

APPLICATION OF FACEBOOK TO ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING: CASE OF MBEYA CITY

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Abstract

Educators and policymakers have taken notice of the widespread usage of Facebook as an online social network and as an alternative method of teaching and learning. Language learners when they use Facebook can come across with new vocabularies and grammar rules that may help them improve their language competence. Despite the widespread usage of Facebook in education around the world, little research has done on how facilitators and students in Tanzanian secondary schools use it to teach and learn English. This study has surveyed the level to which selected ordinary secondary schools' teachers and students in Tanzania use Facebook to teach and learn English as a second language. It also investigated the awareness of students and language teachers towards the application of Facebook in teaching and learning of English in their respective schools. The data were collected from 95 respondents. The structured interview technique and questionnaires were the tools applied to collect data from these informants. The stratified purposive random sampling was employed to get the required respondents. Both statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS), content analysis, and excel techniques were employed in analysing data. The results showed that Facebook was not mostly used as a teaching and learning tool in ordinary secondary schools in Tanzania despite the fact that teachers and students frequently make use of it. It also found that, language learners might acquire new vocabularies and skills such as listening, writing, reading and speaking when they Facebook for social communication.

Keywords: *Facebook; language learners; social network; English Language Teaching*

1. Introduction

In this twenty-first century, technological application is very crucial in all fields including education. Applying technology in delivering knowledge has great contribution in pedagogical aspects since using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could lead to efficiency of learning (Jamieson-Procter et al, 2013 as cited in Ghavifekr and Rosdy, 2015). Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015) points out more that the subjects such as science, mathematics, languages, arts and humanistic can be educated effectively through technology- based application.

Technological improvement has drawn attention to secondary schools educationalists and policy producers to turn their effort into emphasizing the application of technology such as social networks for language teaching and learning. Social networks such

as blogs, online discussion boards, You Tube, MySpace, Facebook, and other Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are used frequently by students of ordinary secondary schools and other levels of education in these recent years. The SNSs mostly used for networking with family, friends and some youth use it to make professional connection. The SNSs are part of students' social lives, but also allow students to interact and collaborate academically with one in a virtual learning environment (McCarthy, 2010).

The English language has now received general acknowledgement as a global language, in respect to its numerous functions and preference over many other languages around the globe (Viatonu & Kayode 2012). Since 2004, the practice of using social media in secondary schools for language teaching and learning has increased due to technical improvements.

Despite the frequent application of SNSs for academic purpose worldwide, the state of Facebook application in English language instructing and educating in Tanzania is not well known. The author then assessed the degree to which ordinary secondary schools in Tanzania apply Facebook to teach and learn English language. The study further investigated the awareness of students and teachers who are teaching English by using Facebook in their respective schools. Specifically, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

- Do language learners have facilities to support the use facebook?
- What are the language aspects learnt by students when they use facebook?
- What are the teachers and learners' perceptions on the use of facebook in teaching and learning language?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Facebook as a Social Networking Site (SNS) with many Users

In recent years Facebook as one of the SNSs, often students use it for communicating social matters. In historical background view, Facebook came famous from 2004. It has grown exponentially to become a popular social networking site in the world (Mazman & Usluel, 2010); Gamble & Wilkins (2014). O'Rawe (2010) also argues that in 2010, Facebook had well over 400 million active users globally. EDUCAUSE Centre for Applied Research (ECAR) also states that from a sample of 36,950 of U.S. universities and one Canadian university showed that 90% of students who use social networking websites, 97% said they used Facebook (Junco, 2012).

The social networking sites gains popularity day after day. Taking an example of America, the social networking such as Facebook, instagram, twiter, snapchat, Tumblr and Vine mostly used by the youth. According to a Pew Research Centre survey in 2015, 89% of teenagers reported using at least social networking site (Gregory, 2016).

2.2 Facebook Application for Communicative English Language Teaching

Facebook provides a target- language- friendly interface created for and used by native speakers in a format familiar to students. As a communicative tool, Facebook can also serve to promote collaboration through target language discussion, status updates, comments, and questions. Through using Facebook, students can discuss a photograph or video or can facilitate an activity in which they describe in the foreign language a certain place, person, activity to mention few, while other students try to guess what it is (Terantino & Graf, 2011).

