

## **Introducing Social Media to Help Students Develop their Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

Mastering a foreign language goes automatically through the mastery of its vocabulary. Having a rich repertoire of lexical items of the foreign language should be the priority of any teacher. Furthermore, teaching and learning vocabulary can be very challenging and may be a time consuming process for both teachers and students. Thus, students need to be oriented towards different strategies and approaches in order to improve their vocabulary. We hypothesize in the current paper that Social Media can represent a rich source for improving the learners' vocabulary. To test our hypothesis and to achieve the research aims two questionnaires were administered for both teachers and students at the English department, Batna 2 University. We found out that using Social Media is an effective pedagogical technique to develop students' vocabulary. Consequently, teachers need to adapt the Social Media to the educational setting in such a way as to help students develop their vocabulary store in a relaxing and entertaining atmosphere.

**Key Words:** Foreign language Learning, Social Media, Vocabulary, Learning Strategies

## ملخص

ان التمكن من لغة أجنبية يمر حتما من خلال إتقان المفردات الخاصة بها. لذلك فان امتلاك ذخيرة غنية من مفردات اللغة الأجنبية يعد أولوية لأي معلم. علاوة على ذلك، يمكن أن يكون لتعلم هذه المفردات طابع المحفز وقد تكون صعبة للغاية وقد تستغرق وقتاً طويلاً لكل من الأساتذة والطلاب. وبالتالي، يجب توجيه الطلبة نحو استراتيجيات ومناهج مختلفة من أجل تحسين تمكنهم من المفردات. نفترض في الدراسة الحالية أن وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية يمكن أن تمثل مصدراً غنياً لتحسين مفردات المتعلمين. لاختبار فرضيتنا ولتحقيق أهداف البحث، تم وضع استبيانين لكل من الأساتذة والطلاب في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة باتنة 2. اكتشفنا أن استخدام وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية هو أسلوب تربوي فعال لتطوير مفردات الطلاب وبالتالي، يحتاج المعلمون إلى تكييف وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية مع البيئة التعليمية بطريقة تساعد الطلاب على تطوير مخزون المفردات في جو مريح وممتع.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تعليم اللغات الأجنبية وسائل الإعلام الاجتماعية، المفردات، استراتيجيات التعليم

## Introduction

With the emergence of communication technology in recent years, foreign language teaching has witnessed tremendous changes in terms of the information delivered as well as the techniques used. The rapid growth of this technology attracted many learners to look for alternative possibilities for foreign language learning facilities. Teachers were no exception since they were forced to implement the new tools using different techniques and strategies aiming at a maximum involvement of the learners. Social Media are, in this respect; among the new tools that both students and teachers can use to facilitate foreign language learning and ensure a maximum profit from the opportunities they offer in different domains and one of them is vocabulary learning. This latter has always been a challenging and urgent task. Learners need words to communicate and have better achievement in the target language. Having a rich vocabulary means that they will be able to comprehend, not only what they hear and read, but also produce appropriate and meaningful language in different communication

contexts. Learning vocabulary is becoming more demanding and fortunately, more tools and techniques are becoming available. One of the strategies that can be effective to enhance learners' vocabulary in the target language is the use of Social Media which are likely to encourage students acquire new vocabulary items in an informal context and an enjoyable way.

### **1. Statement of the Problem**

One of the major goals for learning a foreign language is communicating fluently, an end which cannot be achieved without having a good command of the vocabulary of that language. The acquisition of vocabulary is crucial for successful communication and plays an important role in the process of completion of pieces of discourse whether spoken or written. On the other hand, lack of vocabulary may be the main obstacle for foreign language learners. Eventually, this makes them rush for vocabulary learning thinking that lexical proficiency is synonymous to language proficiency. In other words, acquiring vocabulary, decontextualized does not add much to the learners' full mastery of the foreign language. Furthermore, English language learners who experience slow vocabulary development cannot comprehend texts appropriately. They are likely to show a poor achievement in tests due to their difficulties in communicating fluently as recipients; trying to understand and make sense of what others are telling them, or speakers trying to communicate their own ideas to others. Social Media, which are heavily used by most learners, seem to represent an effective means in aiding learners in unconsciously develop their vocabulary background in a relaxed atmosphere far from the traditional methods of teaching vocabulary and the tedious nature of some vocabulary activities. Foreign language teachers, on the other hand, may have some objections mainly concerning the nature of words and expressions acquired from this virtual environment. They may even go farther claiming that using Social Media and Internet language would have a negative impact on the academic achievement of learners. The present research attempts to investigate the activity of vocabulary learning through Social Media from the perspectives of both teachers and learners.

