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Using Social Media Activities to Enhance EFL Reading Skills of University Students

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Journal of The Faculty of Education- Mansoura University

No. 127 – July . 2024

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to investigate the influence of Facebook groups and blogs as effective technological tools for teaching EFL reading skills among university students. The research was conducted using a quasi-experimental design among Egyptian EFL college students at Higher Institute of Engineering & Technology Basic Science Department at AL Mahala in Gharbia Governorate to be the study participants. In this design, participants were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught through social media activities, whereas the control group was taught through traditional classroom sessions. The research instruments were EFL reading tests (pre-post). The research data were analyzed statistically. The results revealed statistically significant differences between the pre-post instruments (EFL reading test) in favor of the post-one. The findings revealed that the use of social media activities had a substantial impact on EFL students' reading skills. In conclusion, the research recommended implementing social media activities for learning useful skills. It was also advised that further research should be performed about the use of social networking sites to teach EFL skills, listening and speaking.

Key words: EFL reading skills and social media activities

Introduction:

Having knowledge of a foreign language can open numerous opportunities. This is especially true in the field of English language knowledge, as English is recognized as a global language. Reading skills are important because they contribute to a student's success. Language is essential for both personal and national communication. Facebook and blogs are two examples of social media platforms that enable students and instructors to engage in educational activities.

Theoretical background:

English is essential in many aspects of our lives. Reading is the process of establishing meaning by interacting with text. To comprehend the text, students make use of prior knowledge and cues. Reading is a solitary activity. Students read at various levels based on the difficulty of the English language. Readers can discuss the text's significance with the authors. Reading is considered a cognitive input in all courses. It is unlikely

that a student who is unable to comprehend what he or she reads will succeed in other subjects.

Online reading:

Online reading proficiency focuses on being quick, purposeful, and comprehending. It assists everyone in becoming fluent in reading and comprehending the meaning. When a language's core vocabulary is mastered (Kang, 2014).

As technology improved, reading transitioned to non-traditional media, such as reading information on the internet in the form of videos, photos, sounds, animations, and hyperlinks, known as online reading (Sung, 2015).

Students (high school or graduate) must now rely on information available online via Web 2.0 during their academic careers, regardless of their academic standing or level of development. In this environment, searching for relevant information within digital environments is critical. Students and online users in general now need skills that allow them to distinguish between useful information and information that is either useless or irrelevant, or that comes from untrustworthy websites that lack academic support.

Reading online is thus a problem-based inquiry process that requires a variety of reading activities, such as reading online texts to identify specific information, analyze it through critical lenses, synthesize it, and transfer or convey it to others. (Coiro, 2011)

Furthermore, online reading fosters a sense of pervasive learning by introducing new affordances that enable anyone to learn at any time, from any location, and on any device. (Leu, 2011). As a result, teachers often use technology to overcome challenges.

Web 2.0 Tools Used for Collaborative-Online Learning

Web 2.0 Tools are all web platforms that allow individuals to communicate and collaborate online (Kosalge, 2017). Google Docs, blogs, wikis, Facebook, Edmodo, and Zoho are some of the most commonly referenced Web 2.0 applications defined as social collaborative learning platforms. (Klobas, 2006); (Teehan, 2010); (Woods, 2011).

Technology has improved language acquisition. The computer is a new technology that offers an alternative to traditional teaching methods. Some scholars, such as Menkhoff (2015) and Wheeler (2010), believe that social media tools such as Facebook and blogs can provide an impetus for both students and instructors to actively participate in and communicate with one another concerning educational activities. These authors outline

three benefits of social media in a university classroom, regardless of whether it is used on a computer or on a mobile device. First, social media enhances blended learning by assisting students in developing positive contextual learning in relation to pedagogical goals. Facebook, for example, can be used to engage students during face-to-face sessions and to communicate with them when they are at home (distance learning). Second, social media allows students to participate in collaborative learning, and third, social media encourages students to publish comments or questions about their subject matter.

