Face the Book & Facebook

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Abstract

Blended learning focuses on combining a specific percentage of online curriculum and instruction in a face-to-face setting. In this study, the adoption of Facebook as an additional tool in teaching communicative English skills to prepare international students from non-English speaking countries for tertiary education in Malaysia is discussed; based on the Leapfrog Principle. The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Facebook as a language teaching tool in Immersion English courses and examine the role of Facebook in new learning spaces and with today's learners. Data for the study was collected via a teacher's teaching journal followed by a recorded interview conducted with ten students in the pre-intermediate level; at the Limkokwing English Centre. The analysis of the data was done qualitatively. The findings of the study indicated that Facebook is perceived as an effective teaching means; in terms of both delivery and pedagogy in an Intensive English programs. It is also believed to cater to a flexible and motivating language learning environment for the current day youths. In short; the integration of Facebook into the intensive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course for adult learners, enriches the teaching-learning experiences.
Keywords: Blended learning, Facebook, EFL, Intensive English, teaching journal, action research, effectiveness, flexibility, motivation

Introduction

A boost in the number of global universities in the past decade appears to have catalysed the emergence of a highly dense population of abroad learners worldwide. In Malaysia, this sharp increase of foreign students; especially from non-English speaking countries, at tertiary learning institutionshas led to greater demand of the Intensive English language program. At this point, English is taught as a foreign language to adult learners within a short time span. Particularly; in Limkokwing University of Creative Technology Cyberjaya, the Intensive English program which is comprised of 8 levels; in which each level is conducted for 5 weeks for new students. This program is attended by new students prior to their enrolment for the Foundation, Diploma, or Degree programs; as English is the medium of instruction.

Here, the unquestionably challenging process of learning a new language as an adult and teaching adults a new language is nothing, but two sides of the same coin. Chiefly; in this case where the target language is a foreign language in which the learners do not have much or any exposure, the teaching-learning process becomes even more strenuous; especially when it has to be done within a limited time frame. This evokes a growing concern for teachers on how effectively the English language can be imparted for the purpose of communication with such constraints.

Karthiga (2012) highlighted that the majority of language teachers/instructors constantly believe that textbooks and other supplementary materials would suffice; ignoring the truth in which these students are 'digital natives' who spend hours online on their favourite apps. She asserts that teachers are unaware that motivation occurs when students are introduced to what they would like and not to what they should like. In other words; she suggests that textbook based lesson combined with a greater probability of constructive innovation can lead to an optimum teaching-learning process.

Recent studies have proved that social networking sites support educational activities by making interaction, collaboration, active participation, information and resource sharing, and critical thinking possible (Ajjan& Hartshorne, 2008; Mason, 2006; Selwyn, 2007a). Regardless of the numerous studies done in the area of technology in language learning, little interest has been raised on the prospect of social networking sites (SNS) as a teaching tool in Intensive English programs. This inclination creates a gap in the research field. In this respect, the Facebook is seen as worth investigating as it is entrenched in the social networks of today's learners. Therefore, this study aims to obtain a depiction of the effectiveness of Facebook as a language teaching tool in Intensive English programs and examine the role of Facebook in new learning spaces and with today's learners; based on the Leapfrog Principle.

Literature Review

Leapfrog Principle

Recently, tertiary educational institutions around the globe are emphasizing on the shift towards the new paradigm in education; in terms of both delivery and pedagogy, primarily through 'leapfrogging'. According to Harkins and Moravec (2006),

> *"Leapfrogging means to jump over obstacles to achieve goals. It means to get ahead of the competition or the present state of the art through innovative, time-and-cost saving means."*

Correspondingly, Moravic (2007) proposes that transformation and reforms in the curriculum and technology; would echo the paradigm shift in education. He urges that by utilizing new technologies universally, creatively, and purposefully; leapfrogging can be exercisedsuccessfully within the classroom. Essentially; the Leapfrog Principle demands a revolution in approaches to teaching and learning; whereby teachers are required to re-evaluate'what and how' students should learn to thrive in the 21st century as an innovative learning society (Harkins, 2007).

In 2000, Cunningham et al. presented in their report that there is still little substantiation of successful, recognized virtual institutions in the developed world, despite the swift escalation of online delivery among the traditional and new requirement of higher education. Conversely, outcome revealed a beyond belief increase of 41% per program in the tertiary level distance learning in a 2002 survey;in which 75 colleges providing distance learning programs were randomly chosen (Primary Research Group, 2002) (as cited in Christodoulou, 2010).

