Encouraging ESL Discourse Exchanges via Facebook: A Study on Engineering Students

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Abstract

Abstract: Online social networks have been widely used by educators as an alternative tool for language teaching and learning. In this study, Facebook is used as a tool to facilitate students' discussion activity. The activity involved 85 students who enrolled in a compulsory English course. The students were added and grouped in the "Facebook Group" named 'AE101 Communicative English 1, December 2011 Session," which was created by the researcher. After completing the activities in the Facebook group, the students were requested to complete a questionnaire comprising 4-point-Likert-scale questions and two structured questions. The results showed that the students felt that participating in group activities in the Facebook group made learning more interesting. Besides that, they felt comfortable expressing and sharing their ideas with their other coursemates, and they also learnt new vocabulary from reading the comments written by their coursemates. However, the collaboration between lecturer and students is essential in determining the success of implementing learning activities via Facebook.

Keywords*: Facebook Group activities, Learning, Perception, Social Network*

Introduction

Traditionally, the common teaching method practised by educators is the "chalk and talk" method in which students would sit quietly and listen to their teachers who would do all the talking in front of the class (Coppola & Barbara, 2000). As mentioned by Chen (2003), the case of "sage on the stage" has ruled the traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom for a long time. However, today's students tend to be active and they do not want to sit and listen to their teachers talk, and copy notes all the time. This challenges modern educators to innovate their teaching methods to suit their students' needs. Adding to the challenge is the fact that rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have brought various changes in methodology to enhance the teaching and learning process. Web 2.0 in particular, has allowed innovations in education to be supported by sophisticated but user-friendly social networking sites (Cohen, 2011).

One of the popular social networks widely incorporated in education is Facebook. Facebook is currently the leading social networking site with an estimated 750,000,000 monthly visitors and the number of users are increasing daily (Strickland, 2011). The total number of Facebook Users in Malaysia is 12,269,100 with the largest age group ranging between 18 to 24 years, followed by users aged 25 to 34 (Ong, 2010). Facebook is operated and privately owned by Facebook Inc. Since 2006, people aged 13 years and above, and who have a valid e-mail address can sign up as Facebook users. In Facebook, users can add new friends, send messages and update their personal profile. In addition, users can also join common-interest user groups that are organised by workplace, school, or college. Due to its vast pool of users, advocates of online learning have