

FACEBOOKING IN TODAY'S NET GENERATION: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Nooreen Noordin & Dorothy Ting Siao Wei

Universiti Putra Malaysia

(Email: nooreen@upm.edu.my or nooyeen@yahoo.com)

ABSTRACT

The popularity of Facebook (FB) skyrocketed during the last decade as students and educators joined the bandwagon by getting themselves connected as active users for social networking purposes. Since then its wide array of technological affordances has evolved and its versatility as a language education tool has been researched extensively as researchers find ways to use social networking in academia. This study explored the use of FB in general as well as language learning among 150 secondary school students in the ESL context. It looks into Facebook usage in terms of its frequency of use, types of usage and whether teachers actually use Facebook in their lessons. The study employed a descriptive survey approach substantiated with some qualitative information obtained from semi-structured interviews. Results showed that the majority of the students use FB at least once a day and a variety of FB functions are used such as chatting, updating status, messaging friends, commenting on other people's posts or just mainly getting connected with their friends. Students also use FB for academic purposes which include asking friends about homework and getting updates on what went on in the language class. Findings from the interviews conducted revealed that their teachers were hesitant in using FB as a means to stay connected with their students. Despite the fact that students were open to the notion of using FB as part of the English lesson, teachers were skeptical in using it as an instructional tool. This paper highlights the issue of whether FB can be a viable tool in language learning by providing some recommendations on how it can be used in the classroom.

Keywords: Facebook, social networking, language learning

Introduction

The Internet has been deemed as the most life changing invention ever created. Social networking sites have become such a popular trend among internet users that some claim that life would not be exciting without Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or MySpace. Schafer (2009) defined Facebook as a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos

and video clips, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. Created by Mark Zuckerberg together with Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hedges, who started off creating a site for fun, Facebook's popularity skyrocketed within a short period of time.

In the Malaysian context, it is reported that there are currently around 2,365,780 Facebook users which account for 43.0% penetration in the Malaysian population. The Facebook users in Malaysia consist of 69.77% Internet users in Malaysia, the majority of which are young people between the age of 12 to 18 who have access to a computer and Internet and are mostly likely to have their own Facebook accounts (International Webmasters Association, 2012). Some of the features found in Facebook include News Feed, Wall, Timeline, Notifications, Like, Photos - just to name a few, have become a trademark which enable users to conveniently connect and network digitally. While it appears that a growing number of people in Malaysia use Facebook, there has been little research on to what extent and for what purposes students use Facebook in Malaysia.

Initial means of using Facebook in the education context is only to create a learning community online and out of the classroom. Facebook is only seen as a tool for communication, to connect teachers and students out of class, to connect the school staff and also to share information and notifications. Little has been done to explore the possibility of using Facebook to teach language skills as part of the learning experience in and out of the classroom and most students cannot fathom how Facebook can be incorporated into their learning experience other than as entertainment.

At the current moment, it is observed that teachers seem to be engaged only in traditional classroom activities such as workbooks, text books, copying exercises from the blackboard and some more advanced ones would attempt some minimal out-of-classroom activities like going to the library or the language lab to do some class presentations. Teachers are busy rushing to complete the syllabus and prepare students for examinations, and not much time is allocated to engage students in more interesting activities as they themselves are loaded with work and pressured to complete the syllabus. For educators, the question remains – can social networking sites such as Facebook be manipulated and used to enhance the classroom experience in learning languages?

Review of Literature

In the Malaysian context, there is a scarcity in research involving the use of social networking sites for educational purposes. However, in other countries

for example, a study done in Turkey as well as one in India focused on Facebook and its use on language training (Akyıldız & Argan, 2011; Viswanathan, 2008). In the Malaysian context, a study found on teaching and learning English via Facebook was done by Ganapathy (2011) which focused on tertiary-level ESL teachers' use of Facebook. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers working in tertiary education institutions in the Klang Valley and Negeri Sembilan. The items in the questionnaire focused on determining if and how these teachers use Facebook for educational purposes, including language teaching. Semi structured interviews were also conducted to strengthen findings from the questionnaires. Results from the study showed that teachers use Facebook mostly for personal communication and only a few teachers use it as an educational tool. Interestingly, the findings also revealed that teachers do use Facebook to facilitate discussions about class work, assignments as well as a peer review tool. Convinced that Ganapathy's (2011) study was an indication that Facebook can be adopted as an educational tool, the current study was conducted to corroborate and add knowledge in the use of Facebook for educational purposes.

