

Changing the Reading Attitude of Young Children through Facebook

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Abstract: It is widely recognized that positive reading attitude affects reading performances [1]. As such, the aim of this study is to examine the effect of a reading program that leverage on social networking tool Facebook on reading attitude. Reading attitude is affected by personal beliefs, social beliefs and reading experiences [2]. In this study, pupils in the treatment group were required to post book reports onto Facebook which provided them with peers support and social purpose for reading and sharing their reading experiences with peers. Pre- and post- test were administered using Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey (ERAS) before and after the implementation of Facebook reading program. The result of the study shows that the treatment group developed a more positive attitude towards reading of Chinese story books than control group.

Keywords: Reading attitude, Chinese story books, recreational reading, Facebook

1. Introduction

This study is developed base on McKenna's model [2]. Reading attitude is defined by McKenna as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation". McKenna also pointed out that as children mature, and as more and more leisure options compete with reading, positive attitudes toward reading will gradually worsen. This is a common situation that many teachers are facing now, as children's attention are frequently diverted to other activities, such as playing computer games than reading.

Base on McKenna's theory, we predicted that socialization and interaction of reading experiences among pupils could have a strong impact on their reading attitude. Therefore, reading program in school which aims to cultivate positive reading attitude could include more social elements to create a greater impact. As more and more pupils are creating social networking site Facebook to communicate online, we see the advantage of using it to promote sharing and interactions. Hence, the functions and impact of online community were further explored to study its suitability to be included in a reading program that aims to improve the reading attitude of pupils.

1.1 The McKenna Model

The McKenna model [2] identifies 3 principal factors influencing attitudinal change: (a) personal beliefs about the outcomes of reading, (b) social beliefs about the expectations of others and (c) reading experiences. McKenna argues that children's perceived reading outcomes are relational; that is children will always weigh the pleasure of reading against other available alternatives, such as watching television or playing games. As a result, children's attitude towards reading changes when they expect more satisfying results from doing other activities. The second factor that affects children's reading attitude is the desire to be accepted by the people they value. These people can be family, teachers or peers whose views have a strong impact on the perceptions of pupils on reading. Third, negative experiences in reading, such as being scolded by teachers for not handing in book reports,

may lead to a belief that the inevitable result of reading is frustration. Poor readers who often experience frustration during reading will eventually develop negative attitude towards it. On the opposite side, if a child is immersed in an environment that encourages reading, s/he will develop a more positive attitude towards it.

1.2 Online Community

Many studies were conducted by educators to explore instructional methods or to design reading programs to cultivate a positive attitude in reading [3, 4, 5]. However, not many studies were conducted on the effect of online community on changing reading attitude. Online community has the ability to affect the value and practices of members [6]. It is powerful as it is able to reach out to anyone who has internet connection as there is no constraint in physical boundary. Study has also pointed out that when a person develops a strong sense of belonging to the community, there is a higher tendency that he or she will interact more in the community [7]. When a child interacts with better peers frequently in the same community, learning takes place; the child will begin to appropriate and internalize the value and thought of the better peers [8].

Recently, there is more and more studies conducted on the impact of different online community on learning. These online communities include gaming, discussion forum, wiki and many more. However, these are communities specially nurtured by educators to meet certain learning objectives; pupils are invited to participate for academic purposes. As a result, the ability to sustain participation becomes one of the factors that determines the success or failure of the academic program [9, 10]. In this study, we argue that instead of creating a platform for nurturing online community, the result may be better if we can take advantage of an existing active social network, Facebook, as a communication platform to foster a learning community. As Wenger & Snyder [11] pointed out, community cannot be build, but we can identify and nurture one from existing networks. The key is not to impose a structure but assist the development of the community through providing appropriate assistance.

Facebook is a social networking tool that gains enormous popularity recently. It allows users to search and get connected with people for socialization purpose through setting up a personal website easily and quickly. This function has made Facebook one of the most powerful tools for communication among college students to keep in touch with old friends and meet new friends [12].

2. Research Question

In this study, we wanted to take advantage of the affection pupils have for communicating through Facebook to cultivate a more positive attitude in reading Chinese story books. Instead of the usual practice of monitoring students' reading through writing and handing in book reports to teachers for evaluation, pupils will be encourage to post their book reports onto Facebook to share with their peers. We use the following questions to guide our study:

1. What is the effect of a reading program that leverage on social networking tool Facebook has on lower primary pupils' reading attitude of Chinese story books?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants were 2 classes of primary 3 pupils in a neighborhood school in Singapore. Each class consists of about 30 pupils with mix abilities. 26 samples were successfully

collected from each class. The treatment class and control class were taught by different Chinese language teachers. Before the pupils in the treatment class embarked on the program, about half of the class already own a Facebook account and all of them have email accounts. Prior to the program, the pupils knew how to access internet and how to key in Chinese text using Chinese phonics, hanyu pinyin.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument that was used to measure reading attitude was modified from Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), developed by McKenna and Kear [13]. The instrument is divided into 2 sections; each section consists of 10 items. The first section of the survey measures attitude toward recreational reading and the second section measures attitude toward academic aspects of reading. Our aim in this study is to survey the attitude of recreational reading, so the data collected for academic reading is not included for discussion.

