Self-Directed Vocabulary Learning in Facebook: From the Perspective of Social Presence

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Abstract: This work-in-progress study, part of a granted research project that aims to assist university students of English as a foreign language (EFL) to use Facebook for self-directed vocabulary learning (SDVL), is to explore (1) to what extent Facebook motivates learners' participation and (2) to what extent Facebook motivates learners' engagement in the online learning community so as to achieve learners' satisfaction. As the key factor of using Facebook for self-directed learning is what its social presence affords, the research design reported in this paper is a replication of the Kim's study (2011) that developed an instrument to measure social presence in distance higher education: The research project is conducted in an English department in a Taiwanese university. Approximate 180 first-year students are recruited. After the three-week SDVL experiences in Facebook, they respond to the social presence scale of four measures – mutual attention and support, affective connectedness, sense of community and open communication. In addition, the participants' postings are examined for cross-reference data to capture learning behaviors. For post-intervention evaluation, the modified learning satisfaction scale (Arbaugh, 2000) and the perceived learning achievement (Eom, Wen, Ashill, 2006) are used. Results from the study's investigation will shed lights on why Facebook can assist language learning. The pedagogical implication is that social presence supports self-directed learning in such a social networking community.

Keywords: Facebook, self-directed learning, social presence

6. Introduction

Intentional vocabulary teaching and learning is usually limited in the curriculum of English as a foreign language (EFL) at the tertiary level. The research project aims to assist self-directed learning that involves college students to take an active role in learning vocabulary. As social networking sites (SNSs) provide a personal learning environment and community of practice that connects like-minded people for informal knowledge exchange, SNSs might enable learner-centered designs and self-directed learning. This research proposes a self-directed vocabulary learning (SDVL) project via Facebook to assist EFL learners to develop their means of expanding vocabulary knowledge and size.

7. Self-directed learning situated in the online social networking environment

Self-directed learning has been regarded as critical part of individualizing learning experiences (Caffarella, 1993). As online learning often situates control of implementation with the learner, more and more researchers have turned the importance of self-directed learning (SDL) skills to online learning environments. Song and Hill (2007) introduced a conceptual model for understanding self-directed learning in online learning contexts. Sze-yeng and Hussain's (2010) utilized a socio-constructivist learning environment for an instructional design and development module to facilitate self-directed learning within a higher education setting. According to Knowles' self-directed learning model (1990), 'others' are seen as collaborators, potential resource persons rather than competitors in the learning process. Most agree that peer support, collaboration and communication are particularly effective in technology-based learning because in which students need to be more self-directed. In Deng

and Yuen's (2011) proposed framework for structuring activities of writing, reading and commenting on blogs, the interactive functionality of blogs was used mostly for exchanging social support rather than reflective dialogue.

The pedagogy of developing self-directed learners is based on the assumption that learners who take control of their learning will become successful. However, creating a self-directed learning program does not in itself enable learners to become self-directed. The critical issue is how the necessary supportive circumstances and contexts can be provided to help EFL learners develop the necessary capacity and willingness to take on responsibility for their own learning. The instructional design of the SDVL project addresses how the available SNS such as Facebook can be used as a constructivist learning environment for EFL learners. The research design is to examine a multiplicity of motivation sources so as to document both students' perceptions and processes that motivate students to actually engage in and carry out the SDVL task in the social networking site.

8. Instructional Design

Similar to the educational affordances of blogs that provide opportunities of writing, reading and comment, the latest technology Facebook has emerged to become the platform that college students are most comfortable to log in and use because of efficiency of communication and stronger social connections between classmates (Odom, Jarvis, M'Randa & Peek, 2013). Deng and Yuen's framework (2011) is adapted for the instructional framework of vocabulary learning activities adapt: All that students' self-directed communication with self via posting for sharing and with the community of learners via reading and responding to peers' postings is what contributes to meaningful and deep learning. The design of collaboration among peers in non-competitive activities is relevant to the features of a social constructivist learning environment. That is, the SDVL in Facebook is driven by peer collaboration and communication.

The directions of the SDVL project are designed to include "four strands" (Nation, 2007) in the learning activities. Meanwhile, learning activities engage participants in different types of learning (e.g., explicit learning, implicit learning, and interactive learning), induce different involvements (e.g., need, search and evaluate), and reinforce deep processing strategies like finding an image for semantic elaboration, English-English definition.

9. Research design and data collection

Considerable research has indicated that a carefully planned application of social media can have a great influence on student learning outcomes. Beyond the ultimate goal of vocabulary learning outcomes in terms of second language acquisition (SLA), the empirical study is to explore what motivates EFL learners to actually engage in and carry out the SDVL task in the social networking site: (1) to what extent Facebook motivates learners' participation and (2) to what extent Facebook motivates learners' engagement in the online learning community so as to achieve learners' satisfaction. The research project is conducted in an English department in a Taiwanese university. Approximate 180 first-year students are recruited. The popular social networking site Facebook is used for undertaking self-directed vocabulary learning that requires students to share and post academic words on the wall of Friend Group. They are required to weekly choose at least three words from Academic Word List and report the selected words by exploring the usage (definition and part of speech), showing the use in the context (sentences from the text they found), and sharing their reflection for three weeks. They are also required to respond to at least three peers' posted words. After the three-week SDVL experiences in Facebook, they respond to the social presence scale of four measures – mutual attention and support (6 items), affective connectedness (5 items), sense of community (4 items) and open communication (4 items). In addition, participants' discussion threads in Facebook are classified by the four-factor measures for cross-reference of qualitative data to capture learning behaviors. For post-intervention evaluation, the modified learning satisfaction scale (3 items) (Arbaugh, 2000) and the perceived learning achievement

Liu, C.-C. et al. (Eds.) (2014). Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on Computers in Education. Japan: Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education

(4 items) (Eom, Wen, Ashill, 2006) are used. Quantitative data will be analyzed by structural equation model (SEM), multiple regression and correlation.

10. Conclusion

Results from the study's investigation will shed lights on how relevant the educational use of Facebook can assist social constructivist learning for students' vocabulary practices. The pedagogical implication is that social presence can support self-directed learning in an online learning community.

Acknowledgements

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