Edutopia, a website set up by the George Lucas Educational Foundation in 2012, published "How to Create Social Media Guidelines for Your School." They worked with Facebook to help teachers in the US to know the social media guidelines so that they can fully experience the benefits of the use of social media in classrooms (Macmullen, 2012). In the studies cited earlier, it was found that most students prefer to be involved in Facebook than doing the conventional language activities that are aimed at helping them improve their language proficiency.

The use of materials such as workbooks, jigsaw puzzles and crossword puzzles can be fun and help students in learning the language but over time, it can become less appealing to students in the new era as the digital age moves faster where Internet communication tools such as Facebook can offer so much more and engage students so much better. Reinhardt and Thorne (2007) stated that for teens of varying ages and university students, emerging literacies and genres of language use associated with digital media are highly relevant to their current and future experiences as language users. Facebook has the potential to emerge as an easy tool for students to learn the language as well as engage in a language learning community.

According to Blattner and Fiori (2009), institutions of higher learning have a well-established trend toward non-adoption of new technologies. They believe that Facebook is far more sophisticated than many of its counterparts such as MySpace, Friendster, Blackboard or WebCT as it is a tool that is not only built

off the synchronous technologies that are deemed useful for teaching and learning but it has also extended its use as a ubiquitous communicative tool.

In addition, teachers who view Facebook mainly as a communication tool may see Facebook as solely as a communication tool like emails, instant messaging, a technology that they already have been using both for personal use and also in their work place and a new idea like Facebook might not appeal to them. But if teachers view Facebook as a social tool that they can use to further network with other teachers and also develop a closer relationship with their students, they might see it as a great tool to foster relationships with students, encourage them to communicate using the target language and to network with other users across the board (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Wity, 2010).

Thus, this research sought to explore the frequency of Facebook usage by secondary students, what they use Facebook for and their perspectives concerning the integration of Facebook into their English learning experience with the following research questions:

1. How much time do students spend time on Facebook to network?
2. To what extent do teachers use Facebook in their language classrooms?
3. What do the students use Facebook for?
4. What are the views of secondary school students concerning the use of Facebook in language classrooms?
5. To what extent are the students using Facebook for English language learning?

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This study was a quantitative study using the descriptive survey approach in which the quantitative findings were substantiated with qualitative information. A quantitative design strengthened with qualitative information was selected to: (1) seek elaboration, illustration, enhancement and clarification of findings from the survey (2) provide accuracy of findings (3) to compensate for the strengths and weaknesses of the two methods used (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2011).

Instrumentation

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed to collect data. The questionnaire was adapted from Ganapathy's (2011) study on ESL teachers' use of Facebook in the ESL context. It consists of three sections where Section A has four questions about the background of the respondents covering gender, age range, ethnicity and average marks for their English subject in school.

Section B focuses on the Facebook usage habits of the students. This section has four questions asking respondents about their Facebook frequency of use, reasons why they check their Facebook, how often they use Facebook to communicate with their teachers and what are the things they discuss on Facebook with their teacher. Section C consists of three questions seeking to find out whether Facebook has been used in their classroom, how often Facebook is used in their classroom by teachers, and what they think about using Facebook in the classroom.

The semi-structured interview which was also modified from Ganapathy's (2011) study was carried out on randomly selected students to further examine their opinions on their current language classroom, the types of classroom activities done, and to further clarify and understand their opinions and perspectives concerning the incorporation of Facebook as part of their language learning experience.

Sampling and Participants

The population included 149 Form 2 (Year 8) students from a secondary school in Sibul, Sarawak, East Malaysia. A cluster sampling method was used where subjects who are in naturally occurring groups are selected as samples to be studied (Ary, Jacobs & Sorenson, 2011).

Data Analysis

To reiterate, this study used a quantitative method substantiated with qualitative data. The quantitative instrument in the form of a survey questionnaire was administered to respondents followed by semi-structured interviews with 10% out of the total number of respondents who participated in the study. Findings for research questions 1 and 2 are presented using descriptive statistics. For research questions 3 and 4, findings are presented using descriptive data (from the questionnaire responses) and then substantiated with qualitative data (via the open-ended response from the survey). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 17.0. Responses from the semi-structured interview sessions were also analyzed to answer research question 5.

