

Social Media: Engaging Language Learning

Hanna Insyirah Mohd Sukri, Liyana Mustapha, Moomala
Othman, Dalia Aralas, Lilliati Ismail

Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor
Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

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Abstract

Most of youth nowadays have a problem of failing to perceive learning English as important as learning other subjects and therefore, slowly losing interest to get engaged in English lessons. Since Instagram, Twitter and other social media have been the main medium for them to express and share their ideas, this paper will discuss how the usage of social media helps in engaging language learners to use the target language in informal contexts. Today, teachers started to realize that some of these internet tools such as Facebook, Instagram, Email, and others are very useful in promoting language skills among students in schools. However, it cannot be assumed that students know the values of these tools in promoting their language learning. This paper will specifically look at Twitter and Instagram, the two major platforms of social media that are widely used among youth nowadays and adopt these mediums as the main agent of engagement for students in using the target language. Thus, instead of teachers looking at the negative side of social media, they should use it in class as a channel for language learning and teaching and direct students to realize social network as a catalyst to improve their English.

Keywords: Learning, Social Media, Language Learning, Language Engagement, Engaged Learning

Introduction

Social media is a vast platform of communication that used by people around the globe. In this globalization era, the social networking sites (SNS) are the most visited sites as there are more than 1 billion active users around the world (Prichard, 2013). This escalates quickly especially with today's "digital natives" generation using the SNS as a daily routine in their lives. It is a medium that allows everyone to share information, opinions and thoughts efficiently as it exists in every tablet, mobile phones, computers and laptops which make it easier for people to connect with people around the world.

As a result, it becomes one of the Malaysian government's aspiration to maximize the integration of information communication and technology (ICT) in crafting the educational system of the country

(Mansor et al., 2014). Fortunately, teachers are starting to recognize this platform as one of the tools that can enhance the teaching and learning process.

Problems in Language Learning

Language learning has been defined as a conscious process where the product can be obtained from either learning on our own or from formal classroom situation (Kramina, 2000). Teachers throughout the years have been struggling to find the most effective way that suits their students' language learning styles. On the other hand, students keep on encountering issues that forbid them in getting interested with language learning, on their own or when they are in the class. One of the main reasons why this is happening is because students often have the perception that learning English is all about learning difficult grammar systems. A study conducted by Ngersawat and Kirkpatrick in 2014 found out that students still encounter difficulties in applying grammar rules, especially in writing. This contributes to the heavy equation of applying grammar rules that students still could not grasp the idea of, together with writing, the skill that most students frighten the most upon hearing it. Thus, this does not provide any solution to the problem of disinterest among students to learn a new language, but it adds more concern on the issue itself.

Moreover, students also find that the things they learn in schools, including English language, is not meaningful for them as it is only for the purpose of surviving examinations, especially in Malaysia. A result of a study claims that the higher the level of the students in schools, the higher the exam- oriented pressure that is built up in them (Kutlu & Kumandas, 2012). Thus, this leads to students having no motivation or self confidence in using the target language at all because on the first level, they are not good enough in dealing with the stress for examination. Therefore, students are not interested enough to use the target language. In addition, students, especially the ones who are coming from the low proficiency group, will lose interest to get engaged with any language lesson because they are afraid of making mistakes. The pressure of being judged by their teachers and classmates are too much to bear that most of them always decide to be quiet all the way through the lesson. As a result, all of these problems add up to the pressure hold by the language teachers to assist their learners in mastering the target language.

Review of Literature

Social Media in Engaging Language Learning

Social media is now becoming a major communication platform for today's youth to freely express their opinions and thoughts. Through social media, a person can connect with anyone from just a single 'click'. As stated by Mondahl & Razmerita (2014) "Using Web 2.0, users may easily express or share their opinions, 'think by writing', seek others' opinions and feedback and be connected with the others." and this explains that, social media can and has a potential to be a distinguished medium for language learning. Teachers nowadays should adapt this advancement of technology into their teaching and engaged language learning process. By integrating technology into learning, in this case, social media, teachers can enhanced their methods of teaching and thus will help them to be more creative and innovative in delivering the lesson. As Noraien Mansor et al., (2014) explained "As an educational tool, social media enriches the learning experience by allowing students and teachers to connect and interact in new, exciting ways" and also allow authentic environment of language learning.

In addition, the usage of social media also helps the students to be more creative and willing to use the language because the nature of social media itself is interactive and limitless. At the same time, social media engaged the students in language learning by fostering collaboration and discussion among their peers. Thus, teachers should take this opportunity to integrate it in the classroom as well as making language learning happen even in informal context. To get the students to use the target language in informal context is very important because that is how the language should be used in order to make them comfortable and confident in using the language. Hence, social media can be one of the platform for teachers to engage students into language learning as well as improving their creativity in developing teaching materials for teaching and learning process.

