ESL@FACEBOOK: A TEACHER'S DIARY
ON USING FACEBOOK

by **Monique N. Simpson**

Soongsil University, Seoul,

South Korea

Ms_msimpson @ hotmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates whether Facebook would be an 'effective and easy' teaching tool in ESL classes in South Korean universities. Using a teacher's diary, action research was conducted. The study indicated that Facebook is not different from other new teaching tools; the teacher must familiarize him/herself with the tool to use it confidently. Second, a student's 'lazy factor' is quite problematic in the learning process. Lastly, action research and a teacher's journal can increase teacher's self-accountability.

Keywords: ESL, Facebook, social networking site, Internet, accountability, teacher's diary, action research

1. Introduction

In the classroom, boredom is a ubiquitous feature like desks and chairs. Teachers spend countless hours planning lessons, attending meetings, exchanging ideas, and doing other activities in order to lessen the boredom. Many teachers turn to technology to increase participation. During the academic year of 2010/2011 in a small tourism class in southern Ecuador, I used Facebook, an influential Social Networking Site (SNS), to allow students to practice promotional tourism of their city. About 10 per cent of the world's population have active Facebook accounts and about 25 per cent in about one-third of the world's countries (Anderson, 2011). The tourism students developed the first English Facebook page for their city, creating a valuable source of tourist, cultural and historical information. [1] More importantly, my students were genuinely interested in the project. They posted pictures, wrote comical comments, completed assignments on time and easily collaborated with each other. I was able to teach real-life English in a practical manner. I tried to apply this practical method of using English in my present job in South Korea.

Few, if any, in-depth look at SNS in Korean classes have been published in the form of a teacher's diary. With the increasing prominence of SNS among young people around the world, it is crucial for students to become confident users of these sites (and other websites) in English. Bringing SNS into the classroom reinforces the role of ESL to prepare students for our global society. Therefore, it is important to examine SNS as a teaching tool.

This study investigates whether Facebook could be an 'effective and easy' teaching tool in English university classes. Effectiveness was classified as the teacher's (mine) perceived effectiveness in terms of student behavior and response to the Facebook project. My journal entries chronicled observations and thoughts about the project aiming to improve students' participation and motivation. In terms of easiness, I explored how feasible the Facebook assignments were for an instructor with numerous students.

2. Literature review

Recently there has been a steady influx of articles detailing reflective teaching in the form of action research and a teacher's diary; however, few articles have documented Facebook in the ESL classroom.

2.1. Social Networking Sites in the classroom

As Bylth (2010) noted, SNS like Facebook and Twitter are being used in ESL classes. I am aware of teachers using Facebook in the Korean classrooms. However, few teachers share their experiences in academic journals (Wu and Hsu, 2011; Isbulan, 2011). But the tide is turning as seen with some ESL journals, like *ELT Journal*, featuring technology-related sections. Also, Facebook usage in South Korea is rising at an exponential rate. Anderson (2011) reported that in January 2010, Facebook only had half a million South Korean users, but by January 2011 there were 2.5 million users with almost 9 million expected by the end of 2011.

Noting the paucity of academic research on SNS and ESL, Wu and Hsu (2011) conducted a study on Facebook usage by English majors at university in Taiwan. Participants described their Facebook group to be "a pressure-free environment for English learning because it is a virtual community composed of closed group, which opens for limited members and makes them feel less stressful" (Wu and Hsu, 2011, p. 6). However, the study listed five external factors which influenced students' motivation and engagement with the Facebook group. Those factors

were audience, feedback from peers, topic, other school work, and novelty effect (Wu and Hsu, 2011).

Another study on integrating Facebook with peer assessment revealed that Facebook had a positive impact in an ESL writing course. Shih (2011, p. 840) noted that Facebook's "popularity, accessibility, and unique features attracted the students and eased their resistance to learning, making this a successful course." However, Shih (2011) noted that some students disliked how classmates incorrectly corrected grammar, which caused unnecessary frustration in the learning process. Another key finding showed students felt "the most important factors for them to be motivated to learn English writing and find the class interesting were the instructor's teaching techniques, teaching enthusiasm, and sense of humour" (Shih, 2011, p.839). Thus, it is important for teachers to keep in mind that Facebook is not a replacement for teaching but a supplement. The last key finding of Shih's (2011) study was that the instructor/researcher spent a substantial amount of time monitoring the Facebook page and commenting on students' postings.