Results and discussion

Frequency of Facebook use (Research Question 1)

From the data shown in Table 1, it is evident that majority (67.1%) of the students check their Facebook 1-5 times a day. Almost 80 % of the students check their Facebook at least once a day. Only 20.1% of students check their Facebook less than once a day, that is, they do not check their Facebook account daily.

Table 1
Frequency of FB usage

	Frequency	Percent
Less than once a day	30	20.1
1-5 times a day	100	67.1
6-10 times a day	11	7.4
11-15 times a day	2	1.3
16-20 times a day	2	1.3
More than 20 times a day	4	2.7
Total	149	100.0

As seen clearly in Table 1, the majority of the students check their Facebook at least once a day. The findings imply that students generally use Facebook on a daily basis.

Extent of Facebook Use in Class (Research Question 2)

Based on the data shown in Table 2, 96.6% of the students indicated that Facebook was not used in their language classes whereas only 3.4% of the students indicated that Facebook was used in their language classes.

Table 2
Whether FB is used in class to teach

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	5	3.4
No	144	96.6
Total	149	100.0

Table 3 shows that four out of 149 students stated that Facebook was used in class once to twice a semester. Only one student stated that Facebook was used often, meaning once to twice a week. In summary, Facebook was not used in class by the teacher as part of the lessons as the majority of the students clearly stated that Facebook was not used in class.

Table 3
Frequency of FB usage in class

	Frequency	Percent
Often (once to twice a week)	1	0.7
Rarely (once to twice a semester)	4	2.7
Not used at all	144	96.6
Total	149	100.0

Types of Facebook Use (Research Question 3)

Table 4 shows the types of activities that students engage in when they are on Facebook.

Table 4
Types of FB usage

	N	Percent
Keep in touch with friends	48	29.1
Let others know what is happening in my life	32	22.7
Connect with people I have lost touch with	24	16.7
Exchange school notes with friends	38	26.2
Others	7	5.3
Total	149	100.0

As shown in Table 4 above, it is evident that 48 students (29.1%) stated that keeping in touch with friends as the most frequent Facebook activity. Apart from that, 38 respondents (26.2%) also reported that exchanging school notes with friends as one of the activities they often engage in when they are 'facebooking'. The findings also indicated that when students are on Facebook, connecting with people whom they have lost touch with (16.7%) and letting others know what is happening in their lives (22.7%) are the activities they often engage in. It is interesting to note that findings of the current study are in line with the study

conducted by Ganapathy (2011) who found that secondary school students use Facebook mostly for social, personal as well as work reasons.

Secondary School Students’ Perspectives on Using Facebook in Classrooms (Research Question 4)

Table 5 shows students’ perspectives on the use of Facebook in the classroom context.

Table 5
Students’ perspectives on using FB in class

	Frequency	Percent
It would be convenient	33	22.2
I would like to connect with my teachers on Facebook	14	11.4
Facebook is for personal/social use - not for school work!	27	15.1
My privacy would be invaded	36	24.5
I don’t care	39	26.8
Total	149	100.0

Based on the data obtained in Table 5, it is evident that the majority of the students (26.8%) responded that they do not really care if Facebook can be used in class or not and 15.1% of the students reacted that “*Facebook is for personal/social use – not for school work!*”. Meanwhile, 24.5% of the students indicated that “*my privacy would be invaded*” if Facebook is used in class. On the other hand, 22.2% of the students stated that using Facebook in class would be convenient and 11.4% of the students responded that “*I would like to connect with my teachers on Facebook*”. Based on the findings, it is evident that the majority of the students do not seem to want to consider using Facebook in class. It could be argued that these students do not see Facebook’s potential in classroom teaching and learning. This warranted a deeper understanding of their lack of awareness and this was done through the interview sessions conducted.

The Extent of Facebook being Used for English Language Learning (Research Question 5)

For research question 5, the data obtained were analyzed quantitatively as well as qualitatively where interview responses were reported. A frequency analysis was calculated to determine how many students actually used Facebook to communicate with teachers and more specifically, whether they used Facebook

for academic purposes (asking about class, sharing notes, etc.) or mainly for contacting teachers for social reasons and not for academic purposes (refer to Table 6).

