

Original Paper

Educators Perspectives on Integrating Social Media to the ESL Classroom

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Abstract

This article presents a study on the perspective of two higher education professors from Puerto Rico in the use of social media for the ESL classroom. It covers the millennial generation characteristics and its influence on the teaching and learning process at the university level. Several strategies within the use of social media and emergent technologies are presented. The study participants reflect on the use of social media in the classroom and present how beneficial it has been in student achievement, retention, and engagement. Several remarks are made within the use of social media for the classroom and participants expose their experiences in the ESL classroom at the university level.

Keywords

social media, emergent technologies, esl, teaching and learning, millennials, digital natives

1. Introduction

The teaching and learning processes have changed radically in the 21st century. This is in part to the integration of information and communication technologies in education. The world has experienced the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0 and its influence on educational projects. We've also seen how social media have taken over our daily lives. According to Kavitha and Bhuvaneshwari (2016), social media is a mobile and web-based dependable technology that creates highly interactive podiums through which individuals and groups share, co-create, discuss, and modify user generated content. With most of our students, members of the millennial generation, it has a starring role. Millennials arrive to our classrooms with a vision of life that in many cases contrasts with the one of the professors. These have become a challenge and at the same time a motivation for educators in order to integrate social media as part of their educational processes. The teaching of English as a second language is one

of the subjects in which educators integrate them with greater determination. Especially for the development of macro-skills such as writing, reading, listening and speaking. To enhance the experience educators are adding the social media tools of Facebook and Twitter which have become influential in the 21st century. This study embraces the perceptions of teachers of English as a second language within the use of social media. Two educators with experience in the use of social media in the classroom were interviewed and shared their experience with the tools in the integration of English as a second language at the university level with the purpose of knowing which was the pedagogical value towards student achievement, engagement, and retention.

2. Method

For every educator is imperative to know who are the students that they receive in the classroom. These students belong to the millennial generation and identify themselves with a series of particularities. One of this is the use of social media. As indicated at the beginning of this article, this has greatly influenced education in many ways including how educators engage students in different programs including ESL programs at the university level.

2.1 Millennials

According to Smith and Nichols (2015), the millennial generation has several characteristics that make them unique from other generations. For example, they are achievement focused and surpassing all challenges is part of their daily lives. This include goals and aspirations (Kaifi et al., 2012; Kowske et al., 2010). Often called members of generation Z, one important characteristic is that some are 100% digital natives and other not. For those that are 100% digital natives, and members of this generation they think and process the information different. Also, the educational system is not adapted to respond to their needs (Prensky, 2001). This generation became dependent on technology at an earlier age than other generations (Smith & Nichols, 2015). Millennials frequently use the Internet and mobile phones to collect data, retrieve information, and enable ways of communication. In addition, they use of social media frequently create new social environments. The use of social media occurs concurrently to their developing identity, physical development, emerging sexuality and moral consciousness (Kavitha & Bhuvaneswari, 2016).

2.2 Social Media in Education

According to Greenhow and Lewin (2015), “research on social media in education suggests that integrating social media in learning and teaching environments may yield new forms of inquiry, communication, collaboration, identity work, or have positive cognitive, social, and emotional impacts”. This can also be seen in works of Gao, Luo, and Zhang (2012); Greenhow, Burton, and Robelia (2011); Greenhow and Robelia (2009a and 2009b); Pimmer, Linxen, and Grohbiel (2012) and Ranieri, Manca, and Fini (2012). In addition, the work of Faizi, El Afiam, and Chiheb (2013), mentioned the potential benefits of social media in education for students and educators in areas such as communication, engagement and collaboration. As for communication, they have established that social media can

improve communication not only between students and teacher but also among students. The latter can use social media to talk to each other about upcoming assignments or tests. They can get details from their classmates about materials that will be covered on a test or the requirements for one or more assignments. If students are having trouble with a certain topic, they can go to classmates on a social networking website to get assistance and catch up online. Similarly, as blogs and wikis involve the contribution of multiple users, these collaborative tools can successfully enhance interactivity among students. Along with this is the use of Facebook and Twitter, where instructors can communicate thru a Facebook page or Twitter feed. This also supported in the work of Lin and Yuan (2006). Regarding engagement, “tools such as Google apps for Education or Ning would enable students to have access to valuable learning resources regardless of time and place” (Faizi, El Afiam, & Chiheb, 2013). This will also motivate them to continue working and enhancing their learning towards a final goals thanks in part to the use of wikis, blogs, and Google docs. Lastly, collaboration which is essential in the teaching and learning experience can be implemented with social media tools. According to Ingram and Hathorn (2004) and presented in the work of Faizi, El Afiam, and Chiheb (2013), “true collaboration consists of three critical elements: participation, interaction, and synthesis. This means that collaboration in educational settings requires that students move beyond merely dividing up assignments. True collaboration is not only asking students to independently produce separate parts of a project; it actually means working together on shared tasks”.