More crucially, unlike traditional face-to-face teaching, which is limited by space and time, "... [with] electronic media, the globe becomes the classroom, available 24/7, and not constrained to Mondays through Fridays" (Dzavatsva, 2014). In this context, the term "24/7" simply means that adopting social media allows students and lecturers to communicate more freely outside of formal classroom hours. It does not imply that learning must take place on weekends or at night.

According to Jones (2011), social media technologies such as blogs and Twitter are no longer just for fun. Rather, over time, these technologies have evolved into platforms for engaging and interacting with learners.

Computer technology enables teachers and students to access target languages in several fields. Computer technology helps teachers guide students' learning and connect curriculum to real-world activities (Sabouri and Zabihniaemran, 2015). Technological and software methods are employed to address issues with traditional pronunciation instruction, with the goal of providing data to bridge the gap.

Background of the problem

The problem with this research is that students from AL Mahala Higher Institute of Engineering and Technology's Basic Science Department have poor reading skills. This research aims to improve EFL reading skills by implementing Facebook groups and blogs as effective technological tools for teaching reading.

Pilot research was conducted to determine the current level of EFL college students at AL Mahala higher Institute of Engineering and Technology in reading skills. The researcher developed a reading skills test to assess students' reading comprehension skills. Table 1 indicates the reading skills' mean score.

Table 1 Results of the EFL Reading Comprehension Skills

| Sub-Skills | Mean | Std | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-------|------|------------|
| Reading for specific information | 3.50 | 1.43 | 43.75 |
| Reading for prediction | 2.40 | 1.04 | 40 |
| Reading for gist | 1.20 | 1.00 | 60 |
| Reading for details | 3.15 | 1.34 | 52.5 |
| Reading for inference | 1.10 | 1.02 | 55 |
| Total | 11.35 | 5.83 | 47.29 |

Table 1. reports the low reading level of the students' results in the EFL reading test. Students' lowest mean was in the reading for predictions skill (mean = 2.40) 40%, while their highest mean was in the reading for gist (mean =1.20) 60%.

Statement of the problem

Based on the literature review and related studies, pilot study, and the researcher's experience as a teacher, the problem can be articulated in the fact that university students have difficulties in reading skills, including reading for gist, details, predictions, inference, and for specific information. This study suggests using social media activities assisted with language learning to enhance university students' reading comprehension skills.

Questions of the study

The researcher aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the necessary reading skills for university students?
2. How can social media activities-based language learning be used to enhance university students' reading?
3. What is the effectiveness of using social media activities-based language learning in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of university students?

The research purposes

This research aims to

1. Identify essential reading skills for university students.
2. Determine how social media activities are employed to improve university students' reading comprehension skills.
3. Determine the impact of social media activities in improving EFL university students' reading comprehension skills.

Significance of the research

This research is significant for the following reasons:

1. Fill the gap between social media activities and reading comprehension skills for EFL university students.

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2. Explain the effectiveness of using social media activities on reading comprehension skills.
 3. Using social media activities (Facebook groups and blogs) in the EFL teaching process may be a feasible strategy to improve EFL students' reading skills.
 4. Providing a guidance for university lecturers on how to use social media activities assisted language learning to teach reading to university students.

Delimitations

The current research is confined to the following:

1. A group of university first-year students.
2. Some EFL reading comprehension skills (reading for gist, details, predictions, inference, and for specific information) are needed.
3. Some social media activities (Facebook group and weblogs) that will be implemented in this research.

Hypotheses

To answer the research questions, the researcher made the following hypotheses: Using social media activities would improve EFL university students' reading comprehension skills. This research poses the following hypotheses.

- **Ho1:** There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the EFL reading comprehension skills post-test of the experimental group students and those of the control group in favor of the experimental group.
- **Ho2:** There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group pre-post EFL reading comprehension skills test administration in favor of the posttest results.

