The Role Of Social Network Sites In English Language Teaching: Harnessing The Potential Of Facebook And Youtube As Learning Tools

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Abstract – This paper provides a comprehensive review of the role of Social Network Sites (SNSs) in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning. It examines the definitions and potential applications of SNSs, with a specific focus on Facebook and YouTube. The paper discusses the educational and instructional implementations of these SNSs, as well as the challenges and drawbacks faced by both teachers and students when utilizing them. Furthermore, it explores the pedagogical implications of incorporating the cutting-edge features offered by SNSs, aiming to bridge the gap between traditional and technologically driven learning environments.

Keywords – Social network sites (SNSs), English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Technology incorporation, Language learning and teaching.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), social network sites (SNSs) have witnessed remarkable growth in both quantity and technologically advanced features, enabling millions of individuals worldwide to connect and establish numerous web-based communities for information exchange, entertainment, commerce, and even educational purposes. This rapid technological evolution has significantly impacted not only individuals' daily lives but also educational settings, where educators and students are faced with the task of integrating traditional pedagogical methods with internet-based platforms. While there are debates surrounding the limitations and drawbacks of utilizing SNSs as a replacement for traditional methods, students generally exhibit positive attitudes toward incorporating SNSs into education due to their familiarity and experience with these platforms (Akçayır, 2017). In the realm of English language teaching and learning, it is imperative to create an environment that exposes both educators and learners to English through various channels. SNSs, with their diverse and authentic content shared among users worldwide, have thus been selected for integration into language learning and teaching practices.

Both instructors and students exhibit a certain degree of reluctance and hesitation when it comes to fully embracing and incorporating all social network sites (SNSs) into ESL/EFL courses, primarily due to their inherent limitations and the potential negative consequences they may entail, such as copyright issues and online identity concerns (Duffy, 2011). This apprehension aligns with the findings of other researchers who have highlighted concerns regarding privacy infringements and the potential interchange of personal-social profiles within the digital environment (Akçayır, 2017). Moreover, educators express heightened concerns regarding the management of tensions arising from the juxtaposition of formal and informal teaching approaches, structured and unstructured content delivery, and the need to balance students' and teachers' control over the learning process (Alvarez & Olivera-Smith, 2013).
1.1 Statement of the problem

The rapid advancement of technology and the digital landscape has revolutionized the field of ESL/EFL teaching and learning, offering new collaborative approaches. However, this online era presents language teachers with the challenge of selecting the most suitable and effective social network sites (SNSs) among the wide array of over 105 leading platforms worldwide (Mehra, 2017). Students, who are avid users of these SNSs, possess high technological literacy and seek teachers who can incorporate online technologies to enhance their ESL/EFL learning experience while minimizing stress. In this context, the following section discusses the most popularly adopted SNSs by both teachers and students, highlighting their potentials, advantages, drawbacks, and considerations for their effective utilization.

1.2 Purpose of the paper

To comprehensively examine the significant influence of social network sites (SNSs) on the English learning process, it is crucial to emphasize the necessity of integrating online social networks into English teaching and learning contexts and to suggest educational implications. This research paper aimed to address the following inquiries:

1. Which SNSs are appropriate for integration into English teaching and learning?
2. How can these SNSs be effectively implemented as tools for ESL/EFL education?

1.3 Significance of the paper

The literature reviews presented in this paper offer valuable insights that can serve as a reference for future related research. Additionally, the implications and analysis of individual experiences discussed in this paper can provide practical teaching practices, fostering further discussion and facilitating the appropriate integration of internet tools in specific academic settings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of Social Network Sites (SNSs) varies among researchers due to the emergence of new SNSs with different technological features. According to boyd and Ellison (2007), SNSs are web-based platforms that allow users to create profiles, manage connections with other users, and explore mutual connections within the system. Barlett-Bragg (2006) emphasizes the exchange of information and social collaboration in a web-based environment. Carr and Hayes (2015) add the element of selectively self-presenting to broad and narrow audiences in real-time or asynchronously. Forming online communities is considered a common feature of SNSs (Duffy, 2011), highlighting their role as advanced learning environments. The categorization of users into groups such as "Friends," "Contacts," "Fans," or "Followers" plays a vital role in operating and maintaining these virtual environments (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

There is often confusion between social networks and social media due to their diverse features. While social network sites (SNSs) are recognized as digital networks connecting individuals based on shared interests, social media refers to websites that focus on user-generated content and media sharing, such as music, photos, and videos (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Kane et al. (2013) argued for a distinction between social networks and social media but later redefined social networks as social media networks, acknowledging the multiple purposes users have when using these networks and the media content they convey. In this paper, the terms "social network sites," "social media sites," and "digital social tools" are used interchangeably to refer to web-based and mobile technologies across various platforms.

