

Effect of Social Media Activities on Learning English by Saudi Students

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Abstract – Every university has an electronic portal for education and communication purposes, which enables teachers and students to interact in a secure environment. These tools are ideal for foreign language instruction, where students particularly benefit from personal practice. Using social media can provide an interactive environment anywhere. Teachers can improve student learning by using activities on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Edmodo, Google Hangout, Group Me, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. This research aims to investigate the effect of using Facebook (FB) activities on learning English, and on the interaction between Saudi students. Also, the study will test the effectiveness of the move from a teacher-centered strategy to a student-centered one in Saudi classes. This study will follow 30 Saudi female students of age between 19-21, they enrolled in English classes in Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in level one for one semester (12 weeks). The FB questionnaire will help to collect statistical data, present the percentages of agreement or disagreement towards using FB as a supportive educational tool. The data will be analyzed based on descriptive statistics. Dogoriti et al. (2014, p.259) found that most students agreed that using FB is beneficial. Although 90 percent of the students agreed that FB is not an appropriate environment for learning, they agreed (76 percent) that FB creates a sense of community within a learning environment. Also, it is stated that 31 percent of the students preferred to watch and follow the discussion rather than participate. By conducting the proposed study, it is hoped to find similar or better findings.

Keywords: Social Media, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Platforms, Facebook

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Most Saudi universities are equipped with high-tech tools and Internet in the classrooms. Every university has an electronic portal for education and communication purposes, which enables teachers and students to interact in a secure environment. These tools are ideal for foreign language instruction, where students particularly benefit from personal practice. It is noted that “although the infrastructure to support social media’s presence exists in most universities today, instructors have been slow in adopting the tool as an educational one” (Tess, 2013, p. 66). English teachers should utilize the available technology tools to improve English education.

One can no longer complain that students learning English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia lack the opportunity to practice outside of class. It is claimed that language learning can happen formally in the classroom and informally outside the classroom (Dogoriti, Pange, & S. Anderson, 2014). Using social media can provide an interactive environment anywhere. Teachers can improve student learning by using activities on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Edmodo, Google Hangout, Group Me, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat (Brick, 2011). Social

networking sites are constantly developing, adding features that enhance the creativity and the quality of interactions.

This paper includes a brief review of published research and relevant frameworks of using social media in education. Following that, a proposed design of research about a study of the effect of using social media activities on learning English by Saudi students is presented. The study aims to investigate how the FB activities under the supervision of the teacher could encourage the students to gain language knowledge, cooperate, and interact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies about the effect of using technology inside and outside the classroom on learning languages appeared in parallel with the Internet revolution. In the last four decades, many types of research were conducted to investigate the effect of using social media as an educational tool. The definition of social media, in general, is ‘an array of online technologies and practices that people use to share content, insights, opinions, experiences, perspectives, songs, photographs, and videos’

(Risto, 2014, p. 9). Utilizing social media as a tool for teaching, and learning in university communities can support learning English. *The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology* by Lomicka and Lord (2016) examined using technology to learn a language. Lomicka and Lord (2016, p. 255) noted that social media can be categorized into six different but overlapping categories, which include: (1) social networks (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn); (2) bookmarking sites (e.g., Delicious, StumbleUpon); (3) social news (e.g., Digg, Reddit); (4) media sharing (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, Flickr); (5) microblogging (e.g., Twitter); and (6) blogging, particularly comments and forums. These divisions could enable teachers to choose the appropriate tool for their teaching methodology, and activities. Lomicka and Lord (2016) claimed that many of the academic studies to examine the using of social media for educational purposes are not empirical, and do not offer powerful theoretical improvements. They discussed the four theoretical methods: technological, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and ecological.

First, technological approaches affect the pedagogical application of technology in the classroom (Lomicka & Lord, 2016). The history of technology in education developed from computer-assisted language learning (CALL), where there is a dialogue with a computer, to the next stage of using computer-mediated communication (CMC) dialogue via computers. Then the movement is towards the most popular and enjoyable social media (SM) through polylogues via computers (Pasfield-Neofitou, 2016). It is noted that in respect to CALL, the teachers are considered designers who can produce materials, prepare activities to attain the goals of the teaching, and manage their time and classes, but the adjustment in teaching has moved towards learner-centered instruction (Singman, 2012). There is a need to enhance the role of students through interaction and negotiation of meaning, both of which help L2 learners crack the language code (Ortega, 2009). This tool is criticized because it uses a single mode of communication. It is noted that “there was also a small advantage for interaction in SCMC on measures of overall (L2) learning outcomes” (Ziegler, 2016, p. 553). Therefore, the multimodality that has emerged in many applications can support communication in many ways.

Most of these multimodal applications such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and any application that enable communication through video and audio files and chatting. can be accessible by personal devices like mobile, iPad. These multimodal platforms offer the chance to improve writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills; and facilitate collaborative learning (Guo & Möllering, 2016). Furthermore, Guo and Möllering (2016) argued that the previous studies indicated that the use of multiple modes complement, compensate for their shortcomings, and compete. It helps the user to

convey his or her message in a more creative way by using text chat, audio file, video, emoticons, and photos. On the other hand, there is a claim that these multimodal applications could cause problems and cognitive overload for the beginners. From my observation, I think most learners have experience using social media nowadays because they are familiar with using smartphones, which allows the opportunity to practice communication through many applications.

