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EFL@FACEBOOK: INTEGRATING SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOL AS A MEDIUM IN WRITING CLASSROOM

Abstract:

Facebook (FB) is now considered as the most popular platform for online social networking among university students. The present study aims to investigate whether Facebook would be an effective and easy teaching and learning tool in EFL writing classroom in Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus. The data was collected from the students writing assignments on Facebook. The findings revealed that the use of Facebook in the teaching and learning of EFL writing English has to a certain extent been effective. Teachers indicated that Facebook is not far different from other new teaching tools. Students showed positive attitude toward using Facebook as a means of learning grammar and writing. As an alternative learning tool, Facebook offered students a convenient and attractive means to engross in discussion with the teacher and peers who had better grammatical and writing knowledge. Nevertheless, Facebook could help them to increase their motivation and build confidence in learning EFL writing as well.

Keywords:

EFL writing, Facebook, Social Networking

1. Introduction

The education world is moving toward the use of technology in education. Teachers can no longer shy away from the digital world. This is a cycle of change due to the Internet and Information Technology (Kajornboon, 2004). According to Srinivas (2010), social networking is one tool which can assist teachers and learners to access information and facilitate the learning of English.

Facebook is a Web 2.0 application serving a large online community. It gains huge popularity. According to Socialbakers (2012), the number of Facebook users reached 15,948,040 in July 2012 in Thailand. Such a large number ranked Thailand the 14th in the world ranking of the number of Facebook users. The largest group of Thai users comprised those aged between 18 and 24, who accounted for 34% of the Facebook population in Thailand. As this age group consists mostly of students who study in the university level, facebook is used in this study as a social networking tool to enhance the students' language competence.

It is believed that satisfactory knowledge of English grammar not only helps students write paragraph in standard English but also reduce the use of vernacular or non-standard English (i.e. using subjective pronouns in the place of object pronouns, omission of certain prepositions, use of double negative form, mistakes in irregular verb forms, and so on (Valentine & Repath-Martos, 1997).

The present study aims to investigate whether Facebook would be an 'effective and easy' teaching and learning tool in EFL writing classroom in Prince of Songkla University or not.

2. Review of the Literature

The researchers carried out an Internet search and found many websites that demonstrate and guide teachers on how to use Facebook for classroom teaching and learning purposes. Also, articles of different length and depth on Facebook appear in various educational as well as personal web pages, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook, reasons to use Facebook for teaching and learning, and different teaching ideas based on Facebook.

Hence, the researcher concur with the view of Godwin-Jones (2008) that tools and platforms such as FB, "that enhance communication and human interaction can potentially be harnessed for language learning" (p.7) and have become new sites for potential research (Bloch, 2008). Bloch (2008) claims that, from the perspective of student's writing, while there has been a lot of anecdotal evidence, there has been little research on how creating Facebook pages improves their writing. In a conceptual paper, Blattner, and Fiori (2009) discuss and examine how Facebook can provide opportunities to enhance the "developmental of socio-pragmatic competence in language learners" and the "sense of community in language classroom" (p.17). Moreover, Blattner and Fiori (2009) also point out that Facebook can be utilized for authentic language interaction, and can be used to increased motivation and improve the performance of English language learners. They argue that Facebook has "unique features that offer constructive educational experiences while maintaining privacy and safety" and

that potential of Facebook is “growing everyday with new applications” (p.8) that are yet to be explore and examined.

A recent study by Roblyer et al. (2010) found that university students are very open to the possibility of using facebook and similar technologies to support classroom work. Likewise, Haverback (2009) observed and informally examined her students’ creation and participation in an online learning community on Facebook to discuss assignments, ask and answer questions, post information, and support one another for their Reading Education Methods course. She found that her students were motivated to be involved in discussions in Facebook and they grasped a better understanding of the theoretical principles in ensuring effectiveness reading. Her students also developed better ideas as a group compared to when they read individually.

In terms of writing, facebook has been a platform for students to write, but this writing is different from the writing done in school for academic purposes. Students regard the informal writing outside school (including Facebook, blogs and Twitter) as ‘communication’ and the school writing as ‘writing’, which is an exercise in test taking (Yancey, 2009). The students are unable to see the connection between the two forms of writing (inside and outside school) and, the students are unable to consider writing as an enlarging activity to express themselves as well as a tool to perform in academic situations. Yancey (2009) discusses how Facebook and similar tools such as blogs and online forums can be used so students can see writing done in these new media as “writing’ and they can make use of these media to become better writers. In the process help students become thoughtful and informed writers.