Research method

Participants

The research sample consisted of 60 students divided into two groups: the experimental group (30 students) and the control group (30 students). The sample of the research was chosen randomly from AL Mahala higher Institute of Engineering and Technology Basic Science Department in Gharbia Governorate in the academic year 2023/2024.

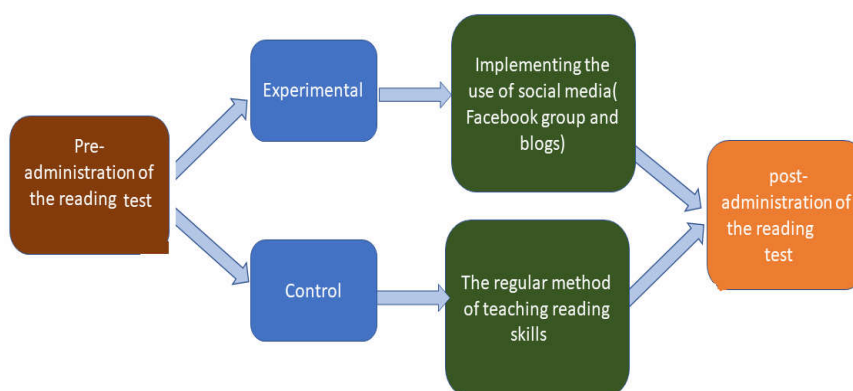
Design

The research was conducted using a quasi-experimental design among Egyptian EFL college students at Higher Institute of Engineering & Technology Basic Science Department at AL Mahala in Gharbia

Governorate. In this design, participants were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught through social media activities, whereas the control group was taught through traditional classroom sessions.

A pre-post reading test was conducted to assess their reading skills. The two pre-post EFL reading tests were used to both groups before and after the intervention. The results of the two pre-post EFL reading tests were analyzed by using t- test for independent samples. This was to find out whether there was any significant difference between the mean score of the two groups, after the implementation of the intervention. Figure 1 illustrates the quasi-experimental design of the research.

Figure 1 The Quasi-Experimental Design of Research



Instrument

The instruments for the research were designed as follows: The researcher created an EFL reading comprehension skills tests (pre-post) to assess the students' reading levels before and after the intervention.

Definition of terms

Reading comprehension is said to be the result of the reader's ability to effectively integrate previously acquired knowledge with the information presented in the text. It is also described as a cognitive process of constructing meaning from texts. (Wolley, 2011).

According to James (2000), reading comprehension is an active process in which the reader uses his background knowledge to generate meaning while reading a text. This study's operational definition of "reading skill" is a measure of learners' ability to deduce meaning from a written text. Reading skills include: reading for gist, details, predictions, inference, and for specific information, as well.

Statistical analysis and results

Testing the first hypothesis of the research

The first hypothesis stated that " There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the EFL reading comprehension skills post-test of the experimental group students and those of the control group in favor of the experimental group"

Table 2 Comparing the performance of the control and experimental groups after administering the EFL Reading Skills Test.

| Variables | Group | No. of cases | Mean | SD | Df | t.Value | Sig. |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------|-------|------|---------|------|
| Reading for gist | Control | 30 | 3.26 | 1.01 | 58 | 5.21 | 0.05 |
| | Experimental | | 4.40 | 0.62 | | 9.75 | |
| Reading for details | Control | | 3.80 | 1.03 | | | |
| | Experimental | | 6.23 | 0.89 | | 4.18 | |
| Reading for inference | Control | | 1.36 | 0.61 | | | |
| | Experimental | | 1.96 | 0.18 | | 9.81 | |
| Reading for prediction | Control | | 1.33 | 0.60 | | | |
| | Experimental | | 1.86 | 0.34 | | 12.06 | |
| Reading for specific Information | Control | | 2.03 | 0.61 | | | |
| | Experimental | | 3.30 | 0.70 | | 1.59 | |
| Total score | Control | 12.06 | 2.72 | 17.73 | 1.59 | 9.81 | 0.05 |
| | Experimental | 17.73 | 1.59 | | | | |

To verify this hypothesis, a t-test was used to evaluate the relative extent of change induced by implementing the intervention in the experimental group. The t-test findings were statistically consistent with the above-stated hypothesis, as indicated in Table 2.