### **2. Aim of the Study**

The main objective set to this paper is to shed some light on teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the role Social Media play in developing the students' vocabulary. In other words, it is hoped to find how Social Media can contribute to provide learners with a better use of the vocabulary items they need to master the foreign language. It also aims at attempting to understand the different ways learners use Social Media and how teachers can intervene by devising techniques for boosting acquisition of vocabulary items.

### **3. Research Questions and Hypothesis**

The research attempts to answer the following research questions:

- Do Social Media enhance learners' vocabulary acquisition?
- What are students' strategies in vocabulary learning through Social Media?

On the light of the previous questions, the following hypothesis is put forward:

- Social Media are effective in developing the students' vocabulary store.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1. Definition of Vocabulary**

The Oxford Dictionary (2007) defines vocabulary as the total number of words which makes up a language. The term 'Vocabulary' is used similarly with the term 'Lexis'. It is also defined in Richards and Schmidt Longman Dictionary (2002) as 'a set of lexemes, including single words, compound words and idioms'. Another definition provided by Ur (2009:60) describes vocabulary as words being taught in foreign language, complex words which are made up of two or three terms like 'post office, mother in law', and multi-word idioms like 'call a day' which represent a single meaning or idea. Vocabulary is knowledge of words and word meaning, however, vocabulary is more complex than this definition suggest. First, words come in two forms: oral and print. Oral vocabulary refers to those words that we recognize and use in listening and speaking. Print vocabulary includes those words that we recognize in reading and writing. Second, word knowledge also comes in two forms: receptive and productive.

## 1.2. Definition of Social Media

The definition of Social Media is introduced in this part all along with the different types commonly used by foreign language learners, in addition to the advantages they may have to facilitate vocabulary acquisition.

Social Media usually refer to the space where individuals virtually meet and share ideas about different topics of mutual interest. They represent one of the latest technological inventions which serve as a means of making education better, cheaper, available and enjoyable. Social Media are defined differently by different experts.

Boyd and Ellison (2007: 211) for instance, define Social Media sites as:

web-based services that allow individuals to: 1- construct a public or semi- public profile within a bounded system, 2- articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3- view and traverse their list of connections and those made of others within the system.

The two terms Social Media and Social Media sites are used interchangeably. However, the term Social Media is the most commonly used because the former is used for socializing and interacting amongst the already existing friends who are members of an offline Social Media. On the other hand, the later implies seeking initiating new friendship or interacting with strangers. Boyd and Ellison (2007) indicate that 'we choose not to employ the term Social Media for two reasons: emphasis and scope. Social Media emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible in these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiate them from other form of computer mediated communication'. However, Beer (as cited in Zelkowitz, 2009) who criticizes Boyd's and Ellison's definition, claims that it is too broad since it includes online sites where friendship is not the main focus such as YouTube. Furthermore, another definition was provided by Purcell (2012) who sees Social Media as:

A term used to describe websites that build online communities with the intent of building relationships among people with similar interests. These sites generally

enable their subscribers: to post text, pictures, video, and various other forms of media content for others to view, to form and maintain relationships with other participants, and to engage in discussions around common interests with others.

Thus, Social Media refer to web-based online communities which may allow people to build profiles, initiate and maintain new friendship, communicate and share new information and ideas between people with similar interests.

### **1.3. Types of Social Media**

Social Media sites are primarily used to transform and share information with a broad audience, and have become a daily practice in many users' lives. These sites include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Podcasts.

#### **1.3.1. Facebook**

The most popular and worldwide Social Media site is Facebook. It is defined by Ashley (2003) as 'a computer-mediated communication tool, an asynchronous (delay) communication tool which enables communication (one-to-one, one-to-many) and collaboration over a period of time through (a different time-different place) mode' (Cited in Bodomo, 2010, p.316). Boyd (2007) maintains that Facebook was created by a Harvard student called Mark Zuckerberg in February 2004. However, when the site was initially launched, it was restricted to Harvard students only, later on, its popularity increased rapidly across the globe especially among young people. Additionally, Facebook users may create a personal profile; add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications, photos and comments when they update their profile. To become a member, one has to have an email account. Facebook is considered as an effective way for students to form online communities (Chartrand, 2012), and an effective medium for language learning and teaching, with the possibility of improving the learners' language skills. Bodomo (2009) states that Facebook offers its users a variety of functions such as photo sharing software, a blog for writing one's diary and getting comments from friends and finally, a

private and public wall which is used specifically for friends to leave messages.

