the secret group or to open a new account.

7. Once they have done this, teacher will have post the first activity as homework. If there are not questions they will come back to the classroom.
Appendix 3

Facebook lesson plan: Group B1

Lesson plan for introducing Facebook inside the classroom.

**Goal:** By the end of the class students will have had some practice of how they will be working with Facebook in the future weeks. They will also have become part of a secret group in order to practise their English outside the class through a social network.

**Material:** A fable, slips of colour paper: three per student, tape, computers, internet.

1. The teacher will give students a copy of a fable called Belling the Cat. Then, students will read the fable together and in pairs will discuss what the moral is.

2. After that, the teacher will give each pair three slips of paper of the same colour and will ask students to write a similar situation on one slip of paper where they think this fable can be applied. The teacher can give an example.

3. Once they finish, T will ask them to paste them on the wall in a vertical line. Once, everyone has pasted their colour stripes will ask everyone to stand up and read their classmates comments.

4. Afterwards, teacher will ask them to choose the most interesting comment and write a reply to it by expressing their opinions. Then, they have to paste the comment next to the one they are replying. Finally have them read what their other classmates wrote and ask them to stand up again and write a final comment. Encourage them to develop their imagination.

5. After that, the teacher will have them sit down and will inform of the purpose of this activity and the regulations. T will let them know that they will use Facebook in order to practise their English outside the class and develop their critical thinking.

6. After that, students will go to the computer lab in order to become part of the secret group or to open a new account.

7. Once they have done this, the teacher will have post the first activity as homework. If there are not questions they will come back to the classroom.

8. Later, teacher will inform students that the postings will be on Mondays and Fridays so they have a period to reply.
APPENDIX 4
Questionnaire

1. What’s your opinión about practising your English through Facebook?
_______________________________________________________________________

2. In what ways do you think Facebook may help you improve your English?
_______________________________________________________________________

3. Do you like practising your English by this mean? Why?
_______________________________________________________________________

4. How often do you post your opinions on your teacher’s comments? Do you consider yourself a frequent participant?
_______________________________________________________________________

5. If your answer in the previous question was No, mention what are the reasons of your lack of participation in the Facebook secret group.
_______________________________________________________________________

6. Do you like the articles, videos or comments that your teacher posts twice a week?
_______________________________________________________________________

7. If you do not find the material posted interesting or relevant, what kind of activities would you suggest uploading?
_______________________________________________________________________

8. Would you like to continue being part of the Facebook secret group? Why?
_______________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX 5
Interview

1. What’s your opinion about using Facebook as a learning tool in your TEFL context?
2. How have your students reacted to this new teaching and learning tool?
3. Has the participation of your students been frequent? Why do you think so?
4. In what ways has Facebook been helpful for your teaching and your students’ learning?
5. How do you feel using this tool in your TEFL context?
6. Would you use this tool in your future groups? Why?
7. What would you suggest doing in order to exploit Facebook in a more efficient and effective way?
8. Can you mention any negative aspects you may have encountered when working with this project?
9. Is there anything else you want to add towards Facebook as a teaching and learning tool?
**APPENDIX 6**

**Mi VaHu**

Do you know why some Mexicans celebrate St Patrick`s day? Should we celebrate foreigner customs?

- Me gusta
- Dejar de seguir la publicación
- 20 de Marzo a la(s) 15:43 de Xalapa-Enríquez

**Samantha** Firstly, they commemorate that day because of a kings anniversary of death, but in Mexico we don't tend to celebrate that, he was from Ireland, maybe people who are from there an live here in Mexico do that.

- 20 de Marzo a la(s) 15:48 de a través de celular

**teacher** I agree with you Samantha, maybe people who have lived or travelled over there tend to celebrate it but I’ve seen people who have zero connection with Ireland or Irish people and they wear green colour on the 17th of March, plus go to Irish restaurants. So my questions is should we celebrate a festival which history is unknown to us?

- 20 de Marzo a la(s) 15:57 de Me gusta

**Ana** In my mind we shouldn't, also we have lots of history that we don't even know and we do not celebrate, we must pay attention in Mexican traditions and history

- 20 de Marzo a la(s) 16:15 de a través de celular

**Hugo** Do Mexicans really celebrate St. Patrick Day?... I think we only use it as a excuse for drinking beer and party. Anyway, we should not take foreign celebrations because that's the first step to lose your culture

- 20 de Marzo a la(s) 23:05 de Me gusta

**Simon** I agree with Jesus, maybe the people that are not connected with Ireland and celebrate it are the ones that like to party for a minimum reason and like to get drunk.

- 30 de Marzo a la(s) 20:55 de a través de celular