According to Wearesocial (2016), Facebook emerged as the most popular social platform in Vietnam from 2016 to 2017, capturing 29% of the market share. Among the active social media users in Vietnam, approximately 45% were young users aged between 20 and 29, making up a significant portion of the 35 million active users. These statistics highlight the potential of utilizing Facebook and other social networking sites as a means to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world, particularly in the context of teaching general English in Vietnam.

III. DISCUSSION AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

3.1. SNSs as ESL/EFL learning and teaching tools

In ESL/EFL classes, the primary learning outcomes aim to develop students' communicative and cultural competence. This
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involves the ability to effectively communicate on various topics, ranging from everyday conversations to workplace situations, using the four language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Canale and Swain (1980) highlighted two essential components of communicative competence: grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence. Additionally, cultural competence encompasses an awareness of one's own cultural perspective and an understanding of different cultural practices and worldviews (Fenner, 2008). Social network sites (SNSs), with their diverse and multicultural user-generated content, offer opportunities to enhance these competencies among students.

3.2. Facebook and Youtube – ideal tools to be integrated into English class

As of July 2017, Facebook remains the most popular social network site globally, with an estimated 1.5 billion unique monthly visitors, closely followed by YouTube with over 1.4 billion visitors (eBizMBA, 2017). Considering the significant number of young Facebook users in Vietnam, integrating Facebook and YouTube into General English courses can greatly enhance students' interest and motivation. Furthermore, incorporating these platforms into the learning and teaching process offers students opportunities to improve their language and communication skills and expand their social networks (Mahmud & Ching, 2012). The suggested implementations focus on enhancing the four language skills, promoting student engagement, and facilitating interactions between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves.

Language skills

**Listening and Speaking:** Thanks to plentiful sources of videos, audios, music, live streams, especially posted or shared by broadcasters from English-speaking countries on Facebook and Youtube, teachers can exploit these sources to select particularly related content-oriented media and get those become teaching materials outside the yawning contents in student textbook by simply cutting and pasting the selected video URL displayed on Youtube site into teaching PowerPoint presentations or sharing to study groups. In case teachers could not play the video online as a result of poor wireless, a website called SaveMedia (https://savemedia.com/) is helpful for downloading the video clips in advance, and then they can insert the clip into PowerPoint slides.

Conversations analysis is a very attractive activity in which educators previously select video clips demonstrating both effective and ineffective conversations in terms of language use in particular contexts, vocabulary appropriateness, phrases and idioms use, or verbal and nonverbal language in certain conversations. These conversations later will be discussed among students or groups of students to immerse themselves in the real cases. Additionally, thanks to Facebook, instructors can pick up any trendy topics widely spread for in-class discussions or group and individual presentations in relation to the concepts they discussed. Teachers also should let students browse and select video clips through these SNSs by themselves to help them engage in the lesson more actively.

Vlogging is another potential listening and speaking application on SNSs which allows students to create their own spoken contents before a camera. They could be assigned in groups a topic or a speaking-related task that they have to construct a short video blog within a limited period of time, followed by editing, reviewing, discussing, peer evaluating, and finally posting the video on Youtube. Teachers later can entail other groups listening and leaving comments below the video clip before generally commenting or marking in terms of pronunciation, use of grammar, vocabulary, level of communicativeness, or even the listening comprehensiveness. Those interactions could be operated both inside and outside the ‘bricks-and-mortar’ classroom. Moreover, numerous videos on Youtube instructing English pronunciation from simply basic contents of diphthongs, consonants to more advanced intonation, accents from reputable sources like BBC Learning English are always available constantly for students to be actively imparted. Facebook would not let Youtube perform the supportive tasks alone but offering diverse pronunciation-constituted pages such as ‘English Phonetics and Phonology’, ‘BBC Learning English’, and so on. Furthermore, these internet-based social media channels exhibit a large number of various cultural contexts for language use from which if learners expose enough to reliable relating contents, they certainly enrich their cultural competence, especially sociolinguistic views. Millions of materials on these SNSs could also be utilized as a source to partly design mini tests so long as the quality of those media is met according to teachers’ consideration.