In developed and developing countries, the latest adaptation of technology is frequently being used to improve earlier versions in education. Therefore language teachers must'leapfrog' towards sustainable innovative language learning; in which they must reorientapproaches to attend to rapid advances in technology and the rapid virtualization of learningand teaching. In relation to the Leapfrog Principle, Cheng (2000) proposes a new triplization paradigm which encompasses globalization, localization, and individualization with the aim to maximize the opportunities of contextualized multiple intelligences (CMI) for students.

In education, globalization refers to the international adaptation through web-based learning; E-learning;immersion programs; international exchange programs; and use of the Internet in learning and research. As for localization practices in education, local community related curricula; curriculum content on technological, economic, social, political, cultural, and learning localization includes.The major implication of individualization in education is to maximize the motivation, initiative, and creativity of students and teachers in schooling, teaching, and learning; through individualized educational programs; individualized learning targets, methods, and progress schedules; self initiated lifelong learning, self actualizing, and self motivation; self managing students and teachers; meeting individual special needs; and development of contextualized multiple intelligences (Cheng, 2000).

Action Research

Action research; typical example of a reflective teaching cycle is a systematic, documented inquiry carried out by teachers in order to reflect upon and improve their teaching (Christodoulou, 2010). He highlights that,

> *"In action research; a teacher concentrates on one particular problem right in his/her classroom, inquires about it in a systematic way, draws a conclusion based on collected data and develops a strategy for improvement. After implementing the strategy, he/she finds out whether it was effective."* (p.31)

Richards (1991) points out that reflective teaching involve, "observing and reflecting on one's own teaching, and using observation and reflection as a way of bringing about change" (p. 4).

Chiefly; action research serves as a catalyst for teachers improving learning environments and strengthening their professionalism. Richards (1991) also asserts that "experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, but that experience coupled with reflection can be a powerful impetus for teacher development" (p. 8). In 2011, Wyatt established a strong possibility of high levels of motivation, self-awareness, efficacy and autonomy in teachers who conducted action research. This reflection during action research constructs a strong teaching foundation. (Wyatt, 2011)

Several studies have been conducted on action research in the form of teaching journals in educational programs. In 1990, Bailey stressed the importance of subsequent analysis of the entries by pointing out that "in reworking, rethinking, and interpreting the entries, teachers can gain powerful insights into their own classroom behavior and motivation" (as cited in Gebhard, 1992, p. 41). Several years later, Baurain (2010) and McDonough (1992) suggest that teachers' written documentation (journal entries) can be used as reliable data that can result in momentous teaching and journal entries. As for Yang (2009); she found that journals allowed teachers to clarify their thoughts on teaching which enhanced their professional development and recommended its inclusion in Korean educational programs. Hence, a teacher's journal is believed to serve a significant purpose in the EFL classroom as foreign language teachers strive to develop insights into their teaching methodology and students' learning.

Facebook

It is apparent that possessing a web-presence and connecting with a great number of people via SNS has set into the daily routines of largely tertiary education learners. (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008) At this point, Mc Bride (2009) highlights Downes (2006)' argument that the surfacing of web 2.0 is more than just technological revolutions it leads to social transformation. Facebook usage is rising at an exponential rate; globally. The Facebook, a spectacular creation of a Harvard scholar

in 2004 for intra-campus socializing, as of March 31, 2012 includes 835,525,280 active members, with the majority being between the ages of 18 to 24; among which the number of Asian users being 236 million(Internet World Stats website, 2012).

Facebook as a social networking site; provides an extensive number of features for its users to socialize and share information. Users can sign up on the website with a valid e-mail address and create a profile page that allows them to keep updated with friends' social activities, upload photos, share links and videos and connect with people. Another interesting feature is the News Feed where users can publish status updates and share them with users in their network. The status updates posted on users' profiles pages will then be available to be replied or commented on at anytime by other users, making it an asynchronous situation. As a result, Facebook has become the leading social network platform on the Internet and a vital communication means internationally.

This obvious explosion of social technologies has fashioned a culture in which youths participate more in creating and sharing content, profoundly changing the way students communicate, interact, and learn. (Petrovic et al., 2012) The preceding researches indicated that the adoption rates of Facebook in universities and colleges are remarkable - 85% of college students that have a college network within Facebook have adopted it (Arrington, 2005; Thompson, 2007). It is also noted that students spend as much (or more) time online in an informal learning environment - interacting with peers and receiving feedback - than they do with their teachers in the traditional classroom (Fogg Phillips et al., 2011) (as cited in Petrovic et al., 2012).

