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Enhancing Communication Via Social Media in ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT
The worldwide demand for good communication skills in English Language has created a great demand for quality language teaching and learning in the age of Information Communication Technology (ICT). The education system of a country plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the nation, specifically inculcating critical thinking skills, effective communication skills as well as competence in English language communication skills. 21st century has introduced the world to the social media evolution. The abundance of social media apps like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat and others spark exciting learning experience by allowing students and teachers to interact in new ways. This study focused on students' perceptions on the implementation of social media in ESL classroom to enhance communication skills. The findings reveal positive impacts of the medium implemented thus encourage active participation from teachers or language instructors to ensure that the existing technology will be fully utilized for the benefits of ESL learners.

Keywords: Online learning, social media, communication, technology.

Introduction

> "…great communication skills take practice and practice makes perfect. Your ability to express yourself will grow daily as long as you apply yourself in improving English language communication skills".
>
> (Noraien Mansor, 2013)

The ability to communicate effectively is still the main concern of ESL students all over the world. Students in Malaysia still face difficulties in applying the language academically and communicatively, even though English language is the official second language in Malaysia. After completing school and tertiary level education, jobseekers have realised the importance of acquiring the skill of English communication in order to be accepted in today's world of globalized era of borderless information and technology (Zubaidah Awang & Shaidatul Akma, 2008). Students are expected to have good command of English language and at the same time, it is to further enhance education excellence in order to produce the necessary human capital who are globally competitive.

> "Why are our students weak in English language specifically in communication skills? Are our students not interested in learning English language and embarrassed to use the language? This problem persists when the medium of communication among students continue to be their mother tongue and not English. The fact that their environment did not promote the use of English fueled their hesitation to use the language".
>
> (Jailani & Noraien, 2014)

In general students are not performing well in English language learning in any countries in the world, particularly when English is not their first language (Hashemi, 2011). Thus, there is a need to encourage language learners to acquire communicative fluency using any available language learning strategies due to lack of exposure in the target language. Effective teaching methods and resources have to be taken much emphasis in creating student-centered learning environment that will 'promote active participation of students in classrooms activities' (Koros, Indoshi & Okwach, 2013). Current technology using social media are both efficient ways to serve as a language learning platform for ESL classrooms.

Social media enriches the learning experience by allowing students and teachers to connect and interact in new, exciting ways. Social media such as Facebook, Blogs, Instagram, e-mail and Twitter provide a platform where users can dialogue, exchange ideas, and find answers to questions, thus further are able to foster collaboration and discussion. In fact, multimedia technology has been absorbed in Malaysian universities to enhance the field of teaching and learning. This portrays the positive move and progress of ICT implementation among higher learning institution students in Malaysia.

However, since teaching and learning rely heavily on communication, it is vital that students enhance their communication skills as almost every activity in class necessitates communication. Thus, Communicative Approach is chosen to cultivate the ability to communicate properly and as students learn how to use English language in their daily communication, they are also simultaneously demonstrating their mastery of English (Hymes, 1972).

Further, in each normal class in school, there are different levels of proficiency that categorize the students in terms of learning pace and it is important to have fewer students for language learning so that everyone has a fair chance of language practice. Communication methods should be varied to allow the language learners to assimilate English as part of their daily encounters and to be more comfortable in using English language. The consolidation of modern technology and having fewer students for a language learning class to promote active interaction for individual improvement in language practice may encourage students to engage more in English language communication activities.

Therefore this study focuses on enhancing communication using two medium of social media namely the Facebook and Instagram. This study is desired to provide valuable insights for the future research in computer-mediated communication, predominantly that focusing on the use of new media which is crucial in the age of information and communication technology.

Literature Review

Kabilan et al. (2010) in their research findings reveal that students' confidence, motivation and attitudes improved significantly by the use of Facebook. Students claim that using Facebook has motivated them to practice English even more since most writings are in English. They also stated that participation in Facebook has inculcated a more positive attitude towards learning English. This particularly shows that Facebook has the tools and features that would offer them opportunities for language improvement.