Several studies reveal that Facebook impacts all levels in academic settings and has the potential for use in educational applications; it has also an important role in opening new environment of learning for both teachers and students (Thurairajet al 2015).

### **1.3.2. Twitter**

Twitter is a web-based service which is described by Thartner (2012) as ‘social networking and micro-blogging service that users like to use for short messages for 140 characters in length’ (p. 98). In twitter, a message is joined to a course or class blog which allow the learners to discuss a variety of asynchronous online discourse. (Thurairaj et al 2015). Wang (2010) emphasizes that ‘Twitter is an excellent way to supplement teaching summarizing and synthesizing skills for written material’ (p.1 12). Furthermore, Wang states that students’ familiarity with Twitter and its use in their daily practice, and collaboration are the main reasons behind adopting Twitter in learning context. In addition, Twitter can be very beneficial in the sense that: 1- educators have the tweets’ written enrollmentand the ideas that has been discussed by the learner, 2- discussion between the learners can be observed as they occur, 3- teachers can assess individual learners’ participation in the discussion, 4- it imposes leaners to use write concisely (Wang, 2010).Furthermore, Thurairajet al, (2015) emphasize that Facebook and Twitter may contribute to language learning, and should be incorporated as learning tools in foreign language classroom. Besides, many researchers claim that adopting Facebook and Twitter as learning tools may foster communication in English. It also assists teachers and learners to create their own learning network, and afford them the chance to connect with people across the globe who help them take their learning and teaching experience to the next level.

### **1.3.3. YouTube**

YouTube is a popular free video sharing websites which allows people to upload post and share their own videos files to others (Bodomo, 2010, P. 342). At the same time, it allows its users to interact with others by making comments to other people’s creation. YouTube launched in

2005 grows over time to become the third most popular website after Facebook and Google (Kelsey, 2010). Furthermore, YouTube has developed to end up with an entertainment with people watching more than 70 million recordings on the site daily. This Social Media tool helps its users search and find out the videos of their concern. Besides, YouTube encourage users who are in the learning process to use videos to more about different topics by listening to lectures and classes of experts from different parts of the world.

#### **1.3.4. LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is one of the most popular powerful Social Media sites created in December 2002. Zelkowitz (2009) defines LinkedIn as ‘a business networking SNS allows members to enter information about themselves, centering on their career and educational history, and try to help them connect online with people that they know or that might be helpful to them at work’ (p.28). In other words, LinkedIn is an onlinemedia which based on professional and business relationships (Purcell, 2012). LinkedIn is viewed as an effective medium in initiating new relationships via promoting the number of users by information given about new people registering from their university or institution, and information about the already existing friends. Furthermore, LinkedIn constitutes both free and paid services like advertising and job seeking where users can connect with each other through email accounts instead of using text messages (Zelkowitz, 2009).

#### **1.3.5. Podcast**

Podcast is one of the Social Media sites which is recognized as ‘audio blogs’, it is described by Anderson (2007) as ‘audio recordings, usually in MP3 format, of talks, interviews and lectures, which can be played either on desktop computer or on a wide range of handled MP3 devices’. Podcast has become easy to access through using various devices and programs, and several studies reveals that Podcast is considered an effective medium to be used in the language classroom. In this respect, Wang (2011) reports that Podcast is found to be an efficient tool to improve the listening and speaking skills in English.

### **1.4. Advantages of Using Social Media in the language Classroom**



Social Media received criticism as to the wisdom of including them in the foreign language classroom for several reasons. One of them is the fact that they can represent a distraction to the students during the lessons. They may be used inadequately by the learners if the teacher is not well-trained to guide them. In addition to that, the inappropriate content posted on Social Media can affect the human interaction and present learners with bad models of social behaviour. Despite the aforementioned drawbacks, Social Media have an undeniable educational potential for teaching because they facilitate communication and play an essential role in information sharing and can, consequently, be used to improve the learners' language proficiency. Purcell (2003) put forward some advantages of integrating Social Media into the classroom to accomplish the learning objectives as follows:

