

Using Facebook to Stimulate more Teacher-Students and Students-Students Interactions

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)* The paper was developed from the research entitled “*Pengembangan Model E-Learning, Blog dan Jejaring Sosial Facebook untuk Meningkatkan Kualitas Pembelajaran di Perguruan Tinggi*” funded by the Directorate General of Higher Education in 2012)

Abstract

Social media Facebook is now used by millions of people all around the world. Indonesia itself has become the biggest four of facebook users after the United States, Brazil, and India. This big number of users has made facebook the most popular platforms for online social networking among youth, and university students (Petrovic, at al. 2012). Facebook has a number of features as groups, instant messaging, video and picture posts, downloadable application etc. that can potentially be exploited by teachers and students to support and facilitate learning. This research was aimed at exploring those potentials especially in stimulating more teacher-students and students - students interactions. It was conducted at College of Languages of Sultan Agung Islamic University Semarang. The subjects were the students taking the course of *the Introduction to Second Language Acquisition* in the even semester of 2011/2012. In addition to classroom learning, the teacher created a facebook group and other applications for the course and added all the students as members so that he and the students were connected to each other. Topics for discussions to stimulate interactions between the teacher and the students as well as between students and students were posted. The students responded to questions, gave comments, even asked for materials (reading resources and references) to the group members. These activities were observed, categorized and analyzed. The analysis proves that facebook can be used to stimulate more interactions between the teacher and students as well as the students and the students.

Keywords: social media facebook, online, interaction,

Introduction

Interaction is defined in some different ways. It is the learner's connection with the content of the course, other learners, the instructor, and the medium of technology in certain course which all result in a close exchange of thoughts and ideas (Thurmond & Wambach, 2004). It is the process of one-to-one action, which can be done verbally as in the written and the spoken words, or non-verbally as by the use of eye contact, facial expression, and proximity (Robinson, 1994). For students, getting involved in interactions gives a number of advantages. It gives the opportunity to learn from each other, to get feedback and to build a strong social relationship (Naimat, 2011). In classroom setting, interaction creates the best learning of language through the real performance and the increased knowledge (Lier, 1988). It also helps the learners use the language in real situation (Nunan, 1991). Through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen and read materials. Students may have the opportunity to develop their production of language as they listen to their fellows in the classroom. In addition, there will be much listening to the materials without any discouragement of the spoken response (Rivers, 1987).

Despite the advantages, many teachers find difficulties in how to design a classroom learning in which teacher and students, and students and students can interact intensively so that they can learn from each other. Passive classes are common problems. Students are unresponsive and avoid

interaction with the teacher (Snell, 1999). My experiences show that students are not very enthusiastic to respond when the teacher addresses them with questions or asks for comments. Very often it is not because they really have nothing to say, but rather they are not getting used to interacting or responding to the teacher's queries. Another possible reason is that direct interaction with the teacher in the classroom requires greater courage and effort since it brings harder pressure psychologically.

Because of the importance of interaction in language acquisition, it is very reasonable that teacher has to find ways to facilitate interactions both the teacher- students interactions and students-students interactions. This paper discusses how facebook can be used to stimulate more teacher-students as well as students-students interactions.

Facebook

Social media Facebook is now used by millions of people all around the world. The social media originally designed by Mark Zuckerberg and some of his friends namely Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes is getting more and more popular. Facebook now has a very diverse community of users at all levels of education and areas of society, including companies and universities. This big number of users has made facebook the most popular platforms for online social networking among youth, and university students (Petrovic, Petrovic, & Jeremic, 2012). Until December 24, 2012, facebook has 981,324,960 audiences globally with the biggest number are from the United States of America with 169,673,580 audiences or 54,69%. Other countries that have big audiences of facebook consecutively are Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, United Kingdom, Turkey, Philippines, France and Germany (www.checkfacebook.com). In December 2012, in Indonesia there were 51,392,040 facebook users.

The history of this social media starts when in February 2004 Mr Zuckerberg launched "The facebook", as it was originally known. The name was taken from the sheets of paper distributed to freshmen, profiling students and staff. Within 24 hours, 1,200 Harvard students had signed up, and after one month, over half of the undergraduate population had a profile. The network was promptly extended to other Boston universities, the Ivy League and eventually all US universities. It became facebook.com in August 2005. US high schools could sign up from September 2005, then it began to spread worldwide, reaching UK universities in the following month. As of September 2006, the network was extended beyond educational institutions to anyone with a registered email address. The site remains free to join, and makes a profit through advertising revenue (Phillips, 2007).

When a user first registers with facebook, he / she needs to set up and create a profile page. The page is based on a basic template where users fill in various personal identifiers. This is customizable so a user can include as much or as little information as he / she wants. After setting up a profile he / she can begin adding friends, join groups and become fans of pages. Facebook offers a search tool that allows users to search for specific information like people and groups. Users can join networks (based on city, workplace, school and region) and allow others in that network to view their profile. Facebook security settings allow users to make their page as accessible or inaccessible as they desire.