They further stated the benefits of using Facebook in language teaching and learning. First, using Facebook seems to have a significant impact on language learning as it allows students to engage with peers in a familiar format and for an academic purpose. It provides opportunities for informal conversations in the target language. Furthermore, Facebook platform allows for access authentic materials and the sharing of culturally relevant photos, videos, and music to promote social and active language learning. Balcikanli (2015) also states the advantages of using Facebook as it makes students constantly communicate about their lives, opinions, interests, and schoolwork in Facebook. Second, the nature of the student-to-student and student to instructor interactions is more multi-dimensional than in traditional writing assignment; third, students who use Facebook get much excitement when participating in an activity using the target language.

2.3 Academic Facebook Groups

Scholars have suggested Facebook groups to be effective means for facilitating English language teaching and learning in secondary schools. Yunus and Salehi (2012) examined students' perceptions on the efficiency of Facebook groups for educating and advancing writing. Their results indicated that groups of Facebook are real for advancing the skill of writing, specifically in the brainstorming of thoughts before actual writing. They finally argued more that, language learners can learn new terminologies from reading the comments sent by other members of the facebook group, and checking the spelling features helps reduce their spelling mistakes.

Yunus and Salehi (2012) examined students' perceptions on the efficiency of groups created in Facebook to teach and improve writing of students. Their results disclosed that Facebook groups are best in improving students' skills of writing, particularly in brainstorming of ideas before the real writing. In conclusion, they have argued that language learners can get new terminologies from reading the comments of other members in a group, and spell checking helps reduce errors in spelling writing.

Srirat (2014) insists that, using Facebook Group to facilitate teaching English language course in secondary schools can assist students to learn more effectively. In addition to that, students felt more confident to perform activities using English. Furthermore, Facebook enhances students' interest and language learning motivation.

Shih (2013) conducted a similar study to explore the outcome of including blended learning with Facebook and peer assessment for English in Business Communication course for college students. The results shown that, applying Facebook to the English designed for Specific Purpose (ESP) course could excellently assist students in the learning of English for Business Communication. Students can improve their professional knowledge not only from in-class instruction but also through peer assessing on Facebook.

3. Research Method

This study employed quantitative and qualitative research approaches. These approaches were applied with a focus of obtaining both qualitative and quantitative data from participants. The qualitative approach was used for an intention of exploring the participants' perceptions, attitudes and opinions towards the investigated problem (Best & Kahn, 2006). This study was conducted at Mbeya city located at Highland Southern Zone of Tanzania which is 830 km from Dar es Salaam. The assumption that many users of social media are in cities and towns in Tanzania, it was the base for selecting this area of study by the researcher.

The target participants were 95; students were 80 and language teachers were 15. To get these informants the researcher used a purposive random sampling technique. This technique was selected basing on the fact that the intended participants were students who study English, and teachers who teach English subject in ordinary secondary schools. The informants provided data in this study were from three ordinary secondary schools. From each school five teachers and twenty-six (26) students were randomly selected. The names of schools where students and teachers selected were Sangu, Meta and Iyumwe secondary schools. To get the required information from these respondents, researcher used structured interview and questionnaires as the data collection tools.

The collected data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The Excel and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) were used to analyse the quantitative data. The data analysed quantitatively resulted into generating frequencies, percentages, tables and charts. The content analysis on the other hand, was the technique used to analyse the qualitative data collected from respondent

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic data

This study involved ninety five participants. These were eighty students and fifteen language teachers. Students who were involved in this study were those taking English as one of their subjects. They were forty-five males (56.2%) and thirty-five females (43.8%). The age groups of students were diverse. There was the age group with highest frequencies (17-20) years, this comprised fifty-one (64%) students. The next age group was (13-16) years and this had twenty-five (31%) students. The age groups with diminutive frequencies was (21-24) years, this had four (5%) students.

The age groups of teachers who interviewed were also diverse. There were teachers with age group between 25-35 years. These were three (20%) teachers. The age group between 35-45 years was nine teachers (60%), 45-55 years were two (13%) and 55-60 years was one (7%). Tables (1-3) below describe the demographic data of informants who were involved in the study.