This most prominent site; particularly among university students proposes an extensive range of technological affordance supporting an array of significance that incorporates several means of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) ranging from one-to-one to one-to-many written interactions; including self-presentation. Bylth (2010) highlighted those social networking sites such as Facebook are being utilized in ESL classes. Furthermore, Facebook provide users with prospects and motivation for personal writing, self-reflection, and interactive learning. Therefore, teachers kick started to view Facebook as an authentic tool in language pedagogy and tertiary studies that, as Godwin-Jones (2008) points out that Facebook, "has the potential to find means to link informal and recreational writing with academic writing" (p. 7)

Wu and Hsu (2011) studied on Facebook usage of English majors at a university in Taiwan. Participants regarded the Facebook group to be "a pressure-free environment for English learning because it is a virtual community composed of closed group, which opens for limited members and makes them feel less stressful" (p. 6).The research also identified 5 external factors which influenced students' motivation and engagement with the Facebook group; which are audience, peer-feedback, topic, other school work, and novel effect.

In addition; Shih (2011) in a study which integrated Facebook with peer-assessment revealed that Facebook had a positive impact in an ESL writing course. Shih (2011) points out:

> *"Popularity, accessibility, and unique features attracted the students and eased their resistance to learning, making this a successful course."*
> (p.840)

On the other hand; Shih (2011) also noted that several students disliked the way classmates incorrectly corrected grammar, which caused unnecessary frustration in the learning process.
Another key finding showed students felt,

> *"the most important factors for them to be motivated to learn English writing and find the class interesting were the instructor's teaching techniques, teaching enthusiasm, and sense of humor."* (p.839)

Thus, it is important for teachers to keep in mind that Facebook is not a replacement for teaching but a supplement. The last key finding of Shih's (2011) study was that the instructor/researcher spent a substantial amount of time monitoring the Facebook page and commenting on students' postings.

In reference to the previous researches; Facebook is strongly recommended as a teaching tool as it enables teachers to supply positive educational outcomes (Pempek, 2009); perform a differential pedagogy, that interests the students (Hew, 2011); attain a transformation in strategy, mentality, attitude and behaviors, as organizing and managing learning state is fundamental (Roblyer, 2010); set up competent educational associations on a social network(Selwyn, 2009); accept the student as an interaction partner (Schwartz, 2009); analyze and compare ways of learning and the knowledge achieved by students (Roblyer, 2010); and develop knowledge and skills in order to execute resourceful instructive activities (Hew, 2011) (as cited in Petrovic et al., 2012).

In addition; based on studies done, Facebook is also learnt to have contributed significantly towards the quality of learning such as nurturing a healthy student-student relationshiptogether with students' motivation andengagement (West et al., 2009; Kabilan et al., 2010); involving students inachieving the learning tasks and successful transfer of knowledge (Madge et al.,2009); mounting a optimistic attitude towards learning and improving the quality of learning (Pasek & Hargittai, 2009; Kirschner&Karpinski, 2010); increasinginterpersonal intelligence, as well as critical thinking (Lampe et al., 2008); encouraging student-teacher interactions outside the class (Selwyn, 2009) (as cited in Petrovic et al., 2012).

Methodology

An action research was carried out with twenty students of a non-native instructor between the ages of 18 and 25 (10 female, 10 male) who were enrolled in a pre-intermediate level Immersion English course at Limkokwing University for 4 weeks in the first semester of the year 2013. The class met on week days for 2 hours. The instructor of the class is also the researcher. Since the main objective of this course is to improve communication skills; the use of Facebook is seen as a means to support learners to achieve that goal. Students used Facebook to carry out tasks assigned by the instructor based on the class syllabus. This out of class activity was made mandatory for all the students as it is related to in class subject matter but extended discussion beyond the four walls of the classroom in the target language.

On Facebook, a "closed" group for students was created. Content of the group's page was not open to the public. The investigator was the sole moderator. Only basic features of the page were used: photo albums of class activities, task posts – questions and answers, messages, comments on teacher's and student's posts, and "likes" of posts and comments. The profile picture of the group was the class's group photo. In addition; the investigator used her professional Facebook account to maintain the teacher-student professional relationship. It is ensured that all tasks were related to the class syllabus and served as a preparation for the final examination.