In addition to these Facebook studies, there has been both positive and negative research on Internet-based assignments. The study conducted by Hamano-Bunce (2011) on the chatroom activities showed how the slowness of partners responding to comments in a chat added unnecessary frustration and stress to the English task. However, this is a possible problem in any cooperative learning activity when one student finishes more quickly than another. A Chilean study showed that a weblog could be "a powerful tool that triggered interaction and communication among students," when teachers played an active role in commenting on students' blog posts (Trajtemberg and Yiakoumetti, 2011, p.442). The weblog "transformed the otherwise solitary activities of reading and writing into more engaging tools for learners" (Trajtemberg and Yiakoumetti, 2011, p. 444).

2.2. Reflective teaching

Reflective teaching involves "observing and reflecting on one's own teaching, and using observation and reflection as a way of bringing about change" (Richards, 1991, p. 4). It serves as a catalyst for teachers improving learning environments and strengthening their professionalism. It has been noted "experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, but that experience coupled with reflection can be a powerful impetus for teacher development" (Richards, 1991, p. 8). Thus, a teacher's diary serves a significant purpose in the ESL classroom.

Teachers' written documentation (diary entries) can be used as reliable data that can impact consequential teaching and diary entries (Baurain, 2010; McDonough, 1992). Several studies have been conducted on action research in the form of teaching diaries in educational programs. In 2009, Yang found that diaries allowed teachers to clarify their thoughts on teaching which enhanced their professional development. Yang (2009) recommended that language teaching diaries be included in Korean educational programs. Similarly, Ahn (2011) recommended incorporating action research, which can include journalising, in teaching since it could provide the effective professional development needed to become competent teachers. Lastly, Wyatt (2011) showed a strong possibility of high levels of motivation, self-awareness, efficacy and autonomy in teachers who conducted action research. Reflecting during action research creates a strong teaching foundation.

3. The study

3.1. Design and procedure

This research focused on three out of six conversation classes that a native English instructor taught at a private university outside of Seoul. The project lasted six weeks, beginning after the midterm of fall semester of 2011. Two classes were selected for the Facebook project based on the highest and lowest average midterm grades. Three other classes were required to produce a three-minute recording in English. One class voted for the Facebook project instead of doing the recording. Conversation classes were mandatory for all university students, with the majority taking the classes during their first year of college. Number of students enrolled in each class ranged from 16 to 23. Each class met once a week for two hours.

This action research followed the procedure published on the website hosted by The Center for Technology in Education (CTE) at Johns Hopkins University. [2] Qualitative data was collected in the form of journal entries to focus on classroom dynamics (i.e student-student interactions, student-teacher interaction, lesson preparation, in-class teaching). The investigator wrote for a minimum of one hour on the weekend after she had completed teaching a 12-hour week. The investigator wrote in her private office, either at home or the university. The last entry was written two weeks after the project as a final reflection on the entire process.

As for Facebook, a "closed" group for students was created.[3] Content of the group's page was not open to the public. The investigator was the sole moderator and controlled who became a group member. Only basic features of the page were used: a photo album of the university, a video poll for an assignment, posting messages, commenting on students' posts, and selecting the "like" button on students' postings. The profile picture of the group was the class textbook. Also, the investigator used her professional Facebook account to maintain the teacher-student professional relationship. Teachers often deliberate on how much personal contact to have with students on SNS; consequently, using a professional account eliminated this dilemma.

Using the class's Facebook group, students had to complete the following three assignments for 10 per cent of their final grade. (All assignments were related to the class textbook and served as preparation for the final examine.)

Table 1. Assignment list.