In Singapore, pupils study 2 languages in primary school, English and Chinese. To ensure pupils knew we are surveying their attitude on reading Chinese story books, instead of English book, we modify the wording for some of the items in ERAS to reflect the correct context. The modified ERAS were then administered in a class that was not participating in the study to examine its internal reliability. A cronbach alpha analysis was run after the data was collected. The obtained alpha score is 0.746 for the first half of the survey on recreational reading and 0.808 for the second half of the survey on academic reading. The score indicates that the items for both scales have high internal consistency.

3.3 Procedure

A pre-test was administered in both treatment and control classes before the Facebook supported reading program started. During the pre-test, ERAS forms were issued to the pupils in both classes to complete. The study lasted about 2 months. During this period, the control class proceeded with their standard reading program, while the treatment class embarked on a Facebook supported reading program. At the end of the study, pupils of both control and treatment groups were issued another set of ERAS forms to complete. Both set of data were collected and analysed to determine if there is any changes in reading attitude before and after the Facebook reading program.

3.4 Intervention

At the start of the Facebook supported reading program, consent forms were issued to parents of treatment group to explain the study and seek permission for involving their children in the program. Most parents were supportive of the study. To avoid pupils' posting being commented by uninvited people, a group account, name: BCPS Book Club was set up to restrict participants. During the intervention period, pupils were encouraged to write and post their book reports onto the wall of BCPS book club and comment on one another's view of the same title. For the control group, pupils wrote their book reports base on a template created by their teachers. After that, teacher will marked and returned the book reports to pupils.

4. Result & Discussion

Independent sample t-test was performed on both groups at the beginning of the semester on students' reading attitude and the results showed no difference between the two groups,

$t(50)=.653, p=.52$. The academic results for Chinese was also compared for both groups and no significant differences were observed, $t(50)=.69, p=.69$. An independent t-test for the reading attitude however revealed significant differences in favour of the treatment group, $t(50)=2.083, p=.042$. Furthermore, paired samples *t*-tests indicated that there were significant changes in the recreational reading attitude for both control and treatment group. The treatment group ($M=27.39, SD=6.5$) achieved a significant gain in recreational reading attitude after attending the Facebook supported reading program ($M=30.31, SD=6.7$), $t(25)=-2.27, p=0.032$. However, the control group ($M=28.73, SD=8.3$) showed a significant drop in recreational reading attitude ($M=26.23, SD=7.4$), $t(25)=2.08, p=0.049$.

The result supports our argument that reading attitude can be influenced by social factors. As compare to reading alone and writing book reports individually, pupils find a social purpose to read in this program. Sharing their reading experiences with their peers on their favorite online platform may be able to motivate them to read.

The Facebook supported reading program impacted different pupils differently. If we look at the individual scores in the treatment group, the Facebook reading program seems to have a greater impact on pupils who were average and poor readers. The reading attitude for pupils who are stronger in Chinese language academically is less or not affected at all by the program. The social support given to weaker pupils in comprehending text by their peers during the study period could be the main contributing factor to this result. For more able readers, they may not see the meaning of collaboration or enjoy the socialization in reading and sharing in the Facebook reading program as yet. Thus, to examine if online community, such as Facebook has a greater and more generalized impact on the reading attitude of pupils compared to conventional reading program, there is a need to extend the study period and re-examine the structure of the program to ensure pupils enjoy the collaboration and sharing through online community.

In other words, to declare a change in reading attitude, the reading program supported by Facebook should be implemented for a longer period of time. In this study, pupils stopped posting book reports onto Facebook when the study ended. Through the Facebook news feed, we can observe that pupils continue to be active in Facebook, as they commented on one another's online games. Unfortunately, they have not interacted over their reading experiences. That is to say, the newly cultivated interest in reading is not strong enough to combat other leisure options pupils find more attractive and exciting in Facebook. Although there is no evidence to show that they have read less after the study, but to build a stronger sharing culture, there is a need to continue the reading program for a longer period of time to create a more impactful attitudinal change. Perhaps we should also interview the students to find out from their perspective if there are other features in Facebook or other pedagogical arrangements that could enhance their interest.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the effect of a reading program designed for lower primary pupils on the reading attitude of Chinese story books. This reading program used social networking tool Facebook as a communication platform for writing book reports. Evidence shows that the Facebook reading program has a positive impact on pupils' reading attitude. The main reason being Facebook provided a social purpose for reading and sharing reading experiences among pupils. However, to inculcate a more permanent attitudinal change, there is a need to extend the reading program for a longer period of time.

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