Four thematic tasks/assignments (Refer to Table 1) were posted by the course instructor and students were then given five days to respond to the questions and interact to accumulate for 10 percent of their final grade. Students were awarded full marks if they responded with a post of least 50 words; they were also given opportunities for limited extra marks by replying to other posts. Student autonomy was also targeted in this project as it was set up to assist students find, recognize, and analyze resources themselves.

Table 1: Weekly Tasks'Topic

Week	Task' Topic
2	The Best Smartphone
3	Favorite Holiday Destinations in Malaysia
4	My Hobbies
5	My Dream House

The investigative approach used in this study is qualitative. In order to study the effectiveness of Facebook as a language teaching tool in Immersion English courses and examine the role of Facebook in new learning spaces and with today's learners; an instructor's teaching journal and 10 students' interview recording were used. The teaching journal was in the form of a collection of weekly reflection entries to hub on classroom dynamics. The instructor wrote the reflections at her home; on the weekends after she had completed teaching a 10-hour week. The final reflective entry however; was written a week after the 4 weeks term ended as a reflection on the entire process. As for the recorded interview, 10 students from the total of twenty students

under this study were randomly selected. Each of these interviews which lasted about 10 minutes retrieved the student's perspective on the Facebook project.

Although the entire process of the action research entails a lot more time and work for the researcher, it was believed to be necessary to obtain a fuller understanding of the integration of Facebook into the intensive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course for adult learners. All in all, the fieldwork of writing a teaching journal and conducting 10 recorded interviews were adopted to provide a micro perspective and a deeper understanding of the subject matter for the point of view of both; the students and teacher/instructor.

Findings

Part A: Teacher's Journal

Excerpt of Journal: Week 1

> *At the computer lab; the teacher conducted a brief introduction session to the Facebook project which is an extension of the lessons on the textbook. All the studentswere following the instructions on their computer while the teacher demonstrated how to work on the project bypulling up the Facebook page for all to see on the projector.Teacher made sure that all the students were added to the project profile; before any task were assigned. The teacher also ensured that the marking scheme for the project; which the teacher had to spend some time creating, was explained to the students.*

The entry highlights the measures taken by the teacher to avoid excuses from students for not knowing how to do their Facebook project; all the students were given specific directions to operate the project page. Furthermore; the task were crafted as an extension of the lessons in the textbook which will be discussed in the class the next consecutive days. This measure was very effective as students did their work as they did not want to appear lost during the class discussion. Students were also awarded marks to ensure all students participated in the project.

Excerpt of Journal: Week 2

> *Students respond to the task posted almost immediately. It is good to know that all students are excited and are capable of performing the task independently. This positive attitude of the students towards the project contrasts greatly of the previous assignments using other teaching materials. Students also did a self research on the topics before posting.*

As was hoped and believed; all the students irrespective of nationality or region were enthusiastic about Facebook. The entry outlines the student's liking of Facebook as a

means of learning. The positive response given by the student signals their attraction towards this particular social networking site based activity.

Excerpt of Journal: Week 3

> *Students appear confident in expressing their thoughts and ideas while posting comments on Facebook; unlike when asked to write a paragraph in class. Hence; these students do their part properly and wait for the teacher's feedback; and also respond to teacher's feedback. At this point; the teacher has to make time for this extra feedback purpose. In cases where the teacher has slightly delayed the feedback; the students would send an inbox message to the teacher stating, "Is my comment good? How is it?" Here; the teacher finds that Facebook as a teaching tool is actually very much time consuming and slightly tiring, yet satisfying as students are showing interest.*

The entry also highlights the teacher's dilemma –setting aside some time for teacher feedback. This was a problem due to time constraints. Initially; the time needed for this Facebook project was overwhelming at first. The teacher ensured that feedback; which included correction was offered to each of the student's by mentioning their name in the respective post. Therefore; this project is found to be time consuming and a little tiring. However, future research should discovera lesser time consuming teacher feedback process.

In addition; students were responding to the feedback given. Therefore; the feedbacks seem to be never ending. However; the teacher realizes that learning is taking place in a healthy manner. Therefore; the teacher values the importance ofteacher feedback.

In short; Facebookdemands more effort on the part of the teacher. However; it seemed more worthy as students equally put in efforton the project. A sense of satisfaction is attained when the effort is welcomed and appreciated. The assignments given proved to be very successful.

Excerpt of Journal: Week 4

> *Students' attendances have improved over the past few weeks. Students' seem to be more active in class and they also do interact well in class. Instead of the teacher asking them questions related to the homework; it is they who question and counter-check their answers and feedback given with the teacher.*

The excerpt serves as evidence to the improved interaction level among students and also between students and the teacher. It can be observed that the anxiety factor has diminished with the adaptation of Facebook into language learning classes. Students are more motivated to attend classes.

