'INVENTION AND PERSONALIZATION': USING FACEBOOK AND WHATSAPP FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
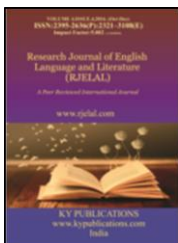
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ABSTRACT

We live in an era where everyone is connected to one another through the new world of social networking. People love to stay connected, spending time socializing, sharing and interacting. According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 72 percent of high school and 78 percent of college students spend time on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc . But can we utilize the virtual world of social networking for teaching and learning purposes? The present study aimed to examine how the social networking media like Facebook and WhatsApp are being used by the tertiary level students and their teachers in Kerala for language learning and teaching purposes and to propose how these media can be effectively utilized for teaching and learning English. To do so, separate questionnaires were administered among 200 tertiary level students and 20 Assistant Professors of English in Kerala to elicit the current usage of Facebook and WhatsApp for language teaching and learning activities. The analysis of the questionnaire proved that both the learners and the teachers hardly use Facebook and WhatsApp as an educational tool. It also proved that the learners as well as the teachers are unaware of the countless language learning possibilities that the social media offer. The investigator hence suggests various range of options like vocabulary games, grammar games, information gap activities, threaded discussions and so on that can be carried out through the social networking media to engage, motivate and involve learners into brainstorming and sensible discussions. It also allows the teacher to invent and personalize the teaching methods according to his/her skill, personality, needs of the learners and the situation. Incorporation of different teaching strategies and approaches beyond the routine makes language teaching and learning a new experience both for the teachers and the learners.

Keywords: Social Networking, Facebook, WhatsApp, Language teaching and learning.

We live in an era where everyone is connected to one another through the new world of social networking. Social networks help us share and interact; stay connected and reconnected with our friends whom we may have not been in touch for years for various reasons. It thus plays a considerable role in bringing in the sense of proximity as it bridges the insurmountable physical distances that we experienced previously. It not only gives immediate access to information about happenings all over the world but also provides a platform for expressing views, communicating and

providing support for global causes and so on. But can we utilize the virtual world of social networking for language teaching and learning purposes?

According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 72 percent of high school and 78 percent of college students spend time on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Studies and discussions on how social networking can be used effectively for language teaching and learning are in its emerging stage. However, many argue that social networking tools increased motivation for learning (Clark and Grube , 2010, Stevenson and Lin, 2010) and is capable of generating meaningful output and stimulating students' interest in language learning (Chartrand 2012). According to Karpati (2009) social web tools are capable of providing authentic language education setting which in turn helps in achieving high communicative competence in a foreign language.

A study conducted by the British Council on how the internet has affected the preferred learning styles of young people into learning English states that 69% of learners around the world agreed that they learned English more effectively when socializing informally. It suggests that learning happens most effectively when the context and the content are relevant to learners' life and also when they are relaxed as it is then they are more open to suggestions and new ideas.

McLaughlin and Lee (2008, p.I) define Pedagogy 2.0 as integrating 'Web 2.0 tools that support knowledge, sharing, peer – to – peer networking and access to a global audience with socio-constructive learning approaches to facilitate greater learner autonomy, agency and personalization.' The social networking tools enable learners to gain knowledge through interactions and sharing. It helps them personalize their learning activities and promotes learner centeredness. It gains them opportunities to do tasks in new and different ways by giving the learner the opportunity to connect, share and discuss ideas (Conole and Alevizou.2010). It provides a collaborative e-learning platform integrating Connectivism principles (Siemens (2005) and Downes (2010)) and hence facilitating open, collective and rapid dissemination of content and information.

Despite Social networking media's popularity for connectivity, personal interaction and transmission and spreading of information, it has not been widely used in education in India. The present study attempts to examine how the social networking platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are being used by the tertiary level students and their teachers in Kerala for language learning and teaching purposes and proposes a few ways in which these media can be effectively utilized for teaching and learning English.

Aim

To explore the perceptions and experiences of a few tertiary level students and Assistant Professors of English about the use of Facebook and WhatsApp for English language teaching and learning and to enumerate different ways in which Facebook and WhatsApp can be used for educational purposes.

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research to assess the use of most commonly used Web 2.0 tools for teaching and learning purposes in the tertiary level and also to evaluate how students and teachers identify Facebook and WhatsApp as educational resources, their attitude and experience towards using the above Web 2.0 tools for English language teaching and learning process. Two self-designed close ended questionnaires, for teachers and students, were administered for collecting the data.