Assignment No.	Assignment
#1	"Bucket List" What do you want to do before you "kick the bucket" (die)? Post a photo and write a sentence.
#2	Ask a follow-up question to a classmate. Remember to use the 5W's (Who? What? When? Where?Why?) and 1 H (How?). Then answer any questions from your classmates.
#3	Watch the three videos posted on this FB page. Out of the three, which is the best technological/Japanese/health-related achievement? Why? Please vote and write your answer in the comment section.

3.2. Results and discussion

In analyzing journal entries, four distinct themes were found:

1.) Facebook as a teaching tool,

2.) students' actions and non-action,

3.) pros and cons of action research, and

4.) a teacher's journal and accountability.

3.2.1. Facebook as a teaching tool

Although I use Facebook daily, I struggled to use it as a teaching tool, showing no difference from any new method and/or equipment. Using Facebook in a professional manner was quite different than using it as personal recreation.

Excerpt 1. Journal: Week 2

There was a problem on how to easily group photos in one class. FB [Facebook] has changed since FB page with Ecuadorians. I showed how students could look at all photos and pics, photos from classmates. Easily/Feasible- not. I'm wondering what will be easiest way to record grades. Easiest would be three separate FB pages, but more work to upload.

My entry highlights an important challenge with technology - the constant upgrading and refreshing of a system. Facebook, in particular, changes its format and features regularly. This could be problematic for teachers if they create a lesson plan based on one format of Facebook, then suddenly encountering the format change.

The entry also highlights my biggest dilemma -- how to grade material once posted. This was a problem due to time constraints. The time needed for this Facebook project was overwhelming at first. As noted by Shih (2011), the instructor had to make a time commitment and put forth great effort in evaluating, correcting and responding to Facebook postings. Time was reduced by making the Facebook project a fluency activity; I corrected grammar by rebroadcasting students' comments (posting the correct grammar) in a response posting. So, once I started actually grading, I found Facebook was just as time consuming as the alternative project (audio recording). However, future research should explore how to allow for stronger student-driven grammar correction that is not time consuming for the teacher.

Another problem was that I overlooked some students' postings. I was only made aware of my error when students questioned why I had not commented on their postings. I meant to comment on all students' posts, for I understood the importance of acknowledging postings. As stated in a Wu and Hsu (2011) study, "specific and meaningful feedback from others plays an important role of the participants' motivation and engagement toward the [Facebook page];" participants "expected a lot of response when posing something" (Wu and Hsu, 2011, p.7). I overlooked the posts because when new postings appeared, older postings were pushed down the page.

Lastly, SNS pose the same pros and cons of any new teaching methods. I felt more comfortable with Facebook and explaining assignments in a clear manner as time passed. The third and final assignment given during Week 5 proved to be the most successful.

Excerpt 2. Journal: Week 5

> I posted the first class's poll late Sunday night. By Monday morning, a few students had posted and voted. I was happy because the project was easily followed independently, without teacher explaining.

This entry contrasts greatly the results of the previous assignments.

Excerpt 3. Journal: Week 3

> My students are not doing their FB assignments. I am spending more time in class, re-explaining assignments. I give demonstration on how to do the HW [homework], pulling up the FB page for all to see on the projector. I walk through the steps giving specific show/tell examples/directions.

Regardless of the teaching tool, when it is new, usage is needed to train one's self to be a confident user.

3.2.2. Perception of effectiveness

I believed my Korean students would show the same enthusiasm that my Ecuadorian students about Facebook. However, this was not the result as evident in my entries.

Excerpt 4. Journal: Week 4

> Where am I at? My students not completing the assignments or not completing correctly...Another problem with my lack of or late response, was the late posting of students...Prior to class, I would monitor the Facebook page as I did other work in my office on campus. I would receive notification for each new posting on the Facebook group page.

Excerpt 5. Journal: Week 3

> Computer Science -- no one did the HW. There is a strong lack of concern, just a pleasant smile to replace work. I'm lost at what to do. I explain how this is 10 per cent of their final grade. I review how to go to FB. I login to my account. I go to the FB group page. I show how to click on the photos to look for someone in their class. I select photos of people in the class. I read aloud one student's photo caption about the bucket list. Then I read the comments and questions I posed to the student. A clear demonstration on what is expected.

