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A Comprehensive Literature Review of the Advantages and Challenges of Applying Facebook to Education and Learning English as a Foreign Language

Po-Chi Kao^{1, 2, *}, Cheng-Shane Hu¹, Pei-Lun Kao^{1, 2}

¹General Education Center, Chang Gung University, Taoyuan, Taiwan

²Linkou Branch, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, Taoyuan, Taiwan

Email address

mk@mail.cgu.edu.tw (Po-Chi Kao)

*Corresponding author

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Abstract

This study comprehensively reviews the literature of applying Facebook to education and learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Several advantages have been found to incorporate Facebook into education and EFL learning, such as promoting student-centered learning, boosting motivation and confidence, constructing knowledge through social interaction, and providing a comfortable and approachable learning environment, etc. In contrast, a few concerns have also been found in the literature. These concerns include distraction from studies that Facebook may cause, privacy and online safety, issues of teacher-student interaction, and the fact that some students simply couldn't recognize the advantages of learning via Facebook. Despite these concerns, Facebook has redefined learning in many ways. This study serves as an important step to the awareness of Facebook's impact on education and EFL learning.

1. Introduction

Technological advancement has been a pivotal element in human history. From time and time again, it changes the way things are done. One such change comes in the form of online learning. Online learning is, by definition, a model of instructions that combine the usage of computer technology and the purpose of teaching and learning in a classroom [1]. Web 2.0 technologies such as Facebook, blogs, video sites, and web applications are fine examples [2]. These examples provide an avenue for individuals to exchange knowledge, attend online classes, or even mediate real time discussion. Such feats were neither available nor possible in the previous learning environment [3]. Among social networking websites, Facebook stands out among the rest, being the most popular social networking site with nearly two billion monthly active users. This statistic is recent as of March 2017 [4].

2. Discussion

2.1. Advantages

Social networking giant Facebook gives opportunities for people to connect in various

manners around the globe. It also contains features that allow users to connect through face-to-face or written conversations. Through either of the two means, users are allowed to present and share ideas, have a discussion with anyone through an online discussion board, and carry on conversations in real time. Due to the fact that Facebook, as an avenue, allows people to interact at their own pace and time in a digital environment, it is ideal apparatus to be incorporated into education. Such possibility was explored and, according to Esteves [5], it yielded positive results. It not only enhanced independent student learning [5], but it also added colors to online discussion [6]. According to previous studies, by engaging in these environments, it also increased students' abilities in English language competency [3], English as a foreign language (EFL) achievement [7], and vocabulary and grammar [8]. Learning through an enriching and stimulating online environment, students have proved to not only improve English skills as a whole, but it also promoted content organization, language and mechanics [9].

In addition, Facebook's ability to motivate students to practice and rehearse their second or foreign languages outside of classroom may allow a more comfortable learning curve. Ultimately, achieving the goal of language development through online classroom participation is made possible through Facebook [10].

Facebook is also a great environment for people to share knowledge within a group. This technology permits users to express and share their existing knowledge by voicing them through their own opinions. Through such means, it allows individuals to obtain new knowledge for themselves [3]. By sharing and digesting knowledge obtained through Facebook, it allows users to solidify knowledge and try its meaning outside of classroom [11]. Instructors and teachers can further amplify the benefits by using Facebook as an interim mediator and encouraging students to take advantage of opportunities on Facebook to seek their own sources of knowledge and validate information. Thus, a beneficial self-learning environment can be created on Facebook.

Facebook is also a great place that nurtures knowledge construct through social interaction. It provides opportunities for users to gain knowledge through interaction with other Facebook users by asking peers and teachers questions to achieve additional understanding, particularly for homework or ideas [12]. Furthermore, Facebook also allows individuals to establish friendships and create more opportunities for academic interactions through online learning [2]. By exploring the minds of others on Facebook, students can achieve a more wholesome understanding of a concept that is not possible in conventional classes [3].

Part of Facebook's tremendous global success can be accredited to its ease to access. It plays a huge part in most students' lives and makes communication among students concerning school work easy [13]. This view is supported by Saikaew, *et al.* [14], who stated that students would welcome Facebook as a supplementary learning means.



Figure 1. Summarized Advantages of Implementing Facebook in Education.