The advantage of Facebook and Youtube use in designing more activities and additional tasks for listening and speaking would be the exciting study atmosphere where students always eagerly expect multiform listening and speaking challenges rather than the compulsory textbook exercises which they can do at home by themselves. Of the greater leverage of SNSs incorporation
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is stimulation of student autonomy on the way approaching the bottom-up learning practices.

Reading and Writing: Besides entertaining and personal posts, Facebook and Youtube also channel to educational and academic broadcasters by which students can access information via official and educational announcements, reports, news about social problems, latest trends, updated events, and so on. Teachers, therefore, could provide students with some informative channels or pages created by organization profiles or reputed users such as Channel NewsAsia, VOA Learning English. The assessment could be performed by raising questions in accordance with either assigned or self-selected news or reports to assess students’ reading comprehensiveness. Likewise, an integrated method could be applied when students are required to make a short presentation expressing their attitudes, views and possibly suggested solutions towards the covered topic. For that to happen, teachers should introduce some other Facebook pages for students to enrich their vocabulary like English Quotes, English Idioms, or English Vocabulary. It is recommended that students should be encouraged to read comments, replies posted on the SNSs in English as it helps them get familiar not only with English and vocabulary in different contexts but also the language used in the real world among native speakers and non-native speakers across cultures. While constructing and managing study groups on the Facebook environment, teachers are suggested to write posts, announcements, or reminding in English so that students are forced to read more English even in the simple contexts. Teacher, during this process, no longer plays the role of educator but shifts to the facilitator who transits students from passive to active learning.

Contrasting with traditional formal writing tasks in the classroom, Facebook provides a platform for students to engage in more self-presenting and informal writing styles, allowing them to write about topics they are interested in. Students should be motivated and encouraged to write personal statuses, comments, or replies in English on Facebook or YouTube when appropriate.

Furthermore, the Facebook application called Note can serve as a virtual blog where students can write about specific topics. Optional privacy settings allow them to control who can read their writing, enabling the teacher and classmates to easily access, evaluate, correct mistakes, and leave comments on their work. The built-in spell-check feature can help identify basic spelling or grammar errors, encouraging students to learn from their mistakes.

Engaging in this process requires students to put in effort for reviewing, checking, and editing their work before sharing it with a wider audience. By exposing their writing to a larger group, students have the opportunity to receive feedback and learn from their peers.

Contrary to the commonly held belief that YouTube is primarily suited for listening and speaking skills development, educators can leverage this platform to enhance reading and writing skills. One particular activity that combines listening, writing, and reading is the summarizing and written reproducing activity. In this approach, learners are required to listen to talks or inspiring topics on YouTube and take notes on the main ideas, important information, or implied details. They then use these notes to write a summary in an academic style.

To evaluate the summaries, teachers and other students can refer to the transcripts provided with the videos. TED Talks Channel, with its wide range of credible and engaging speeches, can serve as a valuable source for such activities. TED Talks has a substantial subscriber base of over 8 million people from around the world, making it a reliable and popular resource (TED Talks, 2017)

Student’s interaction

Language skills acquisition requires active engagement and motivation from learners, both during the course period and throughout their lifelong learning journey. To create a highly interactive and motivating academic setting, instructors should foster student participation in co-creating teaching and learning materials, as well as encourage self-directed learning activities.

To promote student participation in active English language contexts, teachers can assign students to search for specific content-related videos while they are using Facebook and YouTube as part of their daily routines. For students with higher language proficiency or those seeking more sociolinguistic applications, instructors can integrate SNSs to expose them to English used in real-life contexts, beyond the academic, formal English found in textbooks. This can include idioms, dialects, and World Englishes (Kachru, 1992) that showcase the diverse ways English is used across different cultures. These pre-encounters can enhance students’ language confidence and prepare them for potential situations such as work, travel, business, watching English programs or TV shows, and everyday communication. Learners are more likely to be interested in learning and using extended
knowledge when they perceive it as practical and currently used by both native and non-native speakers.