As noted in Wu and Hsu (2011), external factors influence the magnitude of Facebook effectiveness. One of those factors not mentioned in that study but evident in this study was the "lackadaisical factor." One student told me, as I gave him his final grade, he did not complete a class assignment (attending my office hour) was because he was "lazy." The same student did not complete any of the three Facebook assignments. His admission to his lack of effort in the class was a critical teaching breakthrough moment.

Excerpt 6. Journal: Week 8

I was thrown by his honesty and the simple fact that I did not take into consideration 'lazy' in students' work habit. I call some students lazy but I connected laziness with boredom. But perhaps they are very distinct factors in the learning process.

Future exploration of SNS and 'lackadaisicalness' in ESL learning would be a valuable research topic. This specific external factor affects many aspects of the learning process.

Students' problem of being lackadaisical caused another problem, procrastination. Students often waited until the last minute before a deadline to complete assignments. This did not create "a pressure-free environment" discussed by Wu and Hsu (2011, p.7), or a "free-talking" environment of Facebook. [4] Free-talk is "a phenomenon in Korea" that allows students to practice English in "a more relaxed setting" (Nahk-Bohk, 2011, p.120). Although some students wanted to complete the second assignment, Q&A, they could not because the full completion of the assignment required interaction with classmates via Facebook. As Nahk-hohk (2011) noted, free-taking was only successful if others performed their roles and tasks appropriately; thus, when some students failed to do their tasks, it was hard to perceive Facebook as effective.

3.2.3. Pros and cons of action research

In analyzing my journal, I showed some regret for conducting a research. From my literature review, I knew research benefited teachers, yet I still expressed some annoyance with replacing free time with research.

Excerpt 7. Journal: Week 2

How much more work. I procrastinate, and force myself to write in journal and do lit [literature] review. As I do this, I think my colleagues are relaxing, playing Scrabble, enjoying the

> nothingness -- or they are on FB. Since I am on FB, leaving it running like background music...I
> write a quick response to my students posting.

How ironic that I used Facebook in my procrastination of doing my research on Facebook. (Even as I wrote this article, I frequently checked Facebook as a method of not feeling overwhelmed with my scholarly work.) No one denies that doing research that is not required for one's employment can be frustrating at times. But, I was surprised that it occurred so early into my first research project. I think this is a good reflection of many teachers, especially in large classes, who want to do more for their professional development and/or their students' educational growth but lack the energy, motivation and/or time; lack of time is very problematic.

Excerpt 8. Journal: Week 4

> What is the real problem: time consuming. I had set aside my off day (Friday), to do more Lit
> [literature] research and complete the action research form, but other things came up. Off day
> means errands.

I then proceeded to write my to-do list, which consisted of eight items that were not related to my regular teaching duties. However, as I developed a journal routine, I used the allotted time to contemplate how to teach more effectively and use more stimulating activities. This helped facilitate preparation of the weekly lesson. Like using Facebook as a teaching tool, the journalising required time for me to understand how to optimise it.

The biggest benefit of the action research was a sense of camaraderie I gained from my literature review.

Excerpt 9. Journal: Week 8

> The actual act of research, conducting a Lit Review, was enlightening, for it got me looking at
> what is currently happening in the classroom, what ideas are being floated around, how are other
> educators dealing with similar problems that I deal with in my Korean class, related and unrelated
> to my specific topic.

For example, I discovered an article about silence in the Japanese classroom, which did not closely relate to my research but the article provided insight into the silence problem in my Korean classes.

Action research is a noble task although it is time consuming in a modern society where few teachers have the extra time and energy to conduct research that would help them develop

professionally. It is important that educational institutes find methods of encouraging and facilitating action research throughout teachers'careers.

3.2.4. Reflection & accountability

Like many ESL teachers abroad, I am an accidental teacher; I began teaching English as a way to travel and explore new cultures. Thus, I lacked some of the teaching skills and educational theories with which properly trained teachers enter the classroom. In doing this journal, I found myself gaining a valuable tool, self-accountability.

