

The Impact of Social Media on ELL Process

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Abstract: This study aims at investigating the role of social media on English Language Learning (ELL) process. In recent years, social media has become a common technology-supported learning tool for public and academic use. Students can use social networks to supplement their learning through the discussion and sharing of academic materials. The purpose of this study is to identify English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' experience in the classroom facilitated by using a social media platform. Nowadays, social media dominates the life of people, i.e. it has become noticeably widespread among the youth, and students in particular. Research has indicated that social media could be an effective platform for language learning. This study, therefore, comes to explore the impact of social media-assisted English language learning. The main problem that caused this study to be conducted is the addiction of young generation to technology in general and social media in particular. Thus, teachers, instructors, lecturers, etc. can obtain the most benefit from this phenomenon of learners' clinging to their cell phones. This review paper adopts the descriptive methodology based on literature review collected from various resources.

Keywords: technology, social media, blogs, EFL, students' engagement, students' academic performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is an Internet-based technology that is used to create and share online information, which helps facilitate media and information sharing, collaboration, and participation (Evans, 2014). Furthermore, social media enables two or more people to interact and communicate with each other. Social media platforms such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube hold a great potential of being an online channel to facilitate student learning by providing a vast opportunity for learners to access and gather information to build, modify, and share their knowledge (Gaytan, 2013). With the rapid growth of technologies and the presence of social media, the potential to support learning and motivate students is abundant (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

Many students use social media in their daily lives to communicate with others. It has become a common technology-supported learning tool for public and academic use. According to Regan (2015), 1.93 billion people utilize mobile technology for social media platforms. The number of social media users has risen by 176 million in the last year and has reached over 2,206 billion active users in 2015, which resulted in 30% of global penetration. Since social media usage continues to rise, there is an opportunity for schools to integrate social media tools into students' organizational learning process which allows individuals to observe, gain, and share knowledge within their communities.

2. TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS SITES

There are various kinds of social media which may be used in several ways. It should be noted that things around us can be used if we know how to use them. For instance, most people have smartphones, but they barely use all the application available in it. Sometimes they are not appropriately directed and at times they don't have the chance or time to spend on learning new things. However, this is not the case for English learners, because software and applications available on smartphone may assist English learners to connect with others. The types of social media and social network sites can be classified as:

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2.1. Language of the Gadgets

Gadgets, such as mobile phones, desktops and, notebooks offer their users the option for the language which they prefer to use. Such choices definitely benefit all users in many ways but interestingly, new users may significantly benefit from such options. As it has been reported in a number of studies many individuals in various language learning settings have improved their second language learning by opting for English as their preferred language of their gadgets (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

2.2. Blogs

Web blogs are also reportedly one of the forms of social media. Millions of people have created their own blogs and use them to write things which range from news and their perceptions on some specific issues. They invite the readers to reply by adding or posting comments on their blogs. Blogs discourse a broad range of topics and they reportedly assist in improving the reading speed, vocabularies and promote proper use of grammar and enhanced reading comprehension of language learners. Blogs can be employed in various ways for different purposes. For example beginners by means of referring to a particular language blog learn new ideas on how people use blogs to interact with each other. It also helps to learn new vocabularies in the different modern context of a particular time. The language of blogs is not intended for the sophisticated readers, as some scholars claim that it is simple and easy and blogs are a source of talking to an ordinary reader (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

2.3. Twitter

(Murthy, 2011) pointed out that microblogging and social networking facility that users like the most is the small messages of 140. This little arrangement is the sole way of communication that has inspired the minds of the users, which in turn, has become a fascinating method for learners to keep in touch with each other as well as with the teacher.

2.4. Facebook

(Blattner & Fiori, 2009) stated that Facebook is the primary social network that takes pride in its more than billions followers and it is one of the fastest growing and well known sites on the Internet. (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008) reported that Facebook has various tasks of communications, material sharing, modification and collaborative construction. However, the main reason for learners to use Facebook was to touch with friends.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

In recent years, social technologies have been widely used by students on a daily basis. Although it was perceived as a type of technology used mainly for social and entertainment purposes, it has gradually been adapted for use in education (Top, 2012). There are many free and inexpensive applications available in app stores that provide potential opportunities to the academic world. The use of these applications helps to create social-media-focused culture that is influencing how people communicate, teach, and learn (Mao, 2014). Lau (2012) reported that online social networks help initiate learning activities among students. Students who use online social networks can develop their knowledge based on extensive communications and knowledge sharing from the social network sites. Mao (2014) investigated high school students' affordances for social media, their attitudes and beliefs about these new technologies, and related obstacles and issues in using social media. Findings indicated that students show positive attitudes and beliefs about social media use in education. Specifically, students believed they could improve their learning when using social media and also enjoy using social media for an assignment or their own learning after school. However, some students thought that social media created a distraction and was time consuming. The study results also suggest that scaffolding is necessary for social media to be used as effective learning tools (Mao, 2014).