Secondly, psycholinguistic research has focussed on the interaction hypothesis and noticing (Lomicka & Lord, 2016). One of the most important models in learning a second language is input-interaction-output (IIO). This indicates that when learners communicate through social media, they will have comprehensible input; they will interact and modify their output. It will be useful to use social media as a way of communication and learning from each other through replying and asking for clarification in the comments.

Thirdly, studies by a sociocultural approach focus on Vygotsky's theories of learning in social environments (Lomicka & Lord, 2016). From both interactionist and sociocultural perspectives on second language acquisition (SLA), learner-learner interactions provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning, which may facilitate their second language learning (Guo & Möllering, 2016, p. 26). This indicates that social media can improve learners' language and social skills at the same time. In addition, this theory is supported by the constructivism theory ‘that learners enhance their knowledge because of their experiences and social activities’ (Swan, 2005, as cited in Singman, 2012, p. 16). Additionally, it is argued that the learners will gain collaborative, communicative, critical skills by commenting on other works on social media platforms (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). In other words, these two theories are concerned about individuals' learning in a social environment, and social media inside and outside the classroom could facilitate and increase opportunities to communicate.

Lastly, ecological theories take into account the factors that work together in learning like the teachers, the students, the environment, and technological tools. Van Lier, 2004, as cited in Lomicka and Lord (2016, p. 4) claimed that “The existence of the affordance alone does not necessarily encourage action, rather it is the responsibility of the teacher and other interlocutors to help to make the affordances available and accessible to the learners so that they can use them to their benefit”. This means that the role of the teachers is still important in the era of technology. The teachers can prepare the activities on social media, give the students access, and support them.

There are many benefits of using social media tools in education. Two empirical studies on this issue are presented in the following. A study was by Fewell (2014) using Twitter to examine the use of microblogging (Twitter) to promote L2 communication for EFL learners outside the classroom. The researcher believes that online communication platforms like Twitter and Facebook solve the problem of the limitations of the physical world to communicate in EFL environments. The students were expected to write a minimum of three messages every day for two months. Students are gradually engaged with the assignment until they did well beyond the minimum requirements of the task. The assignment showed that most students responded positively to the use of Twitter as a means of promoting language learning and social cohesion. From my point of view, Twitter could also enhance writing and critical thinking skills.

In further investigation of the effect of using social media for language learning, Brick (2011) used Livemocha as a platform for a study. He claimed that social networking sites are tactics of giving language instruction, help and learning cooperatively. The results of this study showed that all the participants could make an account and find a few friends. Also, free learning language feature of Livemocha encourage the participants to learn more than one language. Also, they communicate with native speakers and receive feedback. However, participants claimed that there is a complete lack of learning grammar on the site, which caused some users to abandon Livemocha. However, the tool is useful in learning a new language through contact with native speakers. It is argued that the implementation of communicative task-based activities in multimodal learning needs to receive more attention (Guo & Möllering, 2016). To fill this gap, I propose using FB as a supportive tool to communicate in English outside the classroom and to conduct an evaluation of its effectiveness for language learning.

PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

This research aims to investigate the effect of using FB activities on learning English, and on the interaction between Saudi students. Also, the study will test the effectiveness of the move from a teacher-centered strategy to a student-centered one in Saudi classes. In addition, the research will explore the scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development of the participants when there is help from the teacher and peers for learners who need support (Ortega, 2009). Most of the results from the empirical research in this area show participants' positive attitudes towards social media, and they are willing to participate. From my observation of the students whom I taught in Saudi Arabia, they were shy in the classroom and did not participate. The limited participation could be because they need

more time to refine their answers, and they try to avoid making mistakes. In addition, there is not enough time for everyone to participate during class time. The number of students in the class ranges from 30-40, making it difficult for the teacher to present all the materials in a two-hour lecture and let all the students participate. Therefore, the study looks to students' attitudes towards using FB as a supportive tool for the educational purpose.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What English skills are improved by using FB?
2. Do students gain help from each other in their learning?
3. Does using FB increase the opportunities to share ideas and give opinions?
4. Does FB promote interaction and communication between the members?

These questions will help me to investigate the effectiveness of FB as a tool for communication and interaction outside the classroom and broaden my understanding of how FB works for educational goals.

METHODOLOGY

This study will follow 30 Saudi female students of age between 19-21, they enrolled in English classes in Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in level one for one semester (12 weeks). Listening and speaking skills course will be taught three hours weekly for this group. The course is designed to train students to interact in English. It provides comprehensive practice in the skills of listening and speaking with the aid of tasks and exercises. The course aims to make students familiar with the sound of English, to develop skills to understand the meaning of spoken words and to enable students to comprehend specific information from the spoken words (Course description, 2014).