A closer look at Table 2 shows the experimental group's mean score, standard deviation, t-value, and significance after administering the reading comprehension test. The highest reading performance was in "Reading for details " (m = 6.23; t = 9.75; sig at 0.05 level), and the least improved skill was in "Reading for prediction" (m = 1.86; t = 4.18; sig at 0.05 level).

In the post-administration of the reading comprehension test, the experimental group had a statistically significant advantage over the control group in terms of mean scores. This shows that the recommended intervention helped the experimental group's reading comprehension.

The findings of the first hypothesis were consistent with those of (Aforo, 2014), (Al Momani, 2020), (Sari, 2020), and (Sitorus, 2021). All of these researches concluded that social media activities improved students' reading skills at various school levels and with a diverse range of participants.

Verifying the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis stated “There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the experimental group pre-post EFL reading comprehension skills test administration in favor of the posttest results”.

Table 3 Comparing the reading performance of the experimental group on the reading comprehension pre- and post-test.

| Variables | Practice | No. of cases | Mean | SD | Df | t.Value | Sig. |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--------------|-------|------|----|---------|------|
| Reading for gist | Pre-test | 30 | 3.36 | 0.66 | 29 | -5.86 | 0.05 |
| | Post-test | 30 | 4.40 | 0.62 | | | |
| Reading for details | Pre-test | 30 | 3.86 | 1.33 | | -8.79 | |
| | Post-test | 30 | 6.23 | 0.89 | | | |
| Reading for inference | Pre-test | 30 | 1.46 | 0.57 | | -4.78 | |
| | Post-test | 30 | 1.96 | 0.18 | | | |
| Reading for prediction | Pre-test | 30 | 1.53 | 0.62 | | -3.34 | |
| | Post-test | 30 | 1.86 | 0.34 | | | |
| Reading for specific Information | Pre-test | 30 | 2.16 | 0.74 | | -7.99 | |
| | Post-test | 30 | 3.30 | 0.70 | | | |
| Total score | Pre-test | 30 | 12.33 | 2.56 | | -10.66 | |
| | Post-test | 30 | 17.73 | 1.59 | | | |

The t-test for dependent samples was used to compare the mean scores of experimental group students in the EFL reading comprehension skills test before and after the suggested intervention. The results are reported in Table 3.

The results in Table 3 demonstrate that there is a significant difference at 0.05 levels between the mean score of the experimental group students on the pre- and post-administration of the reading comprehension skills test in favor of the post- administration.

Comparing the experimental group's reading comprehension performance in the pre- and post- test administration revealed that their reading performance was much better after the exam. Their reading for details, reading for specific information, and reading for gist improved ($m = 6.23$; $t = 8.79$ & $m = 3.30$; $t = 7.99$ & $m = 4.40$; $t = 5.86$, respectively). The experimental group's reading ability in " Reading for inference " and " Reading for prediction " were less impressive with ($m = 1.96$ & $t = 4.78$; $m = 1.86$ & $t = 3.34$). Nonetheless, all values were significant at the 0.05 level. These findings support those given for the first hypothesis.

The effect size:

The researcher used the "Effect Size" equation to estimate the amount to which the proposed intervention is helpful for enhancing reading

comprehension skills. The researcher calculated the value of " η^2 ". Figure 2 depicts the intervention's effect size on the experimental group's reading skills.

Figure 2 The intervention's effect size on the experimental group's reading skills.