2.3 Social Media in English as a Second Language

According to Li (2017), the use of social media in ESL has evolved over the years. We’ve seen how ESL educators have using social media to develop speaking, listening, reading, and writing. They’ve been integrating blogs, wikis, and podcast to enhance the teaching and learning of their students. Several strategies include promoting students to go social by creating blogs, so they can share their posts to an online community, also to connect classrooms/schools with other cities/classrooms/countries thru social media so there is interaction among ESL students from different cultural backgrounds. Another strategy is to create a YouTube channel and create videos with the students. Create writing tasks with Twitter and Facebook and use tools like Edmodo. These strategies engage students and encourage participation along with collaboration.

2.4 Methodology

The objective of this study is to determine how much higher education ESL professors use social media in the teaching and learning of English. In addition, to know which social media tools they are using and how they are implementing them. Finally, the level of ESL student achievement in the teaching and learning process of the macro skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking with the use of social media. For this study we use the qualitative research method and the instrument of the interview was selected because it allows analyzing aspects of our objective more in depth, along with opinions and experiences. Two faculty members, n=2, and ESL instructors, one male and one female, from a university in Puerto Rico, were selected for the study. The interview was composed of four open ended

questions previously validated by two other scholars of the same institution and the approval of the Institutional Review Board.

The study development included the elaboration of the interview protocol, the interviews, the transcriptions of the interviews, and the codification of the interviews. The interviews were done in the Summer of 2017 at the end of the university Summer session. Both interviews were conducted in the offices of the scholars in a relaxed atmosphere. This study presented a limitation because $n=2$ participants are not a representative sample. The pseudo-names for the participants were Gabriel and Lucía and both interviews were recorded following protocol and not violating any rights of the subjects. Gabriel is 28 years old and has been teaching ESL at the university level for 3 years. He holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics. On the other hand, Lucía is 56 and has been teaching at the university level for 20 years. She holds an Ed.D. in Secondary English.

3. Result

After transcribing and codifying the interviews several interesting points were found. Including that both professors are implementing blogs, wikis, and podcasts in the same way. They are using blogs to work reflective writing and assess them thru process writing. In addition, wikis are implemented for collaborative activities and engagement with the community. On this particular case Gabriel is using the wiki for projects devoted to hospitality. Meanwhile, Lucía is using wikis as a class website for communication and to promote student collaboration. Both are using podcasting as a way to assess oral proficiency.

On the other hand, Lucía finds the use of social media difficult in contrast to Gabriel who is implementing Facebook groups and created a Twitter hashtag for his courses. Gabriel mentioned that he never had any formal training with the use of social media and that he relies on what he watches on YouTube. He indicated that students are getting a lot more native writing like in English by integrating social networking and are becoming risk takers by publishing live videos in English on Facebook and Twitter. On the other hand, Lucía, mentioned that she is not convinced on the use of social media and benefits for the teaching of English as a second language due to the opportunity's students have to lose focus on class. She mentioned her willingness to receive training on social media in order to apply it properly in the ESL classroom. She doesn't understand how to implement meaningful teaching and learning experiences with Twitter to the classroom. She mentioned constantly that she needs training.

Lastly, both educators mentioned that social media has contributed tremendously to the student achievement in their courses. Also, students are more proficient in the macro skills and showed in the final course evaluation with outstanding achievement for more that 84% of the students. The learners are more engaged in the class and willing to express in the target language. In addition, student retention increased dramatically in 90% in their courses in comparison to previous years where retention was 68%.

4. Discussion

The use of social media in ESL has grown tremendously over the years. More research is necessary to reaffirm the benefits of what our scholars mentioned in the interviews. The limitation of n+2 subjects needs to be considered to foster future research within the topic. As the study showed, extra training or professional development is necessary. This is specific with the use of social media for the classroom specifically with Twitter. Engaging students in meaningful learning experiences is a challenge that need to be considered in order to work several educational implications to benefit second language acquisition. Social media apps foster collaboration between faculty members and students in a way that they can combine ideas and work with projects prior to publish them. The expansion of this study needs to work directly with the student and the variable of student retention to measure the effectiveness in a bilingual or ESL classroom.

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