1. Knowledge and skill development: integrating Social Media sites in the classroom, in particular in lesson plan would help the learners to promote the depth knowledge as well as the level of understanding the content area.
2. Motivation: one benefit that has emerged from incorporating Social Media sites into the classroom is motivation and engagement. Social Media sites can be a useful tool for engaging the learners to accomplish a given task by drawing their interest. Motivation is considered as one of the most important factor behind integration Social Media into curriculum. Mitchell (2012) suggests that creating and maintaining relationship in Social Media sites can increase motivation. For example, students will spend more time and do their best to complete an assignment that will be viewed by a large audience to ensure that they are proud of their work, instead of handing in an assignment that will be viewed only by the teacher and throwing it after receiving the grade.
3. Connectivity: Social Media sites play an integral role in providing the learners the opportunities to communicate and interact with peers, experts and native speakers of a variety of foreign languages around the world, updates information and new ideas which may contribute to better achievement in education.
4. Familiarity: the frequent use of some online media sites may foster students' familiarity with these sites, thus sharing their current knowledge via using these tools.

5. Cost Effectiveness: One of the most advantages of using online media sites is cost effectiveness, most Social Media sites are free to anyone with internet access, and it allows students to save money instead of purchasing expensive lessons and resources.

6. Convenience: Social Media websites are available at any time and can be accessed through any internet-accessible computer. Thus learning can move beyond the classroom and the teacher guidance.

7. Increased Appropriate Use: integrating various technological tools in the classroom involves the learners' familiarity with these tools. Thus, technologies must be taught directly to the students to increase their appropriate and responsible use of these tools.

8. Increased self-expression: Using internet access provides the learners with the opportunities to make their voice heard by a worldwide audience, Purcell (2013) points out 'Social networking sites allow the connection to a large community as users with similar interest serves as an authentic audience' (p.13).

## **2. The Study**

The study was carried out on a population of 60 students at the department of English, Batna 2 University. The objective was to see the extent to which Social Media can enhance the learners' vocabulary. Oral expression teachers were equally involved to see their viewpoints as to the effectiveness of using Social Media to develop the students' vocabulary store. The first questionnaire devised for students revealed mainly that the great majority of the students (56 out of 60) questioned use Social Media. Although recognizing the potential drawbacks inherent in the use of Social Media, they stressed the positive side and affirmed that these drawbacks remain insignificant compared to the advantages. They asserted that they learned a lot thanks to sharing information through Social Media. Their friends on the net vary from teachers to classmates and the majority of them believe it an occasion to catch up for the missing information during the ordinary sessions they are having. Access to information is becoming easier and many pertinent questions are answered. Teachers seem to be of the view of the students because they believe that the students become more motivated when they are members of serious groups where information sharing and

discussions are prevalent. They are learning with less difficulty and their level of performance in the different tests shows a significant improvement. They recognise the difficulties of using Social Media in their classes due to technical and practical problems, but they hope to see these problems overcome to help students learn authentic language from native speakers to allow them communication in real life situations which is very likely, according to them, to help students acquire not only vocabulary, but also genuine communicative competence.

### **3.Recommendations**

Following our research findings we can put forward the following recommendations:

- 1-Teachers should not be reluctant to use Social Media in the foreign language class.
- 2- Students need to be oriented towards the most beneficial Social Media sites.
- 3-Students need to be warned of the potential risks if Social Media are not properly used.
- 4-Students should be accustomed with using dictionaries to avoid forming wrong hypotheses, or attributing to new vocabulary items meanings which are not theirs.

### **General Conclusion**

Integrating Social Media sites in foreign language context becomes one of the most important issue to which the attention should be drawn. To achieve this objective, there exist three main questions need to be answered: how Social Media sites can best be used? What the rote of teacher is? and which Social Media site to adopt. However, one of the most fundamental questions that should be taken into account when incorporating Social Media sites into foreign language classes is how the use of these sites can backup to achieve the course objective (Baird & Fisher, 2005). Computer assisted language learning serves as a means for further learning goals (Richards, 2005), and can be an effective way to communicate the information in classesforeign/second language implies learning the vocabulary of that language. Vocabulary learning is one of the most important aspects in developing the foreign

language proficiency and it is undeniable that vocabulary is the heart of any language learning and language use. Despite its importance, vocabulary has been neglected for many years in the teaching of a foreign/second language when compared to the other aspects like grammar, syntax, phonology and pragmatics. Recently, vocabulary witnesses a renewed interest in the field of language learning and teaching. Thus, vocabulary has a great importance in different teaching and learning strategies.

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