FACEBOOK AS AN ONLINE TOOL TO ENCOURAGE READING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Despite research evidence that shows Web 2.0 has potentials in contributing to the teaching and learning of English Language in significant ways, these potentials are frequently under utilised. Reviews of research literature suggests the need for attention on the use of Web 2.0 in teaching and learning language concerning reading in English Classroom. The aim of this study is to investigate how Facebook helps secondary school students in reading and also the impact Facebook has on their reading habit. The study uses a set of questionnaire as the main instrument in gathering data. There were 30 participants that took part in this research, regardless of their gender and race. The result of the data generated showed that Facebook helps reading process and as well stimulates and encourages students to read in English. In addition, this research is in line with the Ministry of Education policy to promote the integration of Web 2.0 and pedagogy to improve the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Web 2.0; Social Network; Facebook; Facebook Groups; Reading

INTRODUCTION

Improving student English proficiency is a priority under the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), and is also a challenge faced by many Non-English speaking countries. Reading is one of the basic skills that the students are acquired to master in order to be proficient in English language. According to Maughan et al. (2009) reading is a basic educational achievement, career prospects and ultimately adult well-being. Jamian (2011) on the other hands, mentioned reading and writing are interconnected as readers are able to decode the text, they will also be able to encode the words in order to learn a language effectively. This show that reading is one of the basic skills that students should master for their long-life learning purposes.

Fong (2012) found that Malay students in the secondary level have low English proficiency compared to the Chinese and Indian students. In 2015, Nooreiny and Indira state that one of the difficulties faced by students was the inadequate time spent practicing the English language during class hours and these L2 learners resorted to their own alternatives by using Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, social network sites, Twitter and Instagrams. Web 2.0 are commonly used by people to collaborate, interact and express their ideas, create and retrieve information (Lomiicka & Lord, 2009; Wang & Vasquez, 2012). Therefore, Web 2.0 offer more language opportunities to L2 learners.

There are many studies on the use of Web 2.0 targeting on students in tertiary level. Several studies reported that Web 2.0 technologies help graduates to create learning environments which are comfortable (Antenos-Conforti, 2009; Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Chen, 2009), relaxed (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008) and community-based (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). Additionally, a number of studies have indicated that, in general, university students tend to have favorable attitudes towards the pedagogical use of Web 2.0 technologies (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Chen, 2009). More specifically, several studies reported that Web 2.0 technologies increased students’ interest and motivation in language learning (Liou & Peng, 2009). However, not many studies have been carried out on secondary school level. Thus, this study aims to investigate the use of Facebook in engaging secondary school students in reading by answering these questions:
1. How does Facebook help secondary school students to be engaged in reading?
2. What are the impacts of using Facebook towards students’ reading habits?

THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES (SNS) IN EDUCATION

According to Prensky (2012), educators in the 21st century should shift their methodology of teaching in order to meet the current needs of learners who are good with technology. ICT should be used in the classroom so that the teaching and learning activities could be done in a fun way. This is in line with the new Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, whereby the government has highlighted that the use of ICT is essential in order to scale up the quality of education across Malaysia (MOE, 2012). Furthermore, technology provides unlimited services providing everything at a person’s fingertips as the business, fashion tips, news, education, social networking and reading materials are accessible online (Yunus et al., 2009). Consequently, teachers and learners are able to search all the required information via the internet. There are many studies that reveal ICT, particularly SNS, have a positive impact towards the field of education (Selwyn, 2007; Hamat et al., 2012; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012; Yunus et al., 2013; Rahayu, 2014; and Amasha & Akhalaf, 2014). Amasha and Akhalaf (2014) found that Facebook could evolve the e-learning course in order to encourage collaborative discussion among them. The result of this study is similar to Shih’s study (2013) which stated that students’ English proficiency and motivation could be enhanced by integrating Facebook in the teaching and learning activities (blended learning approaches).

Apart from that, Facebook could be a tool for transferring knowledge among the users (Suebsom, 2015). The users could share information through Facebook and their Facebook friends could read the information on their walls. This feature helps others to receive the same information in the News Feed on the wall. He also revealed in his study that most learners in Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand agreed that they employed Facebook for discussion and shared knowledge. Suebsom’s results have a similar finding with the previous study by Omar, Embi, and Yunus (2012) who mentioned that Facebook could be used as a tool for the virtual discussion among the students and also gave a positive feedback on the students’ English learning. Thus, SNS could be used as a platform for the educators and learners to discuss and share valuable knowledge during the teaching and learning activities.

In contrast, a study done by Hamat et al. (2012) found that students at the tertiary level used Facebook for informal learning activities such as asking assignment from the friends, having assignment group discussion, and contacting the lecturer. They also reported that the students spent more times on Facebook for socialising purposes compared to learning activities. In conclusion, SNS provides a wide range of services (formal and informal) to assist learners in order to enhance their English proficiency level.