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Social networks have been found to be a tool to facilitate interactions and support active participation (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). A number of studies have found a relationship between technology use and engagement (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Faizi, El Afia, & Chiheb, 2013; Junco et al., 2011; Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Kwok, 2010). In a study using a set of items developed by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Chen and colleagues (2010) investigated the impact of Web-based learning technology on student engagement and learning outcomes in a traditional classroom and online learning environments. A positive relationship was found between the use of Web-based learning technology and student engagement.

Students who utilize social networking technologies in their learning were not only found to be active and highly engaged, they are also reported to have higher gains in general education. Moreover, Junco and colleagues (2011) conducted an experimental study using Twitter as a social networking platform for various types of academic and co-curricular discussions. Results indicated that Twitter can be used as an educational tool to support active participation and collaboration. Additionally, using Twitter as a microblogging tool can extend communication among students as it helps students increase a sense of connection. Further, the Twitter assignments promoted active learning and allowed instructors to provide prompt feedback. By effectively incorporating social networks as learning tools in the classes, instructors can expect to reach higher levels of learning as well as effective classroom management (Revere & Kovach, 2011).

Given the importance of collaboration in the learning process, social media tools function as platforms for learners to access, collect, and share information. Further, online social networking helps students to (a) develop satisfying relationships with peers (Yu et al., 2010), (b) improve engagement and communication with peers and teachers (Faizi et al., 2013), and (c) collaborate to achieve common goals (Faizi et al., 2013). It is also possible that some students may feel more comfortable expressing themselves and sharing their thoughts through online channels rather than through traditional face-to-face classes. Moreover, as opposed to classical instructional models that focus on individual learning processes, online social networks allow students to bring their ideas together, examine them with peers, and publish them in such a way that allows for revisiting and revising (Faizi et al., 2013). Finally, Additional research has demonstrated that students who work as a group learn more and retain information longer, especially when they are able to be actively involved in the process; and, social media may be a way for students to engage in those activities (Faizi et al., 2013, Junco et al., 2011).

5. SOCIAL MEDIA AND STUDENT LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS

The use of social media in an academic course can connect students and encourage them to create a virtual community that leads to better content learning. Social media provides an opportunity for students to expand their learning environment, explore the new resources, and be used as a tool to facilitate the learning communities by encouraging collaboration and communication.

Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013a) conducted a study regarding the impact of social media use on academic performance among university students. The results revealed that social media integration facilitates students' academic experience, which relates to students' academic performance. Further, social media integration was found to increase the interaction within the class among students and teacher, which increase students' participation and enhance collaborative learning. Similarly, a study by Olaleke, Iroju, and Olajide (2015) revealed that social media can be used to enhance students' learning abilities through interactions among learners and teachers. Specifically, online social media can facilitate students' academic experience by supporting environment for academic discussions, which helps improve learning motivation. Further, by allowing students to discuss the same content at the same time within a virtual community, students can build on conversations and make connections across multiple sources (Frye, Trathen, & Koppenhaver, 2010). This increases a chance of student learning outside the traditional classroom situation.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA AND EFL STUDENTS

The relevance of social media to educational success has been an issue of interest. It is no doubt that language and communication play an important role in exchanging data and sharing information on the use of technology in education (Reinhardt & Zander, 2011). Social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter enhance communication and can potentially be exploited for language learning (Thurairaj, Roy, & Subaramaniam, 2012). It has been incorporated in academic course content to encourage students' participation, which allows students to interact, learn and share information with others. There is research to suggest using social media in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom helps facilitate language learning (Reinhardt & Zander, 2011). For example, Boonmoh (2010) found that using blogs in ESL writing class can encourage students to write and practice self-expression. Similarly, Puthikanon (2009) found that using WebQuests in ESL reading class can increase critical thinking. Furthermore, Bakar, Latif, and Ya'acob (2010) carried out a study on how to integrate the blog as an educational tool in the ESL classroom. The results revealed positive responses from the students about using the blog in learning the second language. They perceived that the use of blog had generally enhanced their reading and writing skills, established their self-confidence, enhanced their communication skills and reduced their anxiety (Bakar et al., 2010). It has become a productive learning tool, especially for the language learning students.

7. SOCIAL MEDIA IMPORT AND USAGE AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Various studies have dealt with social media availability and the new horizons they have created, especially for the youths (Lin et al., 2016). Out of these media, YouTube and Flickr are used to share visual materials, Facebook and LinkedIn provide social networking, Wikipedia specializes in the development of collaborative knowledge and Twitter in microblogging (Balakrishnan & Lay, 2016). For Lin et al. (2016), social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, not only give users the possibility to generate information but also to share it with other users around the globe.