On the other hand, Madge (2009) noted that Facebook is a means for communication and is used for informal learning purposes, but it is not a tool for formal teaching. Nevertheless, Selwyn (2007) reveals that while Facebok holds personal and social significance, it also plays a strong role in students language learning. Selwyn claims that Facebook reflects a good model of learning by its collaborative and active participatory roles of its users. Therefore, Facebook can be seen as a platform in which students are able to

appreciate and value the benefits of collaborative learning, which are not available to them if they are to work individually.

Blattner & Fiori (2009) also share the benefits of authentic language interaction as well as the socio-pragmatic awareness that is gained through the use of Facebook groups. Further, Pempek (2009) reveals that Facebook enables teachers to provide constructive educational outcomes in a variety of fields. Hew (2011) added that Facebook allows teachers to practice a differential pedagogy, in the best interests of the students. According to Roblyer (2010), Facebook enables the teachers to achieve a change in strategy, mentality, attitude and behaviors as well as analyse and compare ways of learning and the knowledge achieved by students.

Normaliza Abd Rahim (2014) study focuses on the usage of blogs for communication in the classroom. The subjects involved in the study include Korean students at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea. The subjects used blogs to express their feelings and thoughts through fourteen weeks of study (one semester). The results of the study revealed that the subjects have actively participated in the blog writing activity and used the presupposition, reference, inference and implicature in order to send their messages using the digital media. Normaliza Abd Rahim (2014) study has similar results to the study of Lunden (2014) and Fritta Faulina Simatupang (2015) whereby the use of media technology has helped in the process of learning. Also, Lunden (2014) and Fritta Faulina Simatupang (2015) have used the instagram for their studies.

Sebah Al-Ali (2014) focuses on the integration of instagram as an active learning tool in a language bridge program, and claims that instagram can be a successful learning tool in an English as a second language classroom. The program includes pictures taken and captions written for a holiday project. Two pre-intermediate English as a Second language (ESL) classes involved in this study. The results of the study revealed that students were gradually welcomed the idea and were encouraged to be creating during the process of writing their activities. Sebah A-Ali (2014) study was similar to the study of Bell (2013) where instagram has played a major role in enhancing the subjects learning. Also, communication took place in the form of expressing ideas and feelings in their captions in instagram. Salomon (2013) agrees with Bell (2013) and adds that instagram has gain a person's interest as well as confidence in expressing ideas virtually. Bell (2013) claims that written communication helps in the process of building up self-esteem and confidence in everyday lives. Normaliza Abd Rahim (2014) agrees with Bell (2013) and Salomon (2013) and claims that digital media exposes a person's in a new and advanced world. Therefore, a person has to adapt and adopt new things everyday.

Methodology

The sample of the study consists of 20 subjects from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu using the Facebook and the online social network instagram. They were divided into 4 groups to complete a task on how to prepare a brochure for a new business to venture.

The subjects own the Facebook and instagram for personal purposes. As for this study, Facebook group was created for each group to provide a platform for students to interact. They were tasked to capture related pictures for their brochures and get their group members to approve the items through instagram before they proceed with further lengthy discussion to produce a creative brochure using their group Facebook. They were given 4 weeks (2 weeks with Instagram and 2 weeks with facebook) to complete their task and they were requested to participate and interact with each other as frequently as possible as their frequency of contribution will be examined.

This study attempts to provide a description and analysis, of the usage of social media focusing on Facebook and instagram in ESL language learning classroom. Further, it also attempts to elicit students' perceptions on the implementation of facebook and instagram in language learning. The data for this study consists of students' interactions transcripts, interviews as well as the observations made by the instructors.

Results and Discussion

The data gathered from the students' participation and interactions in Facebook and instagram during the four weeks duration given, demonstrate a positive impact whereby all the students participated and communicated actively by giving their opinions and comments on the related items posted by their group members in preparing the assigned task. The graphs (Figure 1) below show the frequency of the posts within the duration of two weeks using the instagram.
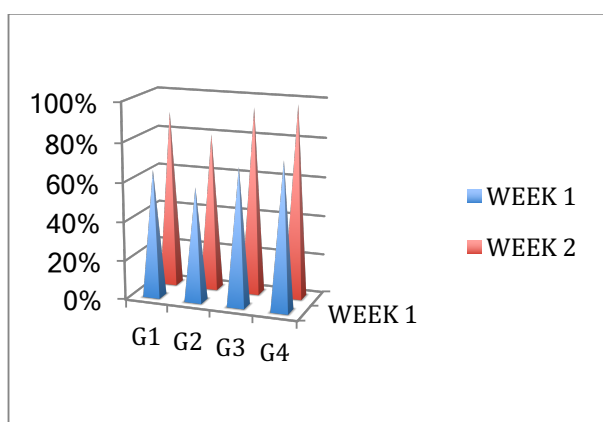