Gender	Students		Teachers/Facilitators	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Female	45	56.2	8	53.3
Male	35	43.8	7	46.7
Total	80	100	15	100

Table 1. Gender of Respondents N=95

Age Groups	Students		Teachers/Facilitators	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
13 – 16 Years	25	31		
17-20 Years	51	64		
21 – 24 Years	4	5		
25 – 35 Years			3	20
36 – 45 Years			9	60
46 – 55 Years			2	13
56 – 60 Years			1	7
Total	80	100	15	100

Table 2. Age Groups of Respondents N=95

4.2 Owing Facebook Accounting (FA) and the Period of owning it

This study has found that among 80 students who responded to the questionnaire, only sixty-nine (86.2%) possess FA, while eleven (13.8%) do not possess it. On the other hand, teachers who own FA were thirteen (86.7%) and those who do not own it were two (13.3%). See table 3 below:

Owing FA	Students			Teachers		
	Frequency	Percentage	Owing Period	Frequency	Percentage	Owing Period
Own	69	86.2	0-4 Years	13	86.7	0-6 Years
Don't Own	11	13.8		2	13.3	
Total	80	100.0		15	100	

Source: Field data

Table 3. Students Owing Facebook Account

This result shows that, large number 86.2% and 86.7% of the respondents who were students and teachers respectively own facebook accounts. This finding gives the researcher an idea that almost all students and teachers in the surveyed ordinary secondary schools were familiar with Facebook. It proved to him that they have daily use Facebook in their life.

The owning period of FA of students as they responded to the questionnaires, vary from one student to another. Nevertheless, the longest period for owning FA was between 0-2 years, which comprised forty-seven (68.1%) students. Other FA owning times were 2-4 years (21.7%) and 4-6 years (10.1%). The data shows that many students have two years of owning FA. This result convised the researcher to believe that, students who were involved in this study had experience of using Facebook. Due to that awareness shown, the researcher concludes that students use facebook to share different information.

The study is in line with Terantino & Graf (2011) who stated that:

“Facebook provides a target-language friendly interface created for and used by native speakers in a format familiar to students. As users connect, they are able to share internet links and multimedia such as photos or videos with ease”.

4.3 Membership of Academic Facebook Groups and Teachers’ Encouragement in Using Facebook

As scholars recommend that, the academic Facebook groups may be effective for facilitating English language teaching and learning in secondary schools. The author investigated this fact to the surveyed area by asking informants (students) if they are the members of any English language Facebook groups. The study shows that all 69 students who declared to possess FA, neather of the students belong to those groups.

Findings depict that, all (100%) students participated to give data in this study were not engaged as members of any English language learning Facebook group. This discovery is contrary to the study made by Yunus and Salehi (2012) who contend that:

“Facebook groups help learners to learn new terminologies by reading the explanations of other group, and the spell check features assist to decrease their spelling mistakes. In addition, the ideas or opinions by peers help them in getting a better idea for writing and they also find it easier to complete their essays after participating in the Facebook group discussion”.

4.4 Teachers' Encouragement on Using Facebook

The study further investigated teachers' encouragement on using Facebook. It was found out that out of 80 students, only six (7.5%) of them agreed to get encouragement from their teachers on the use of Facebook in learning; while 92.5% are not encouraged. This result may mean that, teachers in the ordinary secondary schools do not encourage students on the use of Facebook in teaching and learning. It may also mean English language teachers do realize the usefulness of Facebook in English language teaching and learning.

Encouragement	Frequency	Percent
Encourage	6	7.5
Doesn't Encourage	74	92.5
Total	80	100.0

Table 4. Teachers' Encouragement on Using Facebook in Learning

4.5 English language Aspects Learnt by Students when using Facebook Accounts

The researcher was also interested to know some of the English language features gained by students when use Facebook in the daily life. The result for this investigated item is shown in figure 1 below:

