

Developing reading skills through pedagogical use of Facebook in EFL high school students in Ecuador

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ABSTRACT: This study was done with the aim of discovering if using Facebook (FB) in EFL classrooms help to develop reading skills. The participants were 180 high school students. This action research was approached through mixed method. Data was gathered by means of students' weekly activities and a survey administered to teachers and students. The study concludes that the pedagogical use of FB favors the for improvement of reading skills, besides there is a total agreement of participants on the idea that FB has enhanced the aforementioned skill.

KEYWORDS: Education, EFL Teaching; Social Networks; Web 2.0.

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High school students' success depends at a great extent on the exposition and encouragement to read. Reading skill is one of the fundamental academic skills that every student needs to master, it helps to actually comprehend contents, to be critical, to easily interpret or infer information, it also helps increase their aptitudes for writing and for oral presentation. In this respect, high school students need to be trained in this skill in order for them to become competitive in different fields of knowledge and good users of the language. In order to train students on this skill, teachers take advantage of technology which is a vital element in education because it makes them better learners and enhances their motivation to study. In fact, nowadays, Web 2.0 technologies (i.e. blogs, twitter, podcasts, wikis, social network sites, virtual worlds, video sharing and photo sharing) are greatly influencing students' lives to the point that their time used in–line is much more than the one used off–line. Indeed, the internet has not only changed them socially but also academically. As it is widely known, technology has become a vital component of everyday life and social networking is second nature to our students.

Being Facebook one of the social networks most used by students —though, not necessarily for academic purposes— it has become an alternative tool in educational contexts. Due to the fact that, it offers a great potential to catch students' attention to foster English learning skills (Espinosa 2015, p. 2207) since it incorporates elements of computer–mediated communication tools that allows synchronous and asynchronous discussions, share pictures and videos (Kabilan et. al 2010, p. 179). In the same line, Roblyer et al. (2010, p. 134) highlight that Facebook is one of the latest social networks that students have widely–adopted; therefore, this resource can become a valuable tool to favor educational purposes because it supports communications and collaborations. Besides, the use of FB in education as a new didactic resource, helps personal interaction, which can contribute to improve learning and the acquisition of basic competences (Gómez, García–Prieto and Delgado–

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García 2018, p. 102). On the other hand, it is said that FB increases communication and human interaction which makes it a potential platform for language learning to take place.

In fact, FB can be used for involving English language students in authentic language interaction and learning which, undoubtedly increases motivation and consequently improve their English language performance. Blattner, and Fiori (2009, p. 8) emphasize that FB can be utilized for authentic language interaction and can be used to increase motivation and consequently improve the performance of English language learners, assuring safety and privacy at the same time.

Not much research has been done on the use of FB for teaching English language specially grammar, writing and vocabulary. One study was carried out at Oklt Al Sqoor College of Science and Arts in Saudi Arabia, its purpose was to investigate the effect of Facebook on grammar discussion and writing skill in English as a foreign language for university students. Sixty students participated in it. Results showed that the intervened group outperformed the control group in the final test of EFL grammar and writing, which lead the author affirm that FB was a useful tool for teaching purposes. Another study which attempted to investigate the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of Facebook (FB) groups for teaching and improving writing. Forty-three students completing their bachelor's degree in TESL, in the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) participated in this study. As a conclusion, it was said that 'Facebook groups' improves students' writing skills effectively, especially when brainstorming ideas for writing.

No research has been found on the use of FB for developing reading skills, this is why our study tries to shed lights on how effective FB can be for strengthening reading skills, with this purpose, the following research questions have been proposed:

- How effective is Facebook to improve students' reading skills?
- What are teachers' and students' perceptions on the use of Facebook to enhance reading skills?

This research was conducted in a public high school. One hundred eighty EFL senior students enrolled in the second year of secondary education participated in this study, additionally, three EFL teachers collaborated as tutors. Students ages ranged from 16 to 17, most of them have reached an intermediate proficiency level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). There were also three EFL teachers collaborating in the intervention.

This research study was an action research type, approached through mixed method. It lasted four months during which, students were taught reading skills by using Facebook as a complement and reinforcement for their daily classes at school. The teaching process started with the creation of closed groups in Facebook where students were included. After students were explained the way they were going to work, they were taught for a period of four months, during this time they completed weekly activities for developing the reading skill. All the activities were guided and monitored by the teachers assigned to the groups. The students' progress was measured through the completion of certain tasks such as: identifying the main and supporting ideas and summarizing information. A rubric was used for grading the students' tasks.

The data collection instruments included the activities themselves and a survey applied to students and teachers in order to know their perceptions about the pedagogic use of Facebook to develop reading skills in English as a foreign language.

The results obtained showed that 80 % of students agree that FB is a platform that actually helped them to improve Reading skills, and they feel comfortable working with it, they also believe that their reading skills are now

better than when they were before the intervention started the study. In addition, all the teachers agreed that if FB is used pedagogically, it catches the attention of students, consequently, they improve their reading skills. Besides, the progressive improvement seen throughout the completion of the weekly activities, also shows that FB has been effective for their learning.

After finishing the study, it is concluded that FB is a tool that has greatly impacted and satisfied students improving of reading skills, besides there is a total agreement of participants on the idea that FB has enhanced the aforementioned skills.

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