Incorporating such content into teaching settings is made easier by the abundance of authentic video materials available on SNSs like Facebook and YouTube. For example, to illustrate World Englishes and distinguish the distinctive Australian accent and vocabulary, teachers can utilize channels like '7 News Australia', a popular news service in Australia that provides short news and report videos on both YouTube and Facebook. This allows students to have frequent encounters with Aussie-English. Additionally, promoting cultural competence and developing critical thinking are important considerations for educators to enhance student participation. The use of updated, trendy information and topics can spark anticipation and excitement among students. Teachers can leverage sources for the latest themes or topics that resonate with their younger, technologically savvy students. Debating, discussing, questioning, and mutual evaluation activities can also be incorporated to foster critical thinking skills. The vast array of digital media content on Facebook and YouTube can be selected to serve these purposes and create a motivating environment for students.

**Social interactions**

Indeed, Facebook and similar social networking sites serve as highly interactive platforms for social interaction, allowing users to connect with each other and overcome barriers of time, place, and physical environment. In contrast, YouTube has certain limitations when it comes to forming virtual communities and exchanging text-based content. However, Facebook is effective in supporting various types of communication, enabling educators to reach students regardless of constraints.

One-to-many communication is an interactive mode where instructors can engage with students through study groups, pages, live videos, events, notes, and more. For instance, instructors can create a Facebook group for a specific subject and provide students with membership. This allows for the dissemination of the latest announcements, reminders, shared study materials, as well as participation in topic discussions, Q&A sessions, and online collaborative studies. Instructors have complete control over the group, including member approval, posted content, discussion direction, student comments, and group privacy. This enables them to manage the productivity and effectiveness of the groups in line with the learning outcomes of the course.

Moreover, instructors can utilize group video chat on Facebook Messenger to deliver lectures online, explain detailed instructions for specific tasks, or even conduct online collaborative classes for 1-2 hours. This provides students with the opportunity to ask questions related to the course or assessment plan and receive direct answers from the instructor. Such interactions facilitate easy communication and enable dialogue on specific matters that may not have been addressed in the classroom due to time constraints. This type of interaction strengthens students' engagement with the course material and minimizes knowledge gaps, ultimately enhancing their study motivation. Overall, the one-to-many mode of communication on Facebook allows instructors to effectively communicate with their students, provide updates, clarify doubts, and foster a sense of community within the course.

In one hand, one-to-many is effective in leading students to appropriate study activities on digital environment designed by instructors, many-to-many interactions, on the other hand, fostering positive relationships among students and providing opportunities for them to interact with peers, other instructors and native speakers. An illustrative implementation for this type of interaction could be Facebook communities which are tailored for students on a larger scale of involved individuals. An instructor can create his or her own a study group on Facebook for a particular subject with many student members and he or she can cooperate with other instructors’ study groups in the same subject area so that students simultaneously could access various different Facebook study groups containing different useful study materials shared among members of the connected communities. Moreover, in order to make good use of sharing function of Facebook, the educational institution or academic faculty could facilitate the many-to-many with policies allowing create a larger merged Facebook community for a certain subject. This expanded community possibly includes hundreds to thousands of students and dozens of instructors who are in charge of the same subject for many classes. The contents and study materials shared publicly in this community are delivered by different instructors from various sources of media from that student members can easily and freely to see, select, and interact with any contents accordance to their needs, involvement, and preference. This study group in the scale of subject or course develops social, active, contextual, engaging and student-owned environment (Carmean & Haefner, 2002). More importantly, many-to-many approach motivates members either educators or learners to share things as well as expand their social circles which increase a sense of community and belonging. The frequency of interactions in English would be increased due to the
minimized apprehension among students when using English to communicate with peers without concern for poor pronunciation or grammatical mistakes.

3.3. Facebook and Youtube – prominent drawbacks and suggested solutions

Facebook, Youtube, or other SNSs widely used today in English teaching and learning are not the faultlessly ideal environment in all sense. Although there are obvious benefits for the main stakeholders of language learning and teaching process, those SNSs still reveal weaknesses.

Firstly, these web-based settings encourage students to use English in more informal than academic style which results in the gradual incompetence using English in formal contexts with relative skills like writing and speaking. It is therefore recommended that teachers should stand still their position as a gatekeeper checking and allowing a moderate level of informal language incorporated into the students’ learning process.