Population

The population of the study comprised of 200 tertiary level students doing their graduation in four different colleges under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala and 20 Asst. Professors of English ,below 10 years of teaching experience, working in different colleges under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala.

Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaires for survey, which comprised of 10 close ended simple questions, one designed for students and another for teachers, were aimed at to identify teachers' and students' attitudes towards using the most common ICT tools, Facebook and WhatsApp for language teaching and learning activities.

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The objectives of the survey were to find out:

(1) Students' and teachers' accessibility to social networking media and the activities they do using its tools.

(2) Students' and teachers' use of social networking sites for language learning and teaching activities outside the classroom.

(3) Students and teachers' awareness on the possibilities of social networking sites for language teaching and learning.

(4) The language used to communicate while on Facebook and WhatsApp

(5) Their opinion on using social media tools for language teaching and learning.

The investigator visited four different colleges under Mahatma Gandhi University and administered questionnaires to students randomly and collected back the filled questionnaire on the spot. Later the data collected was organized, analyzed and interpreted.

Analysis of the questionnaires

Sl.No	Areas covered	Percentage of students	Percentage of teachers
1.	Whether having Facebook account	92	80
2	Frequency of visiting Facebook		
	a) Daily once	4	8
	b) Many times daily	74	52
	c) Weekly once or twice	6	16
	d) Not very often	8	4
3.	Device used to open Facebook account Mobile Phone Desktop/laptop	85 7	80
4.	Activities done on Facebook		
	a. Chatting,		
	b. watching and sharing videos,	4	15
	c. updating timeline		
	d. uploading photos		
	e. all of the above	88	65
5.	Awareness about the educational possibilities through Facebook	78	100
6.	People who used Facebook for teaching and learning	42	38
7.	People having WhatsApp account	94	100
8.	Language used for chatting on WhatsApp		
	1. English	5	85
	2. Malayalam	7	
	3. Mix of both	18	
	4. Malayalam in English	64	15
9.	Usage of WhatsApp for teaching learning purposes		
	a. Sharing pdf, links and passing information	94	76
	b. For doing threaded discussion		
	c. Brain storming activities		
10	Opinion on using Facebook and WhatsApp for doing after assignments and after class works		
	a. An interesting idea	83	65
	b. Don't support the idea		

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			13
c.	Doubtful about the practicability		13
d.	Don't support due to lack of access all the time	17	22

The analysis of the survey questionnaire given to the students proved that almost all students have Facebook and WhatsApp and 78% of them are aware of the possibilities of using it for learning purposes. Majority of students are positive towards the use of Facebook and WhatsApp for language teaching and learning and consider the idea of doing after class assignments via Facebook and WhatsApp interesting. The analysis also proved that students and teachers use WhatsApp more than Facebook for learning activities.

The analysis of the survey questionnaire given to the teachers showed that out of 20 teachers four do not have a Facebook account but all use WhatsApp and are aware of the teaching -learning possibilities using Facebook and WhatsApp. However, the enthusiasm and interest shown by the students in using social networks for learning activities were not there among teachers. They seemed to be doubtful about the affordability and worried of the constraints of using social media. An informal interaction with a few of them proved that they fear that the active involvement of the students on social media may be seen fading away when it is used for educational purposes and hence, not suitable for doing serious teaching-learning activities.

12 Ways in Which Facebook or WhatsApp can be used for language teaching and learning

Art-craft approach to teaching sees teaching as something which depends on the teacher's individual skill and personality. According to Zahorik (1986, p. 22) teachers should develop an approach which involves "… invention and personalization. A good teacher is a person who assesses the needs and possibilities of a situation and creates and uses practices that have promise for that situation". The teacher has to analyze a situation, realize the range of options available and then select an alternative which is likely to be the most effective for the circumstances.

Though Facebook and WhatsApp are not designed and intended to use for teaching and learning activities, its vast accessibility, wide reach and popularity, the easiness and flexibility in using it etc. make these Web 2.0 tools an appropriate platform for making learning stress free and fun filled. If use wisely these tools can revolutionize the traditional classroom teaching and learning experiences.

1) Using Facebook Pages for Teaching Different Subjects or Classes: The teacher can create Facebook pages for different classes or subjects and post matters related to pre and post classes. Learners by following those pages stay connected with the learning activities provided by the teacher and also can refer to it anytime, anywhere.

2) Creating Groups: Teacher can create a group on WhatsApp or Facebook and invite all the students of the class to join the group. Creating a group of the language class allows the learners to share information without having to friend each other. It allows the learners to interact each other and it may result in developing a strong bond among the learners.