INTEGRATING FACEBOOK IN READING LITERACY

SNS are the current trend for the students to socialise with their friends. They only just meet in cyberspace in order to know the latest news about their friends. There are many SNS that students employ such as MSN, Twitter, Tumblr, Wiki, MySpace, and Facebook. However, Facebook has become the most popular SNS that students use (Kabilan et al., 2010; Yunus et al., 2012; Vikneswaran and Krish, 2014; and Espinosa, 2015). This is supported by Silverman (2015) who showed that Facebook is still in the first rank in social networking trending in 2015 since it has one billion registered active users.

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. It started at Havard University when he developed the site for socialising with his friend. Nevertheless, the site became famous among the students, thus, the site has been expanded to other people who are over 13 years old. Facebook has features that allow users to share/post photos and videos, update status, interact or communicate with friends via chat box or comment box, create public or closed group, and generate polls. These features of Facebook assisted students to use it as a tool for socialising as well as academic purposes (Kabilan, 2010; and Espinosa, 2015). Thus, it showed that Facebook gives impact towards students’ learning.
There are a few studies have been done on the use of Facebook to engage and improve students’ reading skills. Kabilan et al. (2010) found that Facebook does assist higher educational students in practicing reading in English and increasing the students’ confidence to read English materials. There were over 71% students who are agreed and strongly agreed with these statements that showed their reading skills were getting better. By using SNS, teachers can attract the students to engage with the reading materials as well as can improve the students’ reading abilities (Yunus et al., 2012).

Moreover, the use of Facebook group discussion can help students to learn and develop their reading skills (Rahayu, 2014). She also claimed that Facebook group discussion is a good technique as it can decrease student boredom from the traditional reading methodology. Her study indicated that Facebook group discussion is an effective tool that teachers could use in order to enhance the students’ reading strategies and engage them in reading.

Sleeman and Ryan (2015) also have similar finding with Kabilan et al. (2010) and Rahayu (2014). They found that Facebook reading groups provided students with supplementary reading materials outside the classroom that helped the students to gain knowledge and improve their reading skills. Another finding is, the students have become more engaging in reading as one of the participants mentioned „I check the reading group more than 10 times a day… to know anyone have same thinking like me or not” (p. 27). To conclude, the use of Facebook does give a positive impact on the students’ reading skills.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative design method, intended to explore the use of Facebook to assist secondary school students in reading. The data were collected by asking a group of participants to answer a set of questionnaires and participated in several tasks in the allocated Facebook group. The study used convenience sampling that involved 30 participants from a Form 2 class (14 years old students) from the urban school in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur. These participants were chosen because they have an active Facebook account, they are familiar with Facebook group, are able to make choices, decisions, and are familiar with survey format. This study employed a questionnaire that was adapted from a survey by Kabilan et al. (2010) and Yunus and Salehi (2012). The questionnaire used a four points Likert-scale and divided into two parts. The first section measured the demographic information of the participants: gender; race and mid-year examination grade. The second section consisted of six items that measured the participants’ engagement in reading. The last part of the questionnaire had six items in order to examine the impact of Facebook toward participants’ reading. Then, the data were analysed using the website polldaddy.com in order to find out the frequency of each section. A Facebook group was used as an online tool for the teaching and the learning process. The participants were in the Facebook group entitle “2 Amanah English Classroom” for two weeks. Questionnaire were distributed at the end of the second week.

PROCEDURES

The teacher created a Facebook group and invited the participants in the group. In the group, the participants experienced two weeks of reading activities. The teacher posted simple reading materials such as news, stories, and factual passages for the participants to read. After reading the materials posted in the group, they needed to answer the task given. The participants were also required to share other reading materials in the Facebook group so that the other members of the group could read and respond to the materials. Then, the data collection was done using the polldaddy.com website. The link of the website were posted on the Facebook group discussion page. They needed to choose one category from the Likert scale of „strongly agree”, „agree”, „strongly disagree” and „disagree” that described participants’ reading process and the impact of Facebook towards their reading habit. The „Unsure” Likert scale was excluded to ensure participants had a stand whether to agree or disagree towards the items. The data of the study were analysed using descriptive statistics; the number of the participants and the frequency counts were tabulated.
FINDINGS

There were three questions about the participants’ background. Out of the 30 participants who took part in the survey, 18 of them were male, while the other 12 were female. 21 of them were Malays, 5 of them were Chinese and the rest Indians. The last question was about their mid-year examination grade. Data showed 9 participant got A in the mid-year examination, followed by 15 participants who got a B and 6 of them got a grade C.

FACEBOOK: A TOOL FOR READING There are six items in the second section of the questionnaire. The findings were presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FB enhances my confidence to read English materials.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading materials in the FB group to enhance my vocabulary.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB group engages me in reading my friends’ works.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB makes me want to read.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB group makes me interested in reading.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB makes me want to read everything that my friend share on the wall.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Engaging the students in reading

Table 1 illustrated the number of participants who voted the items in the questionnaire. From the table, it was shown that most of the participants had only voted in the „strongly agree” or „agree” categories after two weeks experiencing online learning in the Facebook group.