Warnock (2009) stated that the first reason to teach writing online is that the environment can be purely textual. Students are in rich, guided learning environment in which they express themselves to a varied audience with their written words. The electronic communication tools allow students to write to the teacher and to each other in ways that will open up teaching and learning opportunities for everyone involved. In addition, writing teachers have a unique opportunity because writing-centered online courses allow instructors and students to interact in ways beyond content delivery. They allow students to build a community through electronic means. For students whose options are limited, these electronic communities can be built the social and professional connections that constitute some of the education’s real value (Warnock, 2009).

3. Methodology

The design of this study was qualitative in nature. By using an online discussion board, a discussion was held among the participants. The employed online discussion board is an e-learning platform and a web-based courseware delivery engine that use multimedia to increase the level of teaching and learning process. The participants were twenty students (3 males and 17 females) at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani in Thailand. The students’ ages ranged from 18 to 19. There were three phases. Phase 1: Participants were asked to check another student’s writing assignment. Phase 2: Students categorized the mistakes and made corrections. Phase 3: Four students were interviewed online to assess the effect of using Facebook in the teaching of writing. The

classes run for three hours per week during the second semester of the academic year. There were three writing assignments. The participants posted their assignment on Facebook and received feedback from their peers and teacher.

The coding of the grammar mistakes of this study was based on Gary-Grant and Gingerich (2012), Orman and Purdue Online Writing Lab (n.d.). The Cambridge Dictionaries Online, Dictionary.com, and the Dictionary and Thesaurus Merriam-Webster Online (n.d.) were used to correct the misuse of vocabulary.

The coding of Grammar Mistakes is as follows:

- I. Misused tenses
- II. Misused singular/plural nouns
- III. Misused vocabulary
- IV. Misused punctuations (commas and periods)
- V. Misused articles (determiners): a, an, the
- VI. Misused pronouns, possessive pronouns
- VII. Misused prepositions
- VIII. Misused nouns/adjectives
- IX. Misused verbs
- X. Misused capital letters
- XI. Misspelled words
- XII. Misused infinitive/gerund
- XIII. Misused superlatives

The participants coded the mistakes according to aforementioned categories. The mistakes have been presented from the most common to the least common.

4. Findings

1. Misused tenses

Example 1:

(SW): As a result, the discussions can help students to understand better before they faced the final examinations soon.

(C): As a result, the discussions can help students to understand better before they face the final examinations soon.

Explanation: Use the simple present to express idea that an action is repeated or usual. The action can be a habit, a hobby, a daily event, a scheduled event or something that often happens.

Example 2:

(SW): This talk show is usually focus on

(C): This talk show is usually focused on

Explanation: Use the simple past to express the idea that an action started and finished at a specific time in the past.

2. Misused singular/plural forms

Example 3:

(SW): From this opportunities it give students time to cover all topic that have been learned and help them to gets good results in final examination.

(C): From this opportunities it give students time to cover all topics that have been learned and help them to gets good results in final examination.

Explanation: The plural form of topics is needed because there is more than one topic that have been learned.

3. Misused vocabulary

Example 4:

(SW): Iphone may refract you.

(C): Iphone may distract you.

Explanation: distract (v.) --to make someone stop giving their attention to something. Refract (v.) –when water or glass, etc. refracts light or sound, etc. it causes it to change direction or to separate when it travels through it.

4. Misused punctuations (comma and periods)

Example 5:

(SW): such as *concentrating on their studies during the week.*

(C): such as *concentrating on their studies during the week.*

Explanation: The comma (,) is place at the end of the word, then a space is needed.

5. Misused articles (determiners): a, an, the

Example 6:

(SW): As a conclusion, a one-week study leave before final exam is important to all the students because can get more benefit from it.

(C): As a conclusion, a one-week study leave before the final exam is important to all the students because can get more benefit from it.

Explanation: Use the when talking about one thing in specific.

6. Misused pronouns, possessive pronouns

Example 7:

(SW): That means, one-week study leave has their own benefit for student and lecturer.

(C): That means, one-week study leave has its own benefit for student and lecturer.

Explanation: Agreement in a thing. When writing in the “third party thing” (It), the possessive pronoun is “its.”

7. Misused preposition:

Example 8:

(SW): Before the final examination came, there are one-week study leave to students that have many advantages to them.

(C): Before the final examination came, there are one-week study leave for students that have many advantages to them.

Explanation: In general the preposition for is used to indicate the person, or a group of people.

8. Misused nouns/adjectives

Example 9:

(SW): Multi Touch Screen has high accurate.