FB activities will be included to increase the possibilities of interaction in English and to create a cooperative community in which students support each other. The actual time for FB study is seven weeks. There should be a session at the beginning of the semester to introduce the purpose of using FB and an explanation of the appropriate setting on FB. After that, the students should create FB accounts; then all the students will be joined by the group that the admin created on FB. Interestingly, the admin can control the privacy settings for the group. There are three kinds of privacy (public, closed, secret), the secret setting is the strictest,

and only the members of the group can see the posts. Students should be aware that this group on FB is for academic purposes, and they should sign a consent form at the beginning of the study. The students are free to withdraw from the study of FB. All the information about the participants' identities is anonymity. All videos that the students will create will be posted privately to the group, and only the members of the group can see them. Other posts like general videos or photos not related to the members can be posted publicly. The FB private group will involve the following functionalities:

1. Student-student communication
2. Student -teacher communication
3. Extra materials to support the course (quizzes, video, useful links, news articles)

To support the activities, the teacher should participate and provide an explanation or promote discussion. On FB, the students can post the updates of their status, they can ask, comment, add appropriate materials, and they can get notifications any time members post in the group. The activities are varied such as post a short general commentary on classroom materials for every week, read posts and comment, record voice messages, listen to the videos, and comment, post useful links for learning English, support each other. Moreover, students will prepare a video in a group with three members then post the video to the group on FB. The video should be 10 minutes about an interesting topic that the students chose after getting approval from the teacher. If the students need to work together on the content of the video, they can prepare and edit it on Google Slides application before recording. Students will spend time on the FB group or in face-to-face discussions to communicate. In addition, students can use Messenger (a feature added to FB to message privately) to communicate with each other. On the Messenger, students can use video, voice calls, text messages, send videos, photos, and record a voice message.

Students will post their videos (one for each group) in week seven. All participants should watch each other's work and write general comments, and any specific observations about the performance or the content will be sent privately to the members of the group. The 30 students then will complete a short, voluntary questionnaire on FB. The quantitative research method will be used in this study using a questionnaire. The study uses a questionnaire that has utilized by a previous research about "*The use of social networking and learning management systems in English language teaching in higher education*" (Dogoriti et al., 2014, p. 259), and extra points are included. Interestingly, the FB offers a survey application which helps to prepare the questions and post the questionnaire to the group. The

questionnaire uses a series of five-point Likert-scaled questions to measure the levels of the agreement.

Statements:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Facebook helps to enhance my listening skills					
Facebook helps to enhance my speaking skills					
Facebook helps to enhance my reading skills					
Facebook helps to enhance my writing skills					
Facebook is not an appropriate environment for learning					
Facebook enhances communication and interaction between the members of the group					
Facebook helps to create a sense of community within a learning environment					
Facebook as a learning tool motivates students; they share their opinions and ideas					
I preferred following the discussions rather than participating					
I enjoyed posting to the discussion forum					
I learned a lot from local classmates					
The Facebook project took up too much time					
The Facebook project was beneficial to me					

DATA ANALYSIS

The FB questionnaire will help to collect statistical data, present the percentages of agreement or disagreement towards using FB as a supportive educational tool. The data will be analyzed based on descriptive statistics. There will be an analysis of each point in the questionnaire. The percentages will appear automatically on the survey application after the participants finished the questionnaire. After that, the percentage will be

written in a table. The first five points in the questionnaire will examine the appropriateness of using FB as a learning tool. The collected data from these points will answer the first question of the study. These data will show which skills are improved by using FB and which skills need another way to advance them. The next six points could investigate the interaction and communication between students. The collected data will answer the rest of the questions. The last two points will examine students' attitudes towards the benefit and the amount of time spend on the FB project as a supportive learning tool for their course.

RESULTS

It is expected that all the students will complete the questionnaire as it's easy to do. In this section, the results will be stated in a table. Then objective descriptions will be presented without interpretation. Dogoriti et al. (2014, p.259) found that most students agreed that using FB is beneficial. Although 90 percent of the students agreed that FB is not an appropriate environment for learning, they agreed (76 percent) that FB creates a sense of community within a learning environment. Also, it is stated that 31 percent of the students preferred to watch and follow the discussion rather than participate. By conducting the proposed study, it is hoped to find similar or better findings. For example, most students agreed that FB helps to enhance the four skills. Also, all the students agreed that FB enhances communication and interaction between the group members. Furthermore, most students agreed that FB as a learning tool motivates the students to share their opinions and ideas. It is wished that students will follow the discussions, and enjoy participating. By using activities on FB like writing the comments, sharing the ideas, reading the posts, listening to videos, and helping each other could make FB an appropriate environment for learning. There is still a need for further research to investigate the effect of using social media for educational purposes on the learning process and interaction. FB platform offers many free services for communication and interaction and more control of privacy than before. Additionally; the study could encourage the curriculum designers to create suitable activities on social media platforms to make them real learning environments.

The following is the timetable for the specific steps of my research; it shows the estimated time of doing each activity by weeks:

Practicalities steps	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Weeks												
Introduction	→											
Literature review	→	→	→	→	→							
Research methodology			→	→	→	→						
Ethical approval				→	→	→						
Distribution of questionnaire							→	→	→			
Data collection								→	→	→		
Analysis of data									→	→	→	
Results										→	→	→
Discussion and conclusion											→	→

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