The data analysis looked at the comparison between items in the „strongly agree” category. There are two items that have the same score and it is the highest from the participants, twenty-eight of the participants chose „strongly agree” at the statement 1st item, „FB enhances my confidence to read English materials” and also the 6th item, „FB makes me want to read everything that my friend share on the wall”. Meanwhile, the second item „Reading materials in the FB group to enhance my vocabulary” has the lowest score, which is sixteen participants. Thus, the data were shown that generally the use of Facebook does help in engaging participants to read.

Furthermore, Sleeman and Ryan (2015) claimed the students’ enthusiastic in social media like Facebook and a good choice of English material could assist them in engaging reading. Based on the observation in the Facebook group, the researcher agreed with Sleeman and Ryan (2015). This could be seen in the example below:
The participants were interested to read the story posted to them and answer the questions that follows. Thus, a choice of reading material also played an important role in order to attract the students in reading besides their addiction on Facebook.

However, the item “reading materials in the FB group can enhance my vocabulary” is the lowest score in the “strongly agree” category. The participants might feel their vocabulary did not improve due to their average proficiency. The participants just read and try to understand the gist of the story without referring to the dictionary while encountering the difficult words. This can be seen whereby a student asked the meaning of the word “lame” maybe because he is too lazy to look it up himself. This finding has a similar result with Rahayu’s study (2014) of 37 students from an English department of FBIB Stikubank University, Semarang. From the interviews with selected students, she found that some of the students were “lazzy” to respond to the reading tasks and discussion in the FB group, since some of them did not understand the certain task given (p.86). This would be one of the disadvantages of using FB as a tool of learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable to read English materials.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel motivated to read English materials.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel encouraged by my teacher or friends ‘like’ my posts or give feedbacks.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer learning reading in a FB group instead of in a classroom.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confidence in my reading abilities.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes, I feel distracted by other things in the FB features while learning through FB group.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 showed the impact of using Facebook towards the participants in reading. The table illustrated most of the
participants agreed and strongly agreed with the items on the survey. Therefore, the researcher only looked at the comparison between the items in the “strongly agree” category. Item 3 in the survey demonstrated the highest score, where the participants felt encouraged after getting a „like‟ and feedback from the teacher and friends. While item 2 had the lowest score, “I feel motivated to read English materials”, there are 6 participants who disagreed that statement. 4 participants “strongly disagree” on item 4, which is “I prefer learning reading in a FB group instead of in a classroom”. This could be because they still prefer the actual classroom discussion instead of that in the FB group. Although students like to learn independently, a teacher is still required to guide and direct the learning, especially over a virtual discussion space. The data shows a similar finding with the previous studies that showed FB does have an impact on students learning (Kabilan et al., 2010; Yunus and Salehi, 2012; Hamat et al., 2012; Rahayu, 2014; and Sleeman and Ryan, 2015).

The findings of this study revealed feedback and “like” give a positive impact towards the students learning and it was the highest score in the „strongly agree” category. This finding has a similar result with Yunus and Salehi’s (2012) study, which has 97.7 % of participants agreed receiving „like” or feedback from teacher and friends encouraged them in learning. The examples of encouragement as below:

Image 2. Example of ‘like’ and feedbacks that encourage the participants in reading

Image 2 illustrated example of having „like” from the teacher and friends after the participants completing the reading tasks and the example of feedbacks on the comments shared by the participants. The icon „like” and encouraging feedback would increase the pupils’ confidence in reading and learning English language.
CONCLUSION

Interactive SNS like Facebook could be a platform to assist students to engage in reading. The findings of this study revealed that most of the participants strongly agreed that FB increases their confident level to read and they do read their friends’ post on the wall. Nevertheless, Facebook does engage and encourage students in reading. Facebook features such as uploading photos, videos and sharing website links could help students to learn in a fun and interesting way, as well as enhancing their reading abilities. This shows a positive engagement between the participants with Facebook. The educators could exploit the participants’ interest in Facebook in order to support their reading process. The result has a similar finding with Kabilan et al. (2010). They discovered Facebook could be used as a learning tool to practice English language that offered authentic and engaging learning situation. However, Facebook could also bring disadvantage to the learners as they are easily distracted by the other features of Facebook like chat and games. Thus, teachers should play an important role to guide the learners in the virtual classroom.

In addition, the FB group could be benefit from the teachers and the pupils indirectly. The teachers and pupils could communicate and learn in flexible times. Besides, Facebook could be used as a platform for the students’ supplementary class. It is recommended that further researches could focus more on the challenges of integrating Facebook groups for engaging and encouraging reading, and look into the perception of teachers as well.

REFERENCES


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