As I began writing about my experiences in the classroom, I struggled to fill up the empty pages of my journal. I was unfocused and unclear on what aspects of my teaching should be critiqued. At first, I simply recapped my actions; later, I reflected more. The following entries illustrate this point.

Excerpt 10. Journal: Week 2

Also, I am employing three strategies used by a teacher to create a 'relaxed learning environment'...so far, I have had a student following the pattern of engaging with me as demonstrated in the Web log article.

Excerpt 11: Journal. Week 4

Students also didn't fully realize they needed not only to respond to my question but do a Q&A with their peers. (Needed to ask a question and answer a question that was asked to them.) Only one group of girls/women did this in my Japanese class. I used this as an example saw [two students'] light bulbs flicker on. They go it. Something they didn't get when I showed it. Or they saw me demonstrate but figured they only had to respond to me, unable to fully grasp they were required to put themselves in my place as a questioner.

In Week 2, I did not reveal any strong feeling or give more reflection on why I thought the students were responding in a similar pattern of another study's participants. However, Week 4 showed my development of more critical thought. In discussing students' lack of assignment completion, I was able to show how my weak deliverance of the assignment guidelines contributed to the students' incorrectly and/or not completing the assignment. I learnt that I have to do more demonstrations and give clearer examples in class.

It is with this critical thought and reflection that I found the journal to have the biggest impact, for the journal provided a sense of accountability. My empty journal pages awaited me each weekend to fill them with worthy teaching/learning moments. I felt the necessity to think more, question more, and try more; I wanted to do my best because I was documenting my behavior. Thus, the teacher's journal made me feel more responsible for the teaching results in my classroom. I often contemplated for a full day on what I would write that would have a meaningful impact in reflection time.

Excerpt 12. Journal: Week 8

[Action research] helped me feel more encouragement to address the issue [problem] in a productive manner instead of blowing it off as "Korea," as many fellow expat teachers do.

This self-imposed pressure motivated me to implement more quickly new material that I obtained from reading articles and attending meetings. My behavior coincides with the idea that when teachers research their own teaching practice, there is an increased teaching awareness and a renewed passion for teaching (Wyatt, 2010). With this greater sense of teaching, comes personal accountability.

4. Conclusion

Overall, Facebook did not provide an increase in apparent student motivation and effectiveness. The "lazy factor" showed to be quite relative in student performance. As a teaching tool, Facebook exhibited the same positive and negative attributes as most new teaching tools. As time went on, I felt more comfortable using Facebook and improved my ability to easily discuss assignments. In the future, research should be conducted to develop a feasible method for correcting grammar while still allowing Facebook to have a "free-talk" and "pressure-free" environment.

The journal and the action research, which I conducted, proved to be beneficial to my development as a professional teacher. The literature review of the action research revealed new and current research and teaching techniques being developed in the ESL field. Journalising provided a source of self-accountability that is sometimes absent in the ESL field, where student evaluation is given more importance than teaching performance. Studies have shown the importance of action research and teacher's journal in teacher educational programs; thus, it

would be beneficial for native ESL teachers who do not have the proper teacher training. It would be of greater interest to examine teachers' journals used in year evaluation and/or a contract renewal process. However, this would require that a supervising teacher give the required time needed to read and discuss the journals with subordinate teachers. An alternative could be possible monthly meetings among teachers and supervisors to discuss their teaching experiences, which would also help ESL professional development and help increase ESL instructors being treated as professional abroad. Even, if the requirement does not become an official job requirement, teaching journals should be used throughout a teacher's career for personal growth as a teacher.

In conclusion, Facebook will not be the final tool to obliterate boredom in the classroom; it is a building block in a pyramid of teaching techniques.

Notes

[1] Loja Lost Paradise http://www.facebook.com/pages/Loja-Lost-Paradise/153527094693575?ref=ts

[2] Action Research http://www.sitesupport.org/actionresearch/index.html

[3] English is Wonderful http://www.facebook.com/groups/280309282002593/

[4] "Action Research on Facebook" PowerPoint http://www.slideshare.net/BroadreachServices/english-as-foreign-language-learning-on-social-networking-site-an-action-research-on-facebook

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