Excerpt of Journal: Week 5

> *Students scored very high marks for the writing assessment in their final exams. In addition; most of the students scored full marks for the Facebook project. Students' overall percentage was high; with all of them qualified to the next level.*
> *The teacher now considers Facebook as a great teaching tool.*

The final excerpt above suggests that Facebook based activity actually aids the improvement of writing. Students' become more capable of expressing their thoughts and ideas through words confidently. The highly achieved scores would further motivate the students to do better and practice the usage of the target language; through writing and also speaking.

Part B: Interviews

Basically; the interviews looked at how students reacted to the use of Facebook in their intensive foreign language lessons.The broad inclination of the interviews suggests that students reacted overwhelmingly positive to the use of Facebook in their pre-intermediate English class. They identified and shared a variety of beneficial aspects; both social and pedagogical which were linked to the integration of Facebook into their textbook based lessons.

The data collected through the interview suggests that the 10% marks rewarded for contributions towards the online project served as extrinsic motivationto students. The real life topics together with the use of the authentic tool-Facebook have resulted inposts that are consistently meaningful as they have a real audience with whom they communicate. The students insist that the topics were very beneficial and interesting. Students also found the Facebook project to be intrinsically motivating in relation to the familiarity and authenticity of the site as a learning tool. It is also interesting to note that students' seem eager to respond to the tasks and interact with each other; in which they replied in multiples to posts' of others.

Besides this; students realize that this type of learning activity is very relaxing and flexible; as they could access the web page with the latest array of gadgets anytime and anywhere. Some students said that they did their work while traveling home on a bus and during breaks at part time jobs. Since Facebook is familiar to them; its usage was not a problem. Also; they agreed that they had more confidence in attempting the tasks; especially while interacting with the teacher. Students mentioned that they had felt less anxiety in interacting with the teacher; that helps them to be comfortable during classroom interaction. The most striking feature in this interview data is that students acknowledged the effort of the teacher to come up with an interesting idea of incorporating social networking sites into the traditional textbook based lessons; other than finding the teacher feedback very helpful.

Discussion &Conclusion

The effectiveness of Facebook as a language teaching tool in Intensive English programs were examined using findings of a teacher's teaching journal, while responses gathered through 10 student interviews were used to identify the role of Facebook in new learning spaces and with today's learners. The results showed that Facebook is an effective teaching tool; only if the language teacher is willing to allocate some time to give timely feedback. As Shih (2011) noted; the students were reported to acknowledge that the teacher's teaching techniques and enthusiasm; as the teacher puts forth continuous effort in evaluating, correcting and responding to Facebook postings. However; it is worth mentioning that the students' response towards the Facebook project was very positive as a whole.

It is observed that the success of the project largely relied on the integration of the Cheng (2000)' triplization paradigm while planning the project; in which a globalised medium - social networking site, localized topics, and individualized student- teacher interaction & feedback; were employed. This in turn; initiated motivation and provided a sense of flexibility to the students. Therefore this study serves as a reminder to language teachers that the foreign language learners need to engage in authentic and meaningful exchanges; which are indispensable in order to expand communicative competence, and focusing on learners' grammatical and lexical knowledge exclusively based on textbooks can never help much. Instead, technology based activities should be integrated into the textbook syllabus to ensure success in the delivery and pedagogy.

For a more thorough study on the effectiveness of Facebook as a language teaching tool in Intensive English programs,and the role of Facebook among current days' foreign language learners; employing teacher's teaching journal and interviews alone may not suffice. Comparatively; any future study should provide valuable statistical information about the implementation of Facebook based activities in the intensive language learning sphere. This could make way for the researchers to gain exact empirical details. It is this body of knowledge that would further substantiate the findings of this study. It would also be of great interest to observe how teachers' view the need to 'leapfrog' in teaching. A study of this nature could be conducted for further investigation on the various implementation strategies of the Leapfrog Principle in the language learning circle. Furthermore, the extent ofthe social network intervention into the tertiary level language learning programs in Malaysia and its implication towards the need of leapfrogging within the context of language learning has lacked empirical attention. This is seen as a major oversight since it has many ramifications towards the quality of the present and future language learning community. Therefore, an understanding of the Facebook as an effective teaching tool; in terms of both delivery and pedagody to initiate a shift in language learning paradigm would be worthwhile.

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