Integration of Social Networking Sites in the English Classroom: My Signature Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper is based on an English teacher's reflection; she shares her experience of using Social Networking Sites (SNS) to improve English writing skills in limitedly resourced secondary-level classrooms in Nepal. The narratives were revisited and reviewed based on the conversation history of SNS groups to see the learning dynamism, and they were subsequently analyzed and interpreted under themes and subthemes. The paper shares the major takeaways of the reflection.

Keywords: *Signature pedagogy, social, networking English, classroom.*

Introduction

Since I admire integrated teaching and learning, I have long advocated the integration of technology and technology-based deeper learning skills. My passion became much stronger when COVID-19 brought massive school closures across the world, and billions of children remained out of the classroom globally. A dramatic shift in the concept and engineering of education and the distinctive rise of e-learning appeared in the picture, whereby teaching was to be undertaken remotely and on digital platforms (Suri, 2021). It was not easy to make the shift from physical school to online in Nepal with very limited human resources as there was a big question mark on students' accessibility to ICT tools and technology (Giri & Dawadi, 2020; Suri, 2022). My school chose to use the ZOOM platform for live classes and WhatsApp/Messenger as another digital platform that we consider common among parents to disseminate news and notice instantly. The real journey of integrating Social Networking Sites (SNS) in teaching-learning started at this point; I was curious about adopting new approaches but was overwhelmed at the same time.

In the beginning, accessibility was a major agenda, but later, engagement appeared to be a real and serious concern for all subject teachers, including English teachers. Soon, I realized that the journey through fancy or tailored learning management tools could not take us to our targets unless we engaged students via the most familiar SNS tools like Messenger and WhatsApp (Anderson, 2007; Bansal,2014). Even though many teachers and students spend a greater part of their time on social media platforms for entertainment or news updates, they are not familiar with the pedagogical uses of social networking sites (Global Mobile Statistics, n.d.). In the meantime, I found that most secondary-level students in my

school were tech-savvy, self-expressive, and open to new ways of doing things, including using social network applications. That was the silver lining at the edge of learning achievement chaos.

Personally, I love innovative pedagogy, and I keep taking risks and trying new interventions each day. After the rise of virtual learning, technology integration has become a part of my daily lesson plan. Moreover, I have followed up on the posts, webinars, and research reports of inspiring scholars in the field of technology-integrated language learning. According to Palalas and Hoven (2013) and Kukulska et al. (2015), the integration of mobile apps into teaching-learning applications has been widely explored, and most of the results show that Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications are getting higher mileage because they are quite handy. In this scenario, this paper portrays how I integrated SNS into English language classes, particularly the use of WhatsApp and Messenger in writing activities of secondary-level English classes.

Methodology

This paper is based on my reflection on collecting data, revising the classroom artefacts, and linking them with learning theories for new insights. In recent years, reflection has been a crucial cognitive practice in research, largely practised in qualitative research (Karin et al., 2002). As my class has been participating in the online discussion on WhatsApp-messenger, I observed and revisited the conversation threads and included the conversation initiated by the teacher along with students' responses/reactions in the loop. Scholars have also claimed that the reflective researcher does not merely report the findings of the research but, at the same time, questions and explains how those findings are constructed as an active observer (Steier, 1995; Guillemin Gillam, 2004). Following the same philosophy, based on the analysis of the entries on WhatsApp and Messenger groups, I posed specific questions to myself during this reflective write-up so that my view and experience with SNS integration could be ascertained. In this paper, I answer the question:

As an English teacher, what is my experience with using WhatsApp and Messenger to support secondary-level students in writing?

The collected information through reflections were discussed under the themes and sub-themes that emerged via a systematic, comprehensive examination of the data.

Dynamics of SNS Groups in the Teaching-learning Process

I used WhatsApp to assign offline tasks, submit tasks to the students, and initially provide feedback on the submitted tasks. Even though it was a single inbox for all subjects, there was excitement and enthusiasm for the first few months. It seemed like everyone was amazed that SNS could be used for a full-fledged academic programme; seeing the whole school shriek at that circular-coloured app was so astonishing. Gradually, I found it was a complicated tool to manage as there was a single door to enter for all the subjects and there was a lot of hassle in scrolling ups and downs for a single search. Finally, I created a parallel Messenger group for each subject I used to teach: English and Social Studies, for which I gave a special name, 'Englisocial Group-9' and 'Englisocial Group-10'. A thorough revisit to the SNS groups, vigilant analysis of the loop of entries and the responses by the teachers and students helped me sketch the multiple dimensions of the usage of SNS and its potentiality to be used as a platform to practise English writing skills for secondary level students of a low resourced classroom.