3) Vocabulary and Grammar Games: Teacher can provide links to play games related to grammar and vocabulary taught in the class instead of giving printed worksheet for doing exercises. It will enhance learners' interest and promote a fun-filled way of learning. Also, online games allow the learner to learn at his/her pace and give immediate feedback.

4) Books and Films Reviews: Teachers can ask students to post their reviews of the book or film they watched/ read. It will give others opportunity to read their friends' reviews and post their comments on it.

5) Making Announcements: Teacher can use Facebook or WhatsApp as a platform to send messages or reminders about the upcoming events or class programmes.

6) Giving Class Notes: Teachers can post notes after the class on the page or in the group. It saves class hours of both teachers and students and also helps those who were absent know about the class updates.

7) Brainstorming Activities and Threaded Discussions: Teacher can post tasks which need brainstorming on Facebook page or WhatsApp group. It gives opportunities for those who are otherwise shy and hence may not respond in the

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class hours. Teacher can start the discussion by posting questions that stimulate thinking and asking students to give their views and opinions. It also enables the students to get to know each other well during these kinds of learning activities. This is very helpful especially in large class room settings as doing activities in large classes in the classroom may not be effective due to the strength and also consumes lots of time.

8) Sharing Blogs, Websites and Talks: Teacher can share language teaching and learning blogs or websites or talks like *ted talks* that add relevancy to the class. Also, teacher can post a video or a part of a film and ask questions for checking their listening comprehension.

9) Posting Assignments and After Class Works: Teacher can ask the students to post their assignments on social media group instead of submitting the printed matter. It will help others in the class to access everyone's assignments and hence time can be saved for collecting others assignment for reference at the time of examination

10) Posting Class Activity Videos: Teacher can record videos of group activity done in the classroom and post it on the page for the learners to watch. It enables them to review their performances and improve it next time.

11) Posting Articles or Links to Online Articles/Books: Teacher can post articles or links to online article/books for students to enhance their reading skills.

12) Using WhatsApp to Enhance Speaking Skills: Teacher can give a speaking task and can tell the students to record it and post it on WhatsApp. However, it would be a herculean task for the teacher to assess the learners' performance if the class strength is large.

Benefits of using Facebook and WhatsApp for teaching and learning activities

1. Provide flexibility and stress free environment
2. Familiarity and wide accessibility
3. Rapid dissemination of information
4. Improve students' group work skills and promote socialization

5. Increase students' cooperation and motivation and allow autonomous and independent learning.
6. Enable close student - teacher relationships.
7. Extend learning beyond the traditional space of the classroom.

Drawbacks of Using Facebook and WhatsApp for Educational purposes

1. Chances of information overload (also known as infobesity or infoxication) and lack of control over the content and source.
2. Lack of appropriate digital competence among teachers to use it favorably.
3. Time consuming as its effectiveness depends on regular updates and timely feedback.
4. Poor internet connection
5. Risk of privacy violations and bullying.

Suggestions for effective handling of Facebook and WhatAapp for educational purposes

1. Proper integration of tools and better management by the teacher
2. Proper guidance and control over the use of content.
3. Having a clear plan of execution and giving clear cut instructions like no SMS language, only Standard English allowed and so on.
4. Give reinforcement through proper and timely feedback to motivate learners to continue their contribution.

Limitations of the Study

1. Samples for the study are chosen randomly from semi urban to rural areas.
2. The questionnaire used to collect the required data was self-designed and used without a validation process.
3. Results would have been different if done in an urban area.

Suggestions for Further Research

On the basis of the study the following suggestions for further research are given:

1. More studies need to be carried to find out the most effective Web2.0 tools that can be integrated.

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2. More studies can be conducted on the use of Facebook and Whatsapp at different levels of language acquisition.

3. Longitudinal studies on large samples may be conducted to confirm the results in different geographical areas.

Concluding Remarks

The success of integrating Web 2.0 tools into teaching and learning depends on lots of factors like teachers' technical and digital competence, timely involvement and feedbacks, control over the content, internet accessibility and so on. Dr. Charles Juwah rightly remarks as "…The success and promotion of effective learning is dependent on a range of factors: learner's ability, sound pedagogy, the nature and alignment of the curriculum, assessment, socio cultural and accessibility issues and so on". (p.xiv) Effective learning occurs only when there is proper planning to execute a sound pedagogy keeping in view of learners' needs, interests and sociocultural background. Many of the Web 2.0 tools though not designed for teaching and learning can be used to stimulate learners' motivation and help the teacher impart learning activities in a stress free environment. The need of the hour is to carry out more research to find out the effective ways in which these tools can be used for teaching and learning English.

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