An Effective Contribution of Social Media Networks in Foreign Language Learning Case Study: Community Diploma College, King Khalid University, KSA

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Abstract— Social Media (SM) is websites increasingly popular and built to allow people to express themselves and to interact socially with others. Most SMT are dominated by youth particularly College students. The proliferation of popular social media tools, which can accessed from any communication devices has become pervasive in the lives of today’s student life. The present paper aims to measure an effective contribution of social media networks in foreign language learning skills among students. For this purpose, a survey was carried out to examine students’ perceptions and attitudes about using these social platforms for learning foreign languages. Results of the research study revealed that the great majority of the students actually use these web-based applications to enhance their language skills. Most importantly, they agreed that social media contribute in improving their listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. Accordingly, we strongly recommend that instructors use these online tools in distant, blended, or face-to-face learning systems.

Keywords— Social Media, Foreign Language Learning, Second Language Learning, KKU

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology has inevitably become the most powerful tool in almost every aspect of human’s daily life. Technology is regarded as a major revolution and this has a significant impact on education. The use of Information Technology (IT) and the Internet are the new paradigm of learning in 21st century. These technological advancements allow people to easily access, gather, analyze, and share, transfer data & knowledge. This makes it possible for them to function as teachers, study-mates and more importantly, as tools to improve entire teaching and learning process [1]. Learning communities have evolved from the traditional classroom to virtual education settings in which students come together in a virtual environment to exchange ideas, solve problems, explore alternatives, and create new meanings along a connected journey. Now the students are Net Generation or digital natives. These digital natives bring new challenges to the teaching and learning environment. In the last seven years, the social media technology becomes more popular characterization of websites that allowed digital users to interact with each other as contributors to a website.

Social media include a wide variety of online tools including social networks, blogs, micro-blogs, wikis as well as media sharing and bookmarking websites. As educational resources, social media tools can also be used to differentiate the learning process. The social media resources allow learners to elect and share learning materials that best meet their learning style and interests. The dynamic and engaging nature of many social media tools may encourage students to expand more time and energy on their academic activities as a consequence of the collaborative, constructivist and authentic learning opportunities they can create. They use these online communities to interact with friends, play games and watch television. Most importantly, students make use of these web-based tools for foreign language / Second Language learning purposes. The objective of this paper is, therefore, to measure the potential role that social media technologies may have on students’ foreign language learning skills.

II. SOCIAL MEDIA – AN OVERVIEW

Connecting formal education to social media tools is a relatively new area. Social media is characterized as Web2.0 e-learning resources that emphasize active participation, connectivity, collaboration and sharing of knowledge and ideas among users. Social networking site like Facebook, a video stream delivered via YouTube, or collaborative discussion and document sharing via Google Apps, more people are using social network and virtual world technologies in the classroom to communicate, express ideas, and form relationships centered on topical interests. Social Media technologies encompass a variety of different meanings that include an increased emphasis on user generated content, data and content sharing, collaborative effort, new ways of interacting with Web-based applications, and the use of the Web as a social platform for generating, repositioning and consuming content. The beginnings of the shared content nature of social network appeared in 1980 in Tim Berners-Lee’s prototype Web software. However, the content sharing aspects of the Web were lost in the original rollout, and did not reappear until Ward Cunningham wrote the first wiki in 1994-1995.
Social media is playing a big role in boosting academic like in social and education systems as a whole. The Figure 1 shows the simple view of current state of Social Network Application (SNA).