In view of their proliferation and the possibilities they provide, researchers have called for the use of social media in the field of education (Everson et al., 2013; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Roblyer et al., 2010). Balakrishnan and Lay (2016) report that Facebook and YouTube have been used “within and outside classrooms for teaching purposes, such as to upload educational videos or learning materials for students”. Such action has been taken due to the popularity of these media among students who use them to complement and thus enhance their classroom learning due to their ease and speed of communication. Consequently, it can be argued that users’ attitudes depend on medium functionality and students’ environment. Attitude is, in turn, determined by users/students’ learning style. By environment, we mean the opportunities the students have to communicate in English as a second language, which will partly determine their recourse to social media to fulfill their communicative needs within a meaningful setting. As it has been investigated by Chartrand (2012), students who have limited time for real English communication can be encouraged use to the Internet to upgrade their English language communicative skills. As to students’ learning styles, as it is argued here, they partly determine the degree and manner in which those students use social media. Balakrishnan et al. (2015) explore the effect of these styles on their intentions to use social media for learning. More particularly, the researchers studied the causes behind students’ intentions to use social media for learning, as this phenomenon has been gaining ground among university students.

Balakrishnan and Lay (2016) underline the importance of teachers’ awareness of their students’ learning styles and their effect on social media usage. The researchers base their view on the Social Learning Theory (SLT), which posits that learning is most effective when learners are allowed to observe and interact with other learners, as well as form or participate in small study groups compared to the lecturers’ teaching styles (Bandura, 2002; Gong et al., 2014). They argue that “this theory has become popular with the widespread use of social media and mobile technology” (Balakrishnan & Lay, 2016, p. 810). Out of the three types of learning styles – participatory, independent, and collaborative – Balakrishnan et al. (2015) advance that students with a participatory learning style might favor Facebook and YouTube as learning tools as they permit them to acquire information from their peers anywhere and virtually instantaneously. As such, these media can be quite appealing for such a category of students.

Independent learners, too, can benefit from social media, as these students tend to rely on themselves in retrieving information when they can access it, either through Facebook or YouTube. According to Umrani-Khan and Iyer (2009; cited after Balakrishnan and Lay, 2016), such learners tend to prefer independent study, self-paced work, or special projects based on their interests. Besides, the practicality and omnipresence of social media can give them the possibility to decide about their study schedules. As collaborative students are generally extroverts, they are not concerned about anonymity. Hence, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube can facilitate their collaboration and information exchange by providing platforms for their discussions. Therefore, such sites can be successfully exploited to enhance collaborative learning.

8. CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Many studies have demonstrated the benefits of using online networks in education (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013a; Chen et al., 2010; Faizi et al., 2013; Junco et al., 2011). According to Gurcan (2015), social networks can be used in academic settings to improve communication skills between students and teachers, promote students’ engagement, facilitate collaborative learning, and enhance academic relationship among peers. Thus, social media plays a significant role in the exchange of information, which provides an opportunity for learners to continually connect and learn within academic environments. Conceptually, the use of social media tools in the classroom has gained popularity, as it helps increased social communication and collaboration, as well as enhanced knowledge sharing (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013b). However, the adoption of these tools in the classroom is creating a challenge whether students can manage between personal and professional lives.

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As mentioned in the study by Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013a), there is a need to control and manage students' time on the use of social media, as it would have a negative effect on the academic performance of students. An example of this concern is the study from researchers at Baylor University, who found that students spent more time visiting social networking for entertainment purposes such as follow sports figures or catch up on the news (Wood, 2014). Moreover, some students found social media to be a helpful learning tool but mentioned some difficulties, which included the weakness of the Internet at home (Al-Rahmi & Othman, 2013b). Given this evidence, researchers continue to question the role of social media in education and whether or not it supports interaction within the classroom or just creates a distraction. Additional evidence is needed in order to determine the usefulness of social media as a tool to enhance the process of learning.

9. CONCLUSION

To sum it up researchers strongly believe that social media has a positive impact on ELL. It is obviously observed in ELL classrooms that learners are glued to their cell phones especially when they are asked to check a meaning of a word using their devices or conduct an activity in machine translation courses. Teachers are definitely capable of taking advantage of their learners' passion and attachment with technological devices and turn it into something useful regarding the instructional process.

10. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers reached a number of finding as well as recommendations. Commencing with the findings:

- Social media has definitely a positive impact on ELL.
- Social media contributes to both teaching and learning processes.
- Teachers can benefit from technology to attract learner's attention to learning.
- Teachers can motivate learners through technology.
- Learners are enthusiastic about utilizing social media in learning.
- Learners are accustomed to virtual classes through technology.

Recommendations:

- Educational institutions are highly recommended to adopt the utilization of technology.
- Educational institutions are advised not to cramp teacher's style in terms of teaching methodologies.
- Teachers should keep up with technology and be tech-savvy.
- Teachers should utilize social media as an instrument to promote learners' motivation and language skills.
- Learners should obtain the utmost benefit from social media through communication with native language speakers.
- Learners should use the various social media platforms in augmenting their knowledge scope in general and promoting their language skills in particular.

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