Examples of Language Activities Using Social Media Twitter

The first example of activities that use social media as a medium for language learning had been done before by one of the literature lecturer. She taught Malaysian Literature and what she did is by assigning an on-going assignment to be done online which is on Twitter; one of the main social media among students. She assigned a reading text during class hour and the students will discuss the issues, and themes of the reading text together with her, after that she will ask a few open-ended questions that requires the students to share their thoughts and opinion on Twitter. This assignment allowed her to directly interact with the students through twitter. Every time the students post something, she will reply to each of their opinions and views. Based on this activity, the students will enhanced their reading and writing skills because the lecturer will constantly reply to their 'tweets' and ask questions that facilitate them to give proper answer related to the text assigned. Thus, this activity helped the students to increase their engagement in the language learning as well as in the reading and writing skills.

Instagram

The second example was conducted in a secondary school in Putrajaya, Malaysia. This activity was participated by form 4 students from a low proficiency class. The aim is to engage the students with the lesson of a literature short story entitles 'Tanjong Rhu' by Minfong Ho. The activity requires the students to snap a photo or find any pictures of their likings that remind them of their favourite character in the story. They are to upload the picture on their Instagram's timelines with a caption in English of why the chosen picture reminds them of the respective character. This will be included together with a unique hashtag to make it easier for the teacher to find the post on Instagram. Plus, the activity also requires them to discuss about their posts in a group in the next class. Therefore, the engaging activity not only cultivate writing skill, but also speaking and listening skills.

Advantages of Integrating Social Media in Language Learning

In a study conducted in using social media to learn French, the researcher focusses on the term of "Digital Natives". "Digital Natives" refers to the new generation who grows up being accustomed to the frequent use of internet and technology in their daily routine (Geraldine, 2013). Thus, it is a good time for language teachers to use the opportunity to expand their pedagogy and integrate social media, the existing comfortable platform, in their teaching process. Firstly, a study states that social media makes language learning more accessible as they can learn whenever they wish (Basoz, 2016). Social media can be accessed through the technological gadgets that are owned by almost all teenagers nowadays such as smartphones

and tablets that can be brought nearly everywhere by the owners. The sources (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) can be used anytime by the students as it is very flexible (Ali, Yaacob, Endut & Langove, 2017). Thus, this enables learners to complete the language task given easily and they can get engaged with the lesson deeper even when they are not in the classroom. Plus, homework through social media also gives learners the chance to organize and plan their own study time (Basoz, 2016).

The environment of social networking provides learners with positive effects on their motivation level in learning and using the language (Mills, 2009). Based on a study, learners showed evidences that they are creating investments of improvements in their English language after being introduced to learning activities through Facebook (Shafie, Yaacob & Singh, 2016). Plus, these social media sites may improve students' language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Another study done by Fishman et al (2005) claims that students produce a big amount of writing via this social networking sites including blogs and emails. Moreover, by using social media to get students engage with the language, it also provides students with a low anxiety environment for learning to take place. A study revealed that students use social media to share their ideas and information together in a less informal atmosphere (Mingle & Adams, 2015). This is exceptionally because they have low anxiety when they are sharing information on social networking sites.

Limitations of Using Social Media to Engage Language Learning

In any research there must be limitations that can restrain the researcher to make sure certain methods can be fully practiced or not. Limitations in a research also can be a reason why certain research gives out varied result even though the method used is the same. For this paper, there are a few limitations that can be identified.

Availability of Internet Access

The first limitation is the availability of internet access. In Malaysia, there is no doubt that most places have the facility to use the internet especially the school's computer lab. However, the common problem that happens to school in relation to internet is the connectivity. The schools from rural area will face this problem quite often because the connectivity of the internet is weak. This is the major limitation because in order for the teachers to integrate technology in their teaching and giving the opportunity to students to use social media in learning, they must have the facility or else, it will be a problem for the students to complete the task given by the teachers for language lesson.

Teachers with Traditional Mind Set

To integrate something new into classroom environment is nearly impossible if the teachers themselves do not want to go out of their ways and try new things. Teachers who are already used with traditional method might not easily accept the usage of social media in engaging the students in language learning. One of the factors why there are teachers who still stick with the traditional method is maybe because of the syllabus. In Malaysia, the teachers need to finish the syllabus to make sure that students will be prepared for their exam and because of this; some teachers will be rather reluctant to integrate social media in the lesson because it takes time and proper preparation.

Assessment Difficulties

As everyone knows, when it comes to posting works online, the originality of the work can be questioned if the source of the information is not properly quoted and also, anyone can edit their work anytime, anywhere when they posted it online. This particular situation is also one of the limitations for the teachers to integrate it in language lesson. When the teacher assign a task or homework for the students to finish it by using social media, the students can alter and edit their work as they pleased so, this will give a hard time for the teachers to assess students' work and to find out their actual level of progress for language learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, language learning process should be interactive and engaging in order to attract students' interest to learn and most importantly, use the target language. The integration of social media in language learning will also help the teachers to engage the students with the lesson and at the same time boost up teachers' creativity and innovation in developing activities for language lesson. The usage of social media in engaging language learning can also motivate the students to use the target language outside of schools hours or in informal context. As explained by Derakshan & Hasanabbasi (2015) "New technologies have been introduced so that language learners can implement them in and out of their classes to improve their language ability, especially in terms of writing". The incorporation of social media in language learning will make the students eventually use the target language while doing their daily activity and thus help them to improve their proficiency level.

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