Observing facebook carefully, one will learn that facebook offers numerous features that allow users to interact in many different ways. Each profile has a Wall, a space that allows friends to post messages, videos, and pictures for the user and others to see. The Pokes feature allows users to send a virtual "poke" to each other; a notification is then sent to the user that is poked. A user can create a Photo Album where they can upload pictures. Users can also update their status and write a mini-blog or post a story for others to read. This application has a specific place on a user's page, and they can "tag" others in the note. The news feed highlights information like profile changes, upcoming events, birthdays, status updates, photo uploads and more, relating to a users' friend base. Tagging allows users to specify people in notes, photos, videos and status updates. This information is sent to users that are tagged so they can easily access information posted.

The Use of Facebook for Education

Studies show that social network tools support educational activities by making interaction (Selwyn, 2007). Social networking helps students develop their autonomy in learning, build connectivity and interaction, foster relationship among them therefore, creating wider learning opportunities. Facebook helps teachers connect with their students about assignments, upcoming events, useful links, and provide constructive educational outcomes in a variety of fields (Pempek,

Yermolayewa, & Calvert, 2009). Students can use facebook to contact classmates for asking helps in doing assignments, getting learning resources, sharing ideas, etc.

Petrovic et.al concluded that facebook is a possible educational tool. Their research indicated that using social networking, such as facebook, increases the productivity of the students (Petrovic, Petrovic, & Jeremic, 2012). Since the research was investigating the use of facebook for the course of Environmental Quality System, the use of facebook also improves interest in environmental issues as well as increasing awareness of necessity for taking environmental actions and changing their environmental behavior patterns.

A study on the use of facebook on language class conducted by Blattner & Lomicka (2012) suggests that students respond in a positive manner toward the use of facebook in education. Social networking sites as facebook can provide learners with attractive social interactions as well as new way to find cultural information that stimulates language learners to further explore a target culture on their own, thereby becoming active partners in discussion and exchange.

Facebook can also strengthen the bond between mentor and mentee or in general term teacher and students. Communication that occurs on the page positively impacted the relationship between teacher and students. The communication then results in increased participation of the students (Pollara & Jie, 2011). The analysis of Pollara & Jie's study revealed that most students believed that they learned more because of using group page and thought it was helpful in achieving their goals for their project and for their group. Most students would like to use social networking for educational purposes. In addition, they liked seeing how other students responded to their posts on facebook.

Methods

Participants

The participants of the research were the teacher and the students of College of Languages of Sultan Agung Islamic University who in the even semester of 2011/2012 were taking the course of *the Introduction to Second Language Acquisition*. It is an obligatory course for the students of English Education Program. There were 45 students and they had one classroom meeting a week. Though, they were encouraged to use English in and outside the classroom, their main everyday languages were actually Indonesian and Javanese.

Facebook Design and Procedure

The study started on the second half of the semester after the students had midterm examination. It was announced to the class that besides having regular meeting once a week as scheduled, the class would use facebook to support the teaching and learning process for the rest of the semester. All the participants were invited to join the facebook group already prepared by the teacher at www.facebook.com/hartonoengfe. The name of the group was SLA Class of COLASULA 2012 (COLASULA stands for College of Languages of UNISSULA). The facebook was equipped with some applications as *slideshare*, "quotev" quiz, *share*. It was also linked directly to the teacher's blog so that the posts in the blog can be shared to the group. The classroom meetings ran as usual; the teacher presented materials, students responded, students made presentations and had discussions, but it was not quite active, as when teacher offered sessions for questions and answers or discussions, usually only one or two students really responded.

Some materials of classroom sessions were posted on the facebook group. The teacher as the administrator also provided links to useful reading sources that students could follow, and posted questions or topics for discussions.

Data Collecting

Data for this study were collected from the postings made by both the teacher and the students. First, the data were categorized into Status (S) and Comments (C). Then, they were functionally labeled as *Initiation (I)*, *Response (R)*, and *Feedback / Follow up (F)* (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). A posting was considered as *Initiation* when it introduced a new topic and it was a *Response* when it responded to a topic. The data also included participants who made the post and the date. They were collected from May 30 to July 25, 2012 (9 weeks). The following is the example:

No	CATE GORY	FUNCTI ON	BY	DATE	THE POST
1	S	I	T	May 30, 2012	This week's session of SLA is about individual learner differences. the topic is interesting and important since the success of language acquisition or language lear.....