Table 6

Frequency of using FB to communicate with teachers on academic and non academic matters

	Frequency	Percent
Very often (more than 3 times a week)	1	0.7
Often (once to twice a week)	7	4.7
Rarely (once to twice a month)	22	14.8
Never	119	79.9
Total	149	100.0

From Table 6, it is interesting to note that only one respondent indicated that he or she frequently uses Facebook to communicate with teachers (more than three times a week). Meanwhile, 4.7% respondents stated that they communicate with teachers via Facebook once or twice a week to discuss social or non-academic matters, clarify homework or project matters as well as class schedule. The data also showed that 14.8% of the respondents rarely (once to twice a week) use Facebook to communicate with teachers. What is intriguing though is that majority of the respondents (79.9%) indicated that they never use Facebook to communicate with teachers. On the whole, it can be concluded that in the context of this study, the data shows that most secondary school students do not really use Facebook to communicate with teachers.

On the same note, the potential of Facebook as a versatile tool that can enhance the quality of classroom learning and increasing language learning opportunities cannot be disregarded as well. Despite the fact that students responded that they never use Facebook to communicate with their teachers, there are students who have already started to use it and this shows that they are open to the idea of using Facebook as part of their learning experience. The next step is to find ways to utilize Facebook in the teaching and learning of English and enhance the feeling of a classroom community. As Prensky (2007) noted that high-tech e-learning technologies such as Facebook are the way of present and the future where the 21st century will be characterized by the advent exponential technological change.

Semi-Structured Interview Responses

Interview sessions were conducted with ten students and their responses were recorded and transcribed. Based on their responses, it can be deduced that majority of them do not use Facebook in the learning process. Some of the students did not fully understand how Facebook can be used as part of the lesson because they do not see its potential to be used as part of their learning process in the classroom. For example, Respondents 2 and 4 perceived that using Facebook is mainly for the purpose of connecting with each other and not for learning English:

“We have our own class page on Facebook. So every time we wanna know about school stuff we would just click on our class page on Facebook. Why would we want to include it as part of our English lesson? I mean, I don’t see how we can learn a lesson using Facebook”.

(Respondent 2)

When asked the question: “If your English homework is to comment on a post in Facebook or to write a post in Facebook, do you think that you and your friends might be interested in posting your comments?”, most of the respondents stressed they did not quite get the idea of having Facebook as part of the language lesson itself to communicate academic matters. However, Respondent 7 commented that she would be open to the idea of using Facebook once she sees its potential and how it can be implemented in the lesson:

“I think it’s about time we try to use Facebook in class...who knows, it could be fun and make class less stressful...too bad our teacher don’t want to use it in class”.

(Respondent 7)

Based on their interview responses, it was unanimous that the number one reason for using Facebook is for personal or social purposes which include activities like chatting, sending messages and connecting with friends. Table 7 outlines the reasons that the interviewees gave when asked why they use Facebook to communicate rather than other social media platforms.

Table 7
Reasons for using Facebook

Reasons	No. of responses
Chat/messaging friends/connect with friends	10
Update status	2
Share photos/quotes/articles	7
Play games	3
Look for interesting videos, photos, facts	5
Ask about homework	1

Sharing photos, quotes, facts and articles seem to be the second priority. Five respondents stated that they use Facebook to look for interesting videos, photos and facts or articles while three responded that they use Facebook for playing online games. In addition, two students responded that they log on to Facebook to update their status and only one respondent mentioned that he or she uses Facebook to ask about school homework.

In the interview, respondents were also asked if they would consider using Facebook in class. Eight out of ten students were in favor of using Facebook in class. Some of the responses given are as follows:

“It’s extremely awesome if that did happen...woww! Well you know, some students cannot learn effectively if the class is boring..not fun, no entertainment value... so with Facebook I think it can totally increase their mood to study.”

(Respondent 2)

“Using Facebook for English lesson can be more convenient so that we can always communicate with teachers or even asking teachers about our problem...”

(Respondent 5)

“It’s great! We can surf the internet as we do not understand some words or whatever. It is very convenient....”

(Respondent 6)

From the interview, students also indicated that they have concerns about using Facebook in class. Respondent 10 for example, stated that he is concerned about the use of short forms while communicating in Facebook - “*I’m afraid that i*

will get carried away with using short forms..you know, just like I how i use it when sms-ing..that's not right, isn't it? Another student was concerned about the invasion of privacy. She responded that one has to be careful with the kind of messages and language used when engaging on Facebook - *"Nothing is sacred online...everybody can read what you post, i prefer if i ask my teacher privately.."* (Respondent 7).