Building Blocks and Gradual Release of Responsibility

The theme, 'Building blocks and gradual release of responsibility,' is subdivided into two sub-themes: students' participation and affordance. I noticed that students' attainment with virtual entries in the 'Englisocial Group' for English writing tasks had different levels. Some students were excelling in all aspects of the target, but some were giving unproductively ample amounts of time to online-based learning as they struggled either with the gadgets, power supply, and internet connection or walked miles to get to the place with an internet connection. There are only one or two students who have rarely attempted. It, thus, proves that affordance incorporates two areas in general: the physical (features of Apps) or ease to use and the socio-economical or psychological state (Shrestha, 2016; CEHRD, 2020;). The students' irregularities, connection issues, low proficiency in writing, and the limited time allocated for teaching English could not push me back from my goals; rather, I shifted my classroom strategies with new interventions.

I set a tiny step at a time; first, I recognized a few tech-savvy students and delegated them the roles of task editor, co-editor, and time tracker on a rotational basis. In the beginning, editors always asked me for support; they wanted a readymade solution from me. I empowered them with a brief group call on Messenger each day, but later, they started resolving the problem independently and came to me for final approval only. The best part of that process was that they practically learned the culture of feedback; they showed maturity in providing and receiving feedback. The next step was the mentorship scheme. In that process, mentor and mentee groups were formed on a rotational basis so that more students could get the opportunity to grow with the learning of responsibility and approval.

Curriculum Integration and Connection to the Face- to- face Classroom Activities

My teaching principles were based on an interactive and democratic classroom; the SNSs, such as WhatsApp and Messenger, could more potentially capture language outside the classroom. Moreover, students could analyze their language production and learning needs, construct artefacts, and share them with others. Most importantly, they could provide evidence of progress gathered across various settings and in various media. I used SNS according to the demands of the students and the nature of the lesson we were dealing with. The purpose was obvious: monitoring, correcting/re-correcting, and providing feedback. How we connected the classroom activities to SNS fully depended on the content and the context. The best part, above all, was that the SNS groups allowed me to provide feedback without worrying about the time limitation of the classroom (40 or 45 minutes), which served my teaching principles for a democratic and interactive classroom.

I created a separate WhatsApp- Messenger group, 'Englacial' to improve students' writing skills. I believed all students were in the exciting realm of the Social Studies class while focusing on active learning and offering practical strategies for effectively integrating the English language skills into the Social Studies curriculum. Every evening after school, I introduced an issue related to the ongoing topic of Social Studies, and the students initiated the discussion, which I probed further, eliciting and encouraging them to be more logical or justifiable in that process. That process promoted inquiry-based learning and critical thinking on the part of the students. In the meantime, they practised writing spontaneous and meaningful texts in English. I often chose topics of global concern from the Social Studies curriculum to integrate them with English lessons, especially geography, such as natural disasters or historical topics like World Wars, civilizations, and international relationships. I motivated the students to develop their writing skills in English by sharing the evaluation rubrics. My criteria of evaluation were new to the students with respect to the content, organization of the thesis statement and supporting details, fluency in the ideas, accuracy and punctuation, logical coherence, use of personal and public experiences, and issue-based real

anecdotes. As a class, we decided on a way to provide feedback each time with a new technique: sometimes, it was written-narrative or symbolic feedback, as well as verbal, individual, and whole class feedback. Normally, our feedback depended on the situation the piece of writing had created.

Summary and Major Takeaway

The paper highlighted an English teacher's perspective on the value and mechanism of using SNS in her classrooms and offered an ecologically valid perspective on incorporating social networking sites such as WhatsApp and Messenger. It exemplified how an English teacher took advantage of the SNS affordance to connect the inside and outside of the class to create more language use opportunities. The given takeaway is supported by previous literature and invalidates the claims of those who still refuse to adapt to the rapid technological advancements in the teaching-learning process. Further, it implies that teachers would soon find themselves to be anachronistic if they did not accept the need for digital literacy in teaching-learning. The points below present the major takeaway of the study:

1. Social media platforms can be integrated into a learning management system (LMS) because an integrated system allows for longer-term learning impacts and higher student engagement (Warschauer,2018).

2. As an English language teacher, one can use WhatsApp for one-on-one exchange of texts to address individual students' expectations and support their writing needs, discuss course contents, and update assignments.

3. Students can contact their course instructors via WhatsApp and Messenger regardless of time, physical distance, or office working hours, which can reduce delays in the feedback on the writing draft (Belal,2014).

4. SNS-based communication groups can enrich the learning experience and make it relatively easy for teachers to contact the learners at their convenience (Son, 2016).

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