Note:

S : New Status I : Initiation T : Teacher

Results and Discussions

Forty five students taking the course of *the Introduction to Second Language Acquisition* joined the group, but only 30 students (66%) participated in the interactions by making new posts or comments. Although it was only 66%, this was much higher than the number students usually participating in regular classroom sessions. Surprisingly, many of the students who posted comments on facebook were not quite active in the classroom. Some even were labeled as 'silent' students.

As explained in the previous part, the data were tabulated into *Status (S)* –when a member of the group posted a new status; *Comment (C)* - when the member commented on certain status; *Initiation (I)* – mostly new statuses were considered as Initiations, but there were also comments which were categorized as initiations since, rather than commenting on the previous status, they introduced new topics; *Response (R)* – when the comments responded to a certain status or certain comments; and finally *Follow up / Feedback (F)* –when the posts clearly developed the interactions with other topics, or provided feedback or evaluation only. However, there was a complexity in determining F because these facebook interactions involved many participants; it was not one-one interactions but one-to-many interactions. Overlaps did occur. The following table shows the findings

	S	C	I	R	F
Teacher (T)	15	16	15	7	9
Students (Ss)	11	95	17	67	22
Total	26	111	32	74	31

The total number of interaction was 137, 31 interactions were made by the teacher, while 106 were made by students. This is very interesting. Compared to the number of status and comments students made during classroom sessions, the ones made through facebook were incredible. This proves that facebook group may stimulate more teacher-students as well as students-students interactions. Another interesting finding is that while initiations in most classroom interactions were dominated by T, with facebook group, collectively students could also make significant number of initiations.

Closer observation to Statuses made by T provides information that status which merely informed couldn't stimulate comments. For example, T posted a new status saying: "If you want to know more about SLA, please go to <http://...>" This status had only 1 response from S. There were 10 such statuses and even some of them did not get any response. The case was different when the status posted by T contained topics or issues for discussion. The followings are the examples:

Data No. 12 "Does anyone like to give comment on the topic we discussed this week on the Role of Grammar Teaching / formal instruction in SLA? Are you really in favor with Krashen that grammar teaching is not necessary? or on the contrary that grammar teaching is helpful for acquisition?" This post got 37 comments from Ss.

Data No. 27 "Krashen draws a very interesting conclusion that acquisition will only happen when there is input. to be optimal, input must satisfy the following requirement: 1) comprehensible, 2) interesting / relevance, 3) not grammatically sequenced, 4) sufficient quantity, 5) learners must not be at defensive (they have to have low affective filter), and the last 6) it provides tools for conversational management. If we bring the requirements and match them with learning approaches / methods we

discussed last semester namely GTM, DA, ALM, TPR and CLT, what do you think? I believe that you have great ideas on this topic.”

This post drew 14 comments from Ss.

Another post by T asking for comments on the use of facebook and e-learning attracted students' participations as it got 31 significantly long comments.

Interactions also occurred among students, as evidenced in the following data.

Data No. 24: “Keep fighting for SLA examination tomorrow...let's do our best...”

Data No. 24.1: “Oke plend..I-Alloh, I've already to do it today.thx 4 the materials u've shared here, it's very useful.”

Data No. 18.2: “Do U have some file 'bout error correction on SLA??”

Data No. 20: “Hey Ghandi Eightynine, this file may help you. Read this out...!!”

Responses made by Ss were also amazing. Students could make clear and well-structured comments. The following is an example (**Data No.12.13**):

“Actually grammar is really important in learning English, especially in writing. But sometimes in speaking, when someone speak use grammar or thinking grammar first before they speak, it will make their speaking is not fluent and feel doubt if any error in their speaking. Although they find the difficulties if they use grammar in their speaking but I think that grammar is necessary for learners in learning acquisition, because without grammar our speaking is not arrange, and may be there is misunderstanding if we make conversation with another person without use grammar.”

(Comment made by S-12, 92 words)

At the end of the program, students were asked to comment on the use of facebook to aid their learning activity. There were 30 different comments from 18 different students. They said that it was positive as it was effective, refreshing, good, inspiring, useful for improving English, etc. and it developed students' ability in English especially for their writing, etc. The following is one of the comments:

Data 28.4: “It is good for me because I used to keep in touch with this way, I could join the discussion wherever I am, wonderful, many students get involved with this the students who always keep silent in the class would share here, for the passive it is good cuz they wouldn't be embarrassed anymore and for the active one had been more than in class, but one thing that we sould pay attention more is not everyone could access internet easily it is not small problem.”

Conclusions

In language learning, interactions play an important role, language teachers therefore, have to find ways to facilitate interactions. This is not an easy job however, especially in the passive classes. In this case, facebook can be an option. The study shows that facebook can be used to stimulate teacher-students and students-students interactions. It was proven that by using facebook group, more students could get involved in interactions. To be effective, teacher's posts must contain not only information but topics which can be commented or discussed by students. Students found that interaction by facebook was effective and refreshing. It could help develop their English and writing ability.

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