Lastly, another issue that was raised during the interview was how using Facebook can be distracting in class, as mentioned by Respondent 10 - *"I don't think it's a good idea because Facebook is not suitable for teaching...we can get distracted easily, something that casual is more suitable for entertainment or personal...students can waste their time away..."*.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide limited evidence that Facebook can be a viable language education tool to enhance in-class instruction. Although findings showed that majority of the students do not perceive that Facebook can be used in the classroom, it can still be considered as an instructional tool to enhance the traditional language instruction particularly in the teaching of production skills like writing and speaking. In addition, to address the issue of privacy which is pertinent when communicating in cyberspace, one solution is to have a closed class group setting that would give the teacher and students privacy for the activities that are carried out. Teachers are able to monitor effectively the activities done by students. For activities that require students to post messages or upload photos, tagging the teachers would enable them to trace students' work and the privacy setting can be set to limit the viewers. The posts that can be viewed by others will enable students to interact or communicate with other users and they can choose to be involved in the discussion generated by that status. It cannot be denied that the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook will only grow and so will the number of its users.

Although there are many concerns and perhaps limitations that are valid with regard to whether it can be applied in language classrooms, at the end of the day it is about innovation, initiation and the teacher's effort in recognizing Facebook's potential in teaching and learning. After all, Facebook is not only about interacting with friends, it can also be utilized as a medium for language learning. Moreover, it can be made fun by taking advantage over the fact that it is an extremely convenient application where students and educators can access anywhere. As Mark Zuckerberg (as cited in Yusooontorn, 2011) aptly puts it:

“People are learning how to use the site and what’s OK to share. As time goes on, people will learn what’s appropriate, what’s safe for them - and learn to share accordingly.”

(Source: www.slideshare.net/bright9977/facebook-founder-mark-zuckerbergs-quotes)

References

- Akyıldız, M., & Argan, M. (2011, October 6-8). *Using online social networking: Students’ Purposes of Facebook*. Academic and Business Research Institute (AABRI) Conference, Las Vegas, USA.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Sorensen, C. (2011). *Introduction to research in education*. Belmont, Canada: Wadsworth.
- Beta Interactive Services. (1996). *Malaysian Internet shopping survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.jaring.my/biz/cybersquare/survey.htm>
- Blattner, G. & Fiori, M. (2009). Facebook in the language classroom: Promises and possibilities. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 6(1), 17-28. Retrieved from <http://wvwm.itdl.org/journal/jan09/article02.htm>
- Ganapathy, S. (2011). *ESL Teachers' use of Facebook in English as a second language context*. (Unpublished master’s thesis), Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.
- International Webmasters Association (2012). *Asia marketing research, Internet usage, population statistics and Facebook information*. Retrieved from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#my>
- Macmullen, L. (2012). *Facebook, Edutopia collaborate on social media guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/high-school-notes/2012/05/14/facebook-edutopia-collaborate-on-social-media-guide>
- Prensky, M. (2007). How to teach with technology: Keeping both teachers and students comfortable in an era of exponential change. *BECTA's Emerging Technologies for Learning*, 2(1), 40-46.
- Roblyer, M. D., McDaniel, M., Webb, M., Herman, J., & Wity, J. V. (2010). Findings on Facebook in higher education: A comparison of college faculty and student uses and perceptions of social networking sites. *Internet and Higher Education*, 13(3), 134–140.
- Reinhardt, J. & Thorne, S. L. (2007). *SCMC, blogs, and wikis*. The Pennsylvania State University, Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research.

- Schafer, I. (2009). *Facebook connect: The next great app war*. Retrieved from <http://adage.com/article/digitalnext/facebook-connect-great-app-war/134174/>
- Viswanathan, R. (2008). *Recent Impacts of Internet on English Language Training in India*. Retrieved from <http://www.teslej.org/wordpress/issues/volume12/ej47/ej47int/>
- Yusoontorn, S. (2011). *Mark Zuckerberg's quotes*. Retrieved from www.slideshare.net/bright9977/facebook-founder-mark-zuckerbergs-quotes