



The Use of Facebook for Online Discussions Among Learners

P.Shanthy

M.Sc.,M.Ed.,M.Phil.,M.Sc(Psy),.SLET(Edu). Assistant Professor
M.Kumarasamy College of Education,Karur District, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of Facebook as a platform for academic discussions among distance learners. It offers a glimpse into how mobile learning via SMS together with Facebook was used to support and enhance the learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners, Facebook is to be used for meaningful teaching and learning and there must be an appropriate and systematic mechanism for integrating educational activities in the platform. The use of Facebook reinforces to be informed and such interaction leads to rich knowledge in students. Facebook as a pedagogical tool are both the educator gaining access to Facebook spaces of all learners and ensuring that every member of the class is a friend of everyone.

KEYWORDS : Face book, announced, maintenance , social network, motivation, popularity, attainment

Introduction

Feedback can be used as an instructional tool of writing courses to increase the learner's writing ability. It reveals the errors in the writing tasks. Grammatical and content errors stated in feedback are more than signs of the learner's failure; they provide insights into how the data of the language are processed. Many studies have supported the benefits of feedback so far. College student use of social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook continue to grow in popularity on college campuses across the country, making the interaction with academic policy inevitable. In fact, Facebook remains a facet of modern collegiate life, permeating throughout various

Background of Facebook

Originally created by Harvard University computer science student Mark Zuckerberg side by side with fellow coursemates Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes for their own personal use, Facebook has since then become a household name to the world of the computer savvy and even to the not so technologically-literate.

Facebook appears to be gaining popularity as time goes by. Facebook's amazing growth as proudly announced in its virtual press room include the following facts:

- More than 400 million active users
- 50% of their active users log on to Facebook in any given day
- More than 35 million users update their status each day
- More than 60 million status updates posted each day
- More than 5 billion pieces of content shared each week
- More than 3.5 million events created each month
- More than 3 million active Pages on Facebook
- Pages have created more than 5.3 billion fans
- More than 70 translations available on the site
- About 70% of Facebook users are outside the United States

Social Networking is the term that currently refers to use of online services that facilitate the creation and maintenance of online communities via the provision of a variety of means of interaction. Unlike other online social networking sites such as MySpace.com and Friendster, Facebook is more than the typical online socialization site. Zuckerberg himself describe Facebook as a "social utility" rather than a "social network" in that it was aimed at making it really efficient for people to communicate, get information and share information.

Facebook in education

Any technology that is able to captivate so many students for so much time not only carries implications for how those students view the world but also offers an opportunity for educators to understand the elements of social networking that students find so compelling and to incorporate those elements into teaching and learning. This view is echoed by Jane Williams of Becta, the British government's educational technology agency. She was of the opinion that social networking sites can have a positive effect on motivation and attainment across the further education sector. Going more into details, Munoz

and Towner (2009) believed that Facebook provides instructors opportunities and structures by which students can help and support one another its also increases both teacher-student and student-student interaction. Apparently much similar to applications available in any typical learning management systems (LMS), Facebook

may be used by course facilitators in a variety of ways to help engage students in the learning process.

Some of these include uploading course announcements, announcing events, posting reminders regarding assignments, creating links to educational resources such as video clips and relevant websites as well as facilitating discussions either on the wall or in discussion boards. Such activities help foster conversation and enhance learning in a community of learners. The beauty of this is that students themselves have the same opportunity to take on responsibility and ownership in building their community of learning. They may themselves post announcements and reminders for fellow students, ask questions of their facilitator or peers or help answer other students' queries.

Online discussion to students through facebook

As a matter of fact, Discard argued that learning cannot be managed (but) can, however, be facilitated. As such he suggested that engaging students in social networks may actually empower them in the learning process. When students actively use the tools available, they are actually constructing their own learning environment. This very much concurs with what Owen, Grant, Sayers and Facer stressed in saying Social software is about bringing minds and ideas into contact with each other and that Identity, space, attention and creativity are all clearly central to the question of how we learn with digital technologies are intimately bound up with the ways in which young people may be coming to expect to learn in a digitally rich environment.

Clark (2000) maintained that the difficult part in getting students to take ownership of online discussions is motivating them to take charge, willing to let go of facilitator control and knowing how much to let go. Students need to interact with the facilitator and with other students; interactions motivate them to learn. In this respect, online learning affords ubiquitous interactions and involvement, be it using LMS or social networks. It expands students' learning space and learning time, something that face-to-face interactions simply cannot parallel.