Allowing Facebook to play a huge role in English language development has proved to elevate students' capabilities on multiple fronts, such as "grammar, structure, and content, organisation, and vocabulary" (p. 840) [15] alongside with team coordination development, and stress alleviation [15]. In addition to the primary skill development, it also plays a major role in affecting students' learning motivation. According to [16], implementation of Facebook in language learning demonstrated signs of improvement in students' motivation in EFL writing and their willingness to engage and interact with other individuals and instructors. Elevated learning motivation and interests has a positive correlation with student-to-student interactions [3]. Jackson [17] also unveiled that students who are Facebook users have stronger retention levels than their counterparts. To further solidify such findings, Simpson [18] conducted a study using Facebook as a mean to improve English writing abilities for high, medium to low achieving students. The results are extremely encouraging.

In summary, it is undeniable that Facebook positively creates a student-centered EFL learning environment that nurtures and rewards an individual's active involvement in his or her own education. The incorporating Facebook in students' learning process has countless benefits (see Figure 1), ranging from promoting student interactions both inside and outside of classroom, engaging knowledge share across various demographics, and amplifying the confidence and motivation needed for individuals to actively build EFL skills and boost their willingness to take on opportunities to exercise critical thinking skills, to creating meaningful experience of EFL learning through the exchange of information [19].

2.2. Challenges

However, it is not to say that using Facebook as an online learning avenue comes with no concerns. One of the most known worries is distraction in learning process. Other common concerns include students' inability to regard Facebook as an educational tool as well as any potential issues that may stem from individual privacy. Last but not least, the potential inappropriate interaction between students and teachers through Facebook could also be a concern. The challenges of applying Facebook to education and EFL learning are illustrated in Figure 2.

It should come as no surprise that having Facebook is a very potent source of distractions. The majority of student users today spend a significant portion of their days surfing through social network applications and websites, and find joy in connection to the rest of the world through such avenue. Ultimately, such behaviors can lead to the loss of time that could have been invested in academic pursuit instead [15, 19]. It is voiced that educators should be equipped with such knowledge of Facebook's potential downside as an educational tool before deciding to follow through with the implementation [20].

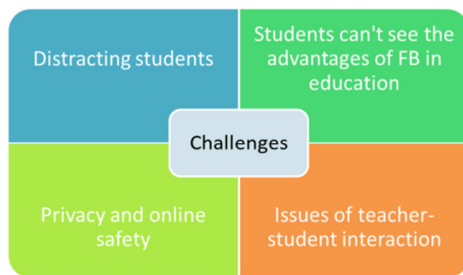


Figure 2. Challenges of integrating Facebook into education.

Not everyone is on board with perceiving Facebook as a valuable learning tool. Undergraduate students in Belgium simply did not share the same sentiment when it comes to utilizing Facebook as an online learning tool in higher education [21]. However, as suggested by Wang [22], it is the responsibility of the educators to combat such resistance and reinforce the positives that can stem from utilizing Facebook in students' pursue for education.

In the age of technology, cyber security is becoming more and more prominent as a problem. According to Malita [23], using Facebook for student learning is no exception. Many students are not aware of the potency of dangers online that stems from sharing private information as well as cyberbullying that are made easy due to the lack of direct consequences [24]. He motioned that instructors should give students ample amounts of training, so they can have sufficient awareness to combat such risk.

The concerns of potential inappropriate relationships that can develop from Facebook interaction is perhaps the most dangerous hurdle [24, 25]. Teclehaimanot and Hickman [25] suggested that student-teacher interaction through Facebook can be a double-edged sword that can potentially leave a negative effect on students' learning. According to them,

Facebook interaction is deemed more acceptable to male students. Researchers conveyed that educators have the responsibility of knowing students' behaviors on Facebook and should be precise when concerning specific tasks. They are also responsible for informing students of the advantages of performing such tasks online.

3. Conclusion

All in all, Facebook has revolutionized learning. On one hand, it gives an attractive avenue to students to discover new methodology to exchange information and knowledge that would ultimately stimulate students' desire to learn on their own. The advantages of implementing Facebook in students' learning process vastly outweigh the negatives. It is vital that EFL courses exploit on such opportunities that are provided through the fusion of learning and technology [26]. In conclusion, such concept of integrating Facebook into education and EFL learning is getting more popular, this study serves as an important step to the awareness of Facebook's impact on education and EFL learning.

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