(C): Multi Touch Screen has high accuracy.

Explanation: Accurate is an adjective. Accuracy is an uncountable noun. A noun has to be used in this sentence.

9. Misused verbs

Example 10:

(SW): Most of them have younger.....

(C): Most of them are younger.....

Explanation: The main verb “to have” is used to show possession of objects, characteristics, relationships or other qualities. The main verb “to be” is used to show the role or position that one has at work, family, or other organization.

10. Misused capital letters

Example 11:

(SW): The reason is, Assessment from lecturers about their student in their study can help them to change their strategy.

(C): The reason is, assessment from lecturers about their student in their study can help them to change their strategy.

Explanation: Common nouns are not capitalized.

11. Misspelled words

Example 12:

(SW): Now a days students must know how important this one-week study leave to them.

(C): Nowadays students must know how important this one-week study leave to them.

Explanation: Nowadays is one word.

12. Misused infinitive/gerund

Example 13:

(SW): Line can distract you from what you should be do.

(C): Line can distract you from what you should be doing. (object)

Explanation: A gerund is used because it is the object or complement of a sentence.

13. Misused superlative

Example 14:

(SW): *At Ten* talk show is the higher rated TV program in Thailand.

(C): *At Ten* talk show is the highest rated TV program in Thailand.

Explanation: The superlative adjective is used when talking about three or more things. It expresses the extreme or highest degree of a quality.

The most common mistakes are misused tenses, followed by misused singular/plural nouns and misused vocabulary. In addition, there were errors in misused punctuations of commas and periods as well as misused articles (determiners): a, an, and the. Then there were misused pronouns, possessive pronouns. In addition, there were misused prepositions,

nouns/adjectives, verbs, and capital letters. Lastly, there were misspelled words, misused infinitive/gerund and misused superlatives.

Phase III involved 4 participants' comments on this current research. Student A has suggested that Facebook can help them in writing indeed. Student A has stated: "Teaching Writing English via Facebook enable me to interact with my friends and teacher. I really love learning writing skill on Facebook. I believe that students can spend their time practicing English freely as they like, and teacher can evaluate and grade their work at any time. And I find this very useful and convenient for both teacher and students. Facebook provides fast access to send and evaluate essays or assignments files, and teacher can access and evaluate student's work. On top of that, I love to learn from my friends and I can share information, knowledge and learn from mistakes with them. As sometimes I am afraid to do this when I am in the class.

Students B has explained the use of Facebook is really effective. This is because documents, announcements and additional materials can be uploaded into Facebook instantly. In addition, it is an effective way to contact students.

Student C has mentioned that Facebook is ideal when interaction is required. As she said: "Facebook is ideal for developing English skills that require interaction. I like it. I think it is fun. And I love it as it is a closed group, I don't have to be afraid of mistakes that I'm going to do. It's truly amazing.

Student D: "It is useful. It helps me a lot. Facebook gives me opportunities to practice my writing skills before taking exams. I can work at home or anywhere I like. I can update what my friends or teacher suggest. I can improve my grammar a lot. I like grammar discussions session very much. All in all, I love studying writing English via Facebook"

The interviews indicated that the participants enjoyed it and found it to be significant. Moreover, they can work from home or anywhere they are. The equipment plays an important part in making it successful. In addition, Facebook is useful because materials can be uploaded and shared. And it is such thoughtful to use Facebook only by the participants in the class (closed group). It should not be opened to others or the public.

5. Conclusion and pedagogical implications

From the results, Facebook, as a means for language learning effectively enhanced the writing abilities of the EFL students. Facebook also built positive attitudes of students in language learning. Grammar discussions seemed to lead the English writing improvement. The students' grammatical and writing competence was enhanced after the four-month period when they were given opportunities to use Facebook for discussions. In their opinion, Facebook was an alternative and up-to-date learning tool which was easily accessible. It provided convenience and more choices for students to study the English grammar, thus developing their writing competence. They overcome their shyness and dared to ask their peers and teacher questions on Facebook. They could leave messages for the teacher or other on Facebook users. Using Facebook as a medium for language learning actively encourages a collaborative environment, builds positive attitudes, increase motivation and student

participation, and sustains teacher-student relationship (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007). Further research can be conducted in other types of learning and teaching. In addition, the participants can practice other skills, such as reading, speaking and listening with other on Facebook. However, it ought to be used in the right climate by set rules and guidelines for the use of Facebook effectively. Good examples of writing can be uploaded so that the students could have opportunity to share their thoughts about the examples.

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