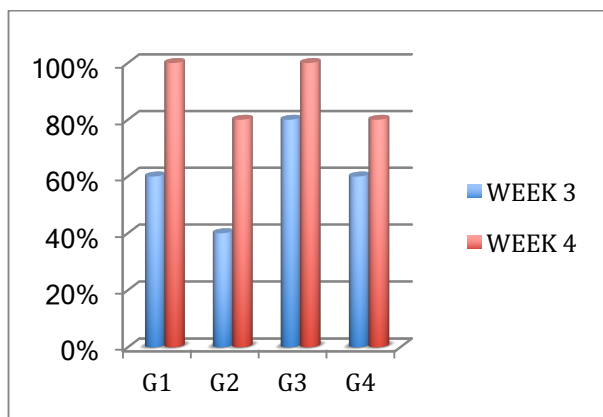*Figure 1*. Instagram Analysis

Figure 2. Facebook Analysis

The analysis of students' participation and interaction in instagram and Facebook portrayed positive impact as the percentage increases from week 1 to week 2 and from week 3 to week 4. The increase demonstrated the students' interest to complete their task successfully within the time frame given. The students participated and interacted actively involving giving opinions, questions and clarifications as well as sharing ideas, thus creating a non-threatening environment for communication to occur. Subsequently, the research

shows that learners gain educational benefits from the technology as learning becomes more relaxed and spontaneous.

The results of the study were also similar to the study by Normaliza Abd Rahim (2014), Normaliza Abd Rahim (2011) where digital media were useful for learners in sharing ideas and information via online. The messages in the forms of expressing feelings and giving advices help the process of communication.

This paper also reports the findings from the students' perceptions through interviews on their experience of the assigned task using the social media. From the interviews done with the students, they revealed their interest to participate and interact with their group members involved in the task. They stressed that using facebook and instagram in language learning has motivated them to participate and heightened their confidence to communicate in English language. The results of the study were parallel to the study by Noraien Mansor (2014) where online communication involving facebook interactions have given great impact towards students. Further, it fueled their interest towards learning English language as during the interaction they read and write to give their posts and comments. Thus, instagram and facebook are able to uplift students determination to communicate in English language and convey their messages successfully.

Another impact derived from the interviews was the development of learning communities using groups in instagram and facebook. The facebook and instagram groups developed for the task provides opportunities for students to interact and support each other as well as learning experiences and a place to build upon knowledge within a learning community. Additionally, it is very obvious that online learning is a rich environment where learner-centered instructional techniques show opportunities for significant developments and offer new ways for language learning.

Further, communicative activities that require group discussion through instagram and Facebook managed to improve the students' communication strategies where they were seen to freely expressed and shared ideas with other group members. Students were also able to hold and maintain the discussion even though they were seen agreeing and disagreeing as well as justifying opinions but in the end they come to a consensus.

On the other hand, there are certain issues surrounding the use of online medium such as Facebook and instagram. Problems such as internet availability and network stability need to be addressed by the instructors before commencing with any online activity using the social media.

Conclusion

Technology has brought immense changes to the lives of many people, and students and teachers are no exception. Technology assures optimistic future for language teaching and learning. In fact, many educators and researches believe that when endless efforts are put to integrate technology in ESL classrooms, teaching and learning of language would be well developed. With upcoming researches and advancement of technology in the future, technological tools will function as the aids for language teachers to design more stimulating and effective lesson plans.

It is highly recommended that further researches could be done involving collaboration of schools with native speakers to look at the impact of the medium in learning English language globally. Communicative approach undoubtedly creates a friendly and interactive learning environment, thus it should be implemented widely in the future. When students are presented with learning environment that offers them a lot of opportunity to use English in the class, they will get better chance at mastering English via communication.

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