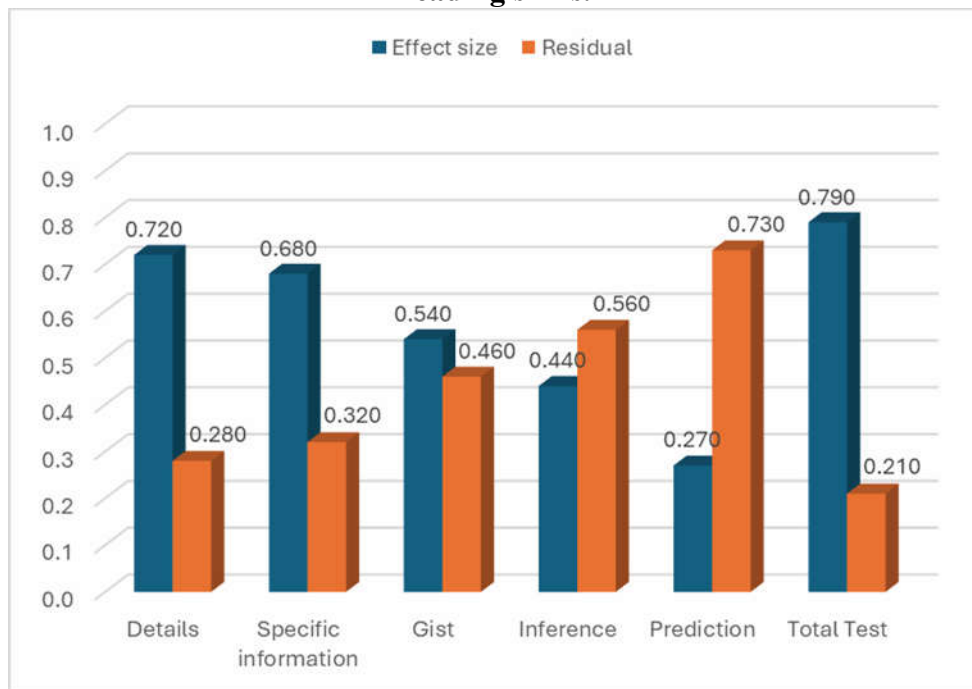


Table 4 The effect size of the proposed intervention on the experimental group reading comprehension skills

| Sub Skill | η^2 | Effect size |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Reading for details | 72% | High |
| Reading for specific information | 68% | High |
| Reading for gist | 54% | High |
| Reading for inference | 44% | High |
| Reading for prediction | 27% | High |
| Total Test | 79% | High |

Table 4 shows that the proposed intervention had a significant effect on the five targeted reading skills, with η^2 values of 72, 68, 54, 44, and 27, respectively. This suggests that the intervention's contribution to improving EFL reading comprehension skills was between 72 and 27% of their performance.

Discussion and results

The current research's statistical analysis yielded the following results:

- There is a statistically significant difference at the (0.05) level of significance between the mean score of the experimental group in the pre and post EFL reading test in favor of the post one.
- The results of the first hypothesis were in line with those of (Aforo, 2014), (Al Momani, 2020), (Sari, 2020), and (Sitorus, 2021). All of these researches concluded that social media activities improved students' reading skills at various school levels and with a diverse range of participants.
- This research shows that using technology and web-based learning can effectively improve the reading skills of EFL university stage students.

Research recommendations

1. Using the blended learning to teach EFL skills.
2. EFL teachers should encourage students to use social networking sites to learn useful skills.
3. Encourage cooperative learning, including group work, both within and outside the classroom.
4. EFL teachers should prioritize student motivation, as it impacts learning outcomes.
5. Curriculum designers should include various activities at all levels of education to help students enhance their EFL skills.
6. Course designers should supply teachers with software packages that use social networking sites to assess reading comprehension and writing skills in a fun way.

Suggestions for further research

- Enhancing English language learning through social media activities.
- Using social networking sites at various school levels and with larger samples.
- Using social networking sites to teach EFL skills, listening and speaking.
- Investigating how students' motivation affects their achievement in learning English.

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