Secondly, the general concerns towards SNSs overuse, namely physical social self-exclusion, privacy violation, plagiarism spread, distraction, or addiction, are emerging recently. Lecturers and the institutional environments can cope with those worries by invest time, money and effort in constructing a set of guidance in details instructing the appropriate actions on the virtual internet-based social sites before actually making those digital supports available to be applied.

Thirdly, due to the vastness of the Facebook and Youtube media library, time-consuming traverse through all these sites causes unproductive pursuit the intended contents. In this case, teachers, playing a facilitating role, should guide students clearly and precisely what they need students to look for with suggested keywords.

Fourthly, harmful and unreliable information on these SNSs is easy to be accessed just like the useful and educational information because of the global scope for shared contents. Thus, teachers have to be aware of appropriate, credible, and accurate mediated contents as strongly as copyright restrictions. Before presenting any videos to students, teachers have to make sure that the videos are not associated with any discriminative concepts against gender, race, disability, age or religious orientation. Provocative language and/or nudity contained in videos should be considered extremely carefully before putting those into teaching materials.

IV. CONCLUSION

Indeed, social media networking sites have become valuable tools in both traditional and online English courses, offering numerous benefits for teachers and students alike. Facebook and YouTube, being widely used platforms, have been analyzed and discussed extensively due to their popularity among Vietnamese students. The practical applications and implications of using Facebook and YouTube in English teaching have been identified and can be implemented in real teaching contexts. These implementations primarily aim to enhance the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), promote student engagement, and encourage interactions within virtual communities. While the interactions may be limited to online platforms, they still offer valuable opportunities for language learning and practice.

It is important for educators to explore the diverse uses of SNSs and understand how to leverage their benefits effectively. By incorporating social media into English courses, teachers can create dynamic and interactive learning environments that cater to the needs and interests of students. Additionally, SNSs provide opportunities for collaborative learning, cultural exchange, and exposure to authentic English language use. By embracing the potential of Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms, teachers can tap into the digital resources and tools available to enrich their teaching practices and enhance students’ language learning experiences.

While social media networking sites offer innovative teaching and learning opportunities, they also present certain challenges and disadvantages that need to be addressed. One major challenge is the technical skill required to effectively use internet-connected devices like laptops, smartphones, or computers. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds or remote areas may face difficulties in accessing and utilizing these tools, which can create inequalities in learning opportunities.

Teachers also encounter challenges in integrating social media into their teaching practices. They need to possess technical proficiency and stay updated with the latest information and modern teaching methods. The dynamic nature of social media platforms requires teachers to continually adapt and explore new ways to engage students effectively. To address these
challenges, it is crucial for teachers to continuously improve their skills and stay informed about the latest advancements in technology and social media. Professional development programs and training sessions can support teachers in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate social media platforms confidently.

Furthermore, educational institutions play a significant role in supporting teachers by implementing encouraging policies and providing resources and support. They can invest in infrastructure, provide access to necessary tools and resources, and create a supportive environment that fosters the integration of social media into the curriculum. By promoting self-improvement among teachers and implementing supportive policies, educational institutions can facilitate the pedagogical transition from traditional top-down teaching approaches to more interactive and collaborative bottom-up and peer-to-peer approaches. This can optimize students' classroom experiences and ensure that the benefits of social media in education are accessible to all students.

While personal teaching experiences and assumptions based on previous research can provide insights into the potential benefits of using SNSs in education, it is essential to conduct additional research to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' learning styles and their willingness to use SNSs in the classroom. Qualitative and quantitative research can be conducted to explore the objects of SNS utilization in learning and teaching English. This research can delve into the reasons behind students' decisions to use or not use SNSs, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of incorporating SNSs into the learning process for different groups of students.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to conduct research that examines and compares the attitudes of instructors and students towards using SNSs in specific English courses, such as General English or English for Specific Purposes. This research can shed light on the preferences and perspectives of both educators and learners, providing valuable insights for designing effective instructional strategies and incorporating SNSs appropriately into different language learning contexts. By conducting rigorous research, educational institutions can gather empirical evidence that informs decision-making and helps establish best practices for incorporating SNSs into English language teaching. This research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the benefits, challenges, and limitations of SNS utilization in education and guide the development of effective pedagogical approaches that leverage the potential of these platforms.

REFERENCES