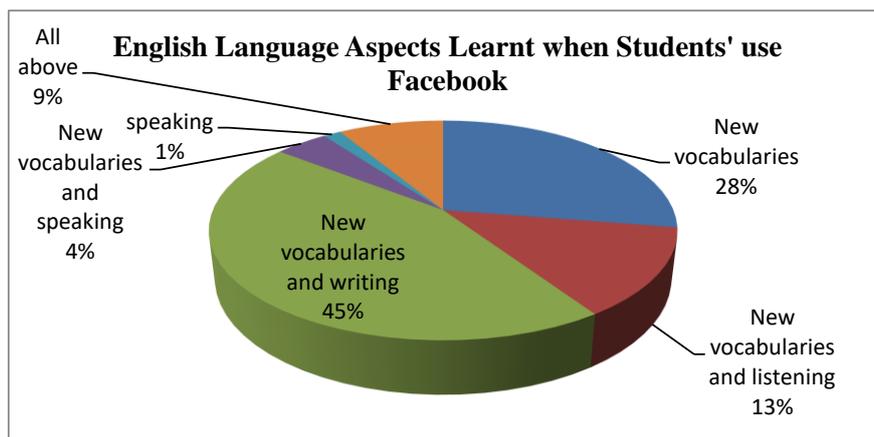


Figure 1. English Language Aspects Learnt by Students when using FA

Basing on the above results, it shows that there are language aspects a student learn when using Facebook. The most aspect pointed out was the learning of new vocabularies and writing skills, which had 45%. It is followed by the learning new vocabularies 28%, new vocabularies and listening 13%, new vocabularies and speaking 4%, speaking 1% and those who agreed all of the above-mentioned aspects to be learnt by students were 9%. Speaking and listening skills have emerged to be one of the skills learnt by students when using Facebook via chatting, posting comments and sharing videos.

The English language mastering when students use Facebook, was also observed. About sixty-nine (72.6%) respondents replied on the question addressed to them about mastery of the language. See the results in table 5 below:

Level of Mastery	Frequency	Percent
Very Well Improved	4	5.8
Well Improved	26	37.7
Somehow Improved	32	46.4
Not Improved	7	10.1
Total	69	100.0

Table 5. Level of Mastery of English Language through Use of Facebook N=69

4.6 Students' and Teachers' Perceptions on Using Facebook

The study also looked at the opinions given by students and teachers towards the use of Facebook in English language teaching and learning. After doing analysis to the item related to this, the results were that 55 students rated 68.8% agreed Facebook to be helpful to them in learning English language. 17.5% of them said not helpful while 13.8% were not sure whether it could be helpful or not.

Students' Perception	Frequency	Percent
Helpful	55	68.8
Not Helpful	14	17.5
Not sure	11	13.8
Total	80	100.0

Table 6. Students' Perception on Using Facebook

On the other hand, teachers had different opinions towards the use of Facebook. However, they were conversant with it, but eleven (73.3%) teachers doubted the effectiveness of this technique in teaching and learning English language. Those who agree were four (27.7%) teachers. One respondent commented that:

"This technique won't be effective because some students are not accessed to the internet. Furthermore, some of their families are unable to buy computers/mobile phones for their children that to let them connect with Facebook".

Contrarily, other respondents were against of the truth that Facebook could be used as the teaching and learning technique. The outlook given was that:

"I don't believe if Facebook can be the successful technique in teaching and learning English language since it is mostly used by youth as to exchange non-useful information".

This discovery is contrary to the perceptions of students who approved to possess FA. Students accepted Facebook to be useful to them especially in learning English language as it can help them to learn many vocabularies.

5. Conclusion

As this study was intended to survey the level to which teachers and students in Tanzanian ordinary secondary schools use Facebook in teaching and learning English as a second language, the findings reveal that the level of using it in schools is still low. The

negligible use of facebook in language teaching and learning goes contrally with current technology development. The social media use in Tanzania as reported by Kemp (2021), has increased by 900 thousand (+20%) between 2020 and 2021. That is to say, there were about 5.40 million social media users by January 2021. The report shows more the leading social media in Tanzania with large number of users to be facebook. The number of people that can be reached by facebook in Tanzania has been reported to be 3.40 millions, Kemp (2021). This report implies that, facebook is one of the social media used by many people than other types of social media Tanzania. It has large number of users in the country. This proves that, once much emphasis is put on the use facebook in education particularly in teaching and learning English language, it may lead on increasing the competence of language learners.

It is true that facebook in Tanzania is not used for learning purpose. This is proved by the findings obtained in this study. The results show that many students in ordinary secondary schools have facilities to support the use of facebook in language teaching and learning but they don't use them for that purpose. It has been observed that 86.2% of all students responded to the questionnaires and interview, possess facebook accounts. The fact that most of the students witnessed to possess facebook accounts but none of the teachers encourage and guide them for English language learning. The language teachers also observed to be contrally with those scholars who regard facebook as one of the methodological tools which can be used for language teaching and learning in classrooms.

To increase the use of facebook in teaching and learning particularly on English language in Tanzanian secondary schools, much emphasis need to be made to ensure all educational stakeholders get awareness of facebook. Teachers are required to use different methodological tools including facebook in teaching language. Doing this, may help to increase students' competences on English language as many language aspects can be learnt along with the use of facebook. The awareness on the importance of facebook should be made to the teachers, students and all other educational stakeholders.

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