Taking all these educational benefits into consideration, social media can serve as an ideal environment for learning foreign languages. These social applications actually make language learning an easier process by being fun, interactive and interesting. The online platforms that help people connect with each other could also be used to make language learning faster and more engaging. Via social media, all language enthusiasts can get in touch with native speakers of a variety of languages. Even though basic vocabulary and grammar rules can be well learnt from a non-native speaker, and no matter what language exercises or activities might be done in class, students may still lack listening and speaking skills. The truth is that class activities and discussion topics are not actual real-life situations. By contrast, social media platforms, characterized by the constant availability of native ‘instructors’, provide a live experience in which a student or language learner can practice his target language in real time. This is actually where the web supplements real life and offers alternative ways for learning languages. Given this fact, the language learner can, through social media, turn a laborious task like studying into something enjoyable by meeting and interacting with native language speakers from around the world. With or without their teacher’s recommendations, students tend to enter social language learning networks where they can get an answer to most of their questions, without having to go through the anxiety of asking it in front of the class. Social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter are spaces where a person can practice his language skills with real native speakers. Besides these free online networks, there are specifically designed web-based language learning communities that offer interactive lessons, exercises and tests as well as text, audio and video chat in many languages. Users can, for instance, write a passage in a foreign language such as French or German and submit it to have a native speaker in the network correct their writing. Social media authoring tools, namely discussion forums, blogs and wikis, are also taking a more predominant role in language learning as they help students improve reading, writing, and discussion skills through cooperative writing opportunities. Media sharing websites are also a valuable resource for language learners of all levels. YouTube or Dailymotion, for example, is a very convenient way to learn a language, to review those grammar points that a student may forget and to reinforce his overall language skills.
In these online channels, one can watch or listen to a variety of spoken languages (formal, informal, colloquial, slang) of all genres (debates, talks, shows, movies, etc.) and learn a lot of vocabulary in context, which will undoubtedly help them improve their language proficiency. Beyond just getting materials from this set of social media tools, language learners can also broadcast themselves. By producing their own videos, students can apply the target language to real-world situations, and by uploading them on social media, they can get feedback on their speaking skills from others.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Samples

A survey was conducted among the Community Diploma College students King Khalid University, Abha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to investigate an effective contribution of social media networks in foreign language learning. The data was gathered via survey distributed to 120 students.

The questions are easy to understand and each participant is asked to fill out the given questionnaire to measure the students’ response.

B. Data Analysis

Analysis of the collected data has revealed that all the surveyed students reported to be members of at least one social network. Results have actually shown that the great majority of informants have a Twitter account. For more information about students’ membership in various social online communities is shown in Figure 1.

As is clearly seen, the most popular social network among community diploma college students in King Khalid University is Twitter (49.03%), other social networks like MySpace, Live mocha, Viadeo, Babble, Busuu, Unilang, Lang-8, Palabea, Italki.com, voxSwap, Myngle and English Baby (23.23%) and Google+ (18.71%). The online networks that are less frequently used by students are LinkedIn (1.94%). The low percentage associated with LinkedIn may be due to the fact that these online communities are mainly used for work-related purposes and more surprise that Facebook is utilized by the less percentage (7.10%) of students only.

With regard to the use of social media for learning foreign languages, 66.88% of the surveyed students reported that they use this set of online tools to enhance their foreign language skills. The most common languages that the students are interested in improving or learning are given in Figure 3. The students were also asked to choose from a list the social media network technologies that they use to boost their language skills. Results showed that most of the students like video sharing websites and Chat Tools. Nonetheless, it has been observed that though there are social online communities, such as Live mocha and Busuu, which are dedicated to language learning, none of the respondents seems to be using them.
This implies that students generally prefer to use a platform through which they can not only learn a language but also interact with friends, colleagues and family. The technologies used by students are given in Figure 4.

![Figure 4: Student's Social Media Network technology Usage](image)

To investigate the impact of student’s foreign language learning skills, the students were asked to select the major language skills - listening, speaking, reading or writing. Figure 5 shows the percentage ratings associated with each language skill. As the figure displays, the main language skill reported to be improving is listening. Of those who participated in the survey, 45% reported that listening is the most noticeable skill. Listening is usually considered as the weakest skill of most language learners. Easy access to the rich database of audio and video materials on social media certainly contributes in enhancing this Listening Language skill.

![Figure 5: Student's Improved Skills Rating after Social Media Use](image)

Figure 6 shows that students (68.32%) are satisfied with the social media tools for improving their foreign language skills.

![Figure 6: Student's Satisfaction of using Social Media Tools in Foreign Language Learning](image)
IV. CONCLUSION

Based on data collected from 120 students, this research measures the effective contribution of SMN in Foreign language learning skills. Results of the research study demonstrated that most of the surveyed students claimed they favor the use of these internet-based applications as these help them improve their four language skills, namely listening, reading, writing and speaking. Given these educational benefits, we can stipulate that social media tools are capable of enriching the language learning experience. Therefore, we recommend that educators use these online social communities whether they work in fully online, blended, or face-to-face language learning environments.

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REFERENCES