Feature involvement of Facebook

In relation to this, Heiberger and Harper (2008) suggested that the theory of student involvement by Alexander Astin (1984) be used to support new thinking regarding

student involvement with the features of Facebook. According to them, five tenets of the theory that could be used to examine involvement and development are:

- Involvement Requires Physical and Psychological
- Involvement Occurs Along a Continuum
- Involvement Has Both Quantitative and Qualitative Features.
- Development Is Proportional to Quantity and Quality of Involvement.
- Educational Effectiveness Is Related to Capacity to Increase Involvement. Considering the popularity of Facebook among college students, they further

emphasized that educators ought to explore, create, and use positive, educational, engaging Facebook activities if they desire to be effective in the delivery of instructional outcomes

While involvement is a social process, it helps shape a student's learning experience and it therefore fosters not only social engagement but academic engagement as well (CELT, n.d.). According to Educause Learning Initiative (2006), Facebook has the potential to make students feel like they belong and are accepted" (p. 2). Used appropriately, Facebook offers channels for academic and pastoral support which is so crucial in helping distance learners feel connected to their virtual campus, virtual peers and virtual facilitator. Through the creation of community, conversation, collaboration, it has tremendous potential in reducing the sense of online isolation that Walker and McPherson said is caused by physical and temporal distances as well as diverse learning spaces of distance learners.

Technology Mediated Learning

Technology mediated learning refers to using technology to assist learning. Recently, there has been increased use of new technologies in teaching and learning. Collis (1977) cited in Oliver and Herrington (2003) argues that when using technology for learning, there is need to re-engineer the entire learning design rather than just re-packaging content electronically. Usually, we design learning environments that mimic the teacher in a traditional class. This is common in the distance learning classes because of the large class sizes. Oliver and Herrington have suggested three important components for improving online learning design, namely: tasks to engage and direct the learner, supports for the online learner, and the learning resources. They also believe that

we should have authentic tasks which help learners to learn so that the learner mimics the real working environment. They indicate that "flexible and online learning environments need learning supports to be designed as integral parts of the learning process". They further contend that when dealing with a learning support component, there is need to work carefully on the supportive tutor role which should provide learners with feedback and guidance on requests and most especially at critical points in the learning process. These are affordances inherent in Facebook since it can be ported on multiple platforms, including mobile phones.

Facebook as a Mediator of Learning

Vygotsky argues that social interactions are seen to play a critical role in the processes of learning and cognition. We also realize that learning support can help mediate learning through providing guidance and feedback to the learners. Facebook can ensure that guidance and feedback is achieved. resources based on multiple voices. Vygotsky (1978) says that development can be achieved through the collective nature of human consciousness manifested through social interaction. Rambe and Ng'ambi (2011) identified the need for the active presence of the learners and tutors on social media for the learners to have someone to interact with at any time. This can then help reduce the feeling of isolation characteristic of distance learning.

There are also challenges involved when using Facebook. It is estimated that online teachers spend 90% of their planning and development time creating content and online learning resources. Mediation is the guidance that goes beyond online content.

Rambe and Ng'ambi identified challenges of using social networking sites as redundant postings, limitations of collective responsibility, and subtle negotiations of power between educators and learners, and confusion of roles among novice learners. They observed that some of the challenges of using. They argue that Facebook violates personal privacy, and some students may be skeptical about participating in academic activities that invade their personal lives and "comfort zones".

Conclusion

The possibility accessing Facebook on mobile phones gave distance learners an opportunity to access the class. Given that the majority of the distance learners have no access to computers and Internet from their places of aboard, mobile phone access to

Facebook offers the best alternative. The use of Facebook in the teaching and learning helped to support modeling, contingency management, feedback, instructing and questioning. Modeling and instructing could be supported through videos uploaded on the class page. For contingency management, students felt that they were not sufficiently rewarded with positive comments. Facebook allowed students to easily give feedback to each other through 'liking' peers' comments. Facilitators were called upon to increase interaction and give timely feedback to comments. Students also said that Facebook helped them to get guidance. Facebook supported feedback as mentioned in the results. Therefore, Facebook mediated learning through feedback and questioning. It was established that questioning was possible through Facebook but teachers were cautioned to be careful not to confuse assessment questions with assisting questions. There is need to systematically integrate the activities in the teaching and learning using Facebook in order to achieve meaningful mediated learning.

References

1. Clark, J. (2000). Collaboration tools in online learning environments. <http://www.sloanconsortium.org/publications/magazine/v4n1/clark.asp>
2. Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Iowa State University. (n.d.). What does social networking have to do with teaching and learning? Retrieved December 31, 2009 from, www.celt.iastate.edu/lt/sn.html
3. Facebook. (2010b). *Facebook Pages: Insights for your Facebook Page*. Retrieved February 10, 2010 from, <http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=914>
4. Locke, L. The Future of Facebook. *Time Magazine*, July 17, 2007. Retrieved February 12, 2010 from, <http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1644040,00.htm>
5. Aguti, J. N. (2002). "Facing up to the challenge Universal Primary Education, (UPE) in Uganda through distance teacher education programmes", Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning: Open Learning: Transforming Education for Development.