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Submission date: 6-September-2021 09:04AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2101262487

File name: Vocabulary_Development_of_University_Students-Domingo_et_al.pdf (585.01K)

Word count: 6331

Character count: 34564



Perceived Role of Social Media in the Vocabulary Development of University Students

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ABSTRACT

In the academe, stakeholders are starting to acknowledge the impact of social media in the teaching and learning process. Aware of this, the researchers conducted this study to determine the role of social media in the language learning experiences of students. Specifically, it identified the social media profile of the students and the platforms' perceived use and advantages to vocabulary development. In realizing its objectives, the study employed a descriptive research design that involved 83 university students from a state university in the Philippines. Respondents answered an online survey questionnaire, which was tried out first to potential respondents before its actual use. The researchers used descriptive statistics to make sense of the data gathered. Results show that the students have high social media engagement as manifested by the number of social media accounts that they created for themselves (the majority have two or more accounts) and the number of hours that they spend day online (majority are online for at least three hours a day). All the respondents use Facebook.com, making it the most commonly used social media platform among them. In addition, the study found that students perceive social media as contributory and effective applications for the enhancement of language and vocabulary skills due to the media's accessibility, universality, ease of use, multimodality, general appeal, and its role in lowering communication anxieties. With these findings, educators are encouraged to explore the possibility of using social media platforms, preferably Facebook, as instructional media, specifically for the teaching of vocabulary.

Keywords: social media; vocabulary development; language learning

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that vocabulary is important in second language acquisition because one's vocabulary deficiency may result in difficulty in understanding others and in expressing oneself. Because of this, it is said that vocabulary knowledge is a determinant in any academic environment it is one of the linguistic components influencing the development of communicative competence and learners' language skills as well (Schmitt, Wun-Ching, & Garras, 2011).

In the Philippines, it has been a common observation that many elementary, secondary, and university students are deficient as to the necessary productive English vocabulary that they need (Calub & Calub (2017) in order to cope with the challenges of the demands of their academic loads. This vocabulary deficiency is attributed to quality and availability of reading materials, students' attitude and level of motivation to learn the language, and exposure to the target language that includes frequency of use. Hence, it is therefore imperative that educational institutions invest in improving vocabulary learning for brushing this aside may lead to an increase in the dropout rates across levels.

According to White and Kim (2009), vocabulary learning is one of the most important stages of language learning since it is contributory to the successful acquisition or learning of the micro and macro skills of the English language. A good resource of vocabulary does not only help non-native and even native speakers of the target language understand messages (listening and reading) but in transmitting ideas (speaking and writing) as well. Because of this, teaching and learning vocabulary is a vital issue among educators.

In a study conducted by Hairrel, Rupley, and Simmons (2011), they found that repeated exposure, contextual analysis, and semantic strategies are common methods in building up vocabulary. Moreover, vocabulary learning is determined by the frequency of use and exposure to various situations, scenarios, forms, and contexts (Schmitt, 2000; Nagy & Heibert, 2011).

According to Sivagnanam and Yunus (2020), teachers can approach vocabulary learning in two ways – explicit and incidental. The former refers to the conscious learning of vocabulary while the latter is learning without intention (Schmitt, 2000). Further, to Hunt and Beglar (1998), incidental vocabulary learning is recommended for advanced learners while the other is for the novice learners of the language.

Due to the advancement of technology and the concept of 21st- century learning that promotes communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and technology use, learning nowadays does just happen inside the four walls of the classroom. The internet is becoming a good resource for teachers and the use of social media and networking sites are becoming popular among educators, particularly in language learning. This is because, students spend considerable time on social networks (Wang, Chen, and Liang, 2011), download lectures, submit requirements, read materials, and join virtual groups (Domingo, 2017). They are important knowledge-sharing platforms due to their universality and ease of use (Pavlik and McIntosh, 2018). Moreover, given that English is the lingua franca of the internet, variance in English language usage increases. As such, cross-linguistic communication in social media provides a rich and meaningful learning experience to learners as it provides authentic contexts of the conversational qualities of the English language (Alharthi, et al., 2020). The wide array of situations provided by social media platforms give language learners chances to expand, validate, play and improve their vocabulary (Takac, 2008). Undoubtedly and implicitly, social media is somehow promoting independent learning.

The popularity of social media among teachers and students on the use of social media as an instructional resource, specifically in language education has been well-researched in the international arena (Sivagnanam and Yunus, 2020; Alharthi, et al., 2020; Zainal and Rahmat, 2020; Arumugam et al., 2020). In the Philippines, however, there is a dearth of published studies on the use of social media in English language classrooms. In fact, only three studies were found by the researchers to have been published online (Domingo, 2017; Kulidtod & Pasagui, 2017; Nanquil, 2020). This is surprising as the country is the top social media user in the world (Chua, 2021) and that some social media platforms are accessed free of charge.

Aware of the importance of vocabulary in the university and the impact of social media on the lives of the students, it is imperative that an exploratory study be undertaken as regards incidental vocabulary learning through social media. Hence, this study was conceptualized and undertaken.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine the perceived role of social media in the English language vocabulary development of select university students in a state university in the Philippines. Specifically, it identified the social media profile of the respondents, the perceived use of social media for vocabulary development, the advantages of social media as a learning tool, and the students' general views on the use of social media for vocabulary development.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Today, the popularity of social networks is unfathomable either as a communication platform, business transaction site, and instructional resource. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide benchmark information on how users, in this context, students, teachers, and administrators use FB as an instructional media.

To students, results would make them more aware of the use of social media in the furtherance of their language skills. In effect, they would be more conscious in processing the new words and/or phrases that they would encounter in their accounts. For teachers, results would give them an idea as to how they could use the platform in the delivery of their subject. For instance, teachers may get samples of word-formation strategies, new terms and phrases, and sentence structures online. This would make the teaching and learning experiences more meaningful and fun. Lastly, administrators could use the results as bases for the formulation of guidelines and/or policies governing the use of social media inside or as an extension of the classroom.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study only explored the use of social media in the learning or acquisition of English language vocabulary. It involved university students, specifically AB English Language (ABEL) and AB Communication (BA Com) students of a state university in the Philippines who were enrolled during the second semester of the academic year 2020 – 2021. These groups of students were purposely chosen because their exposure to the English language is believed to be more intense compared with other students. Also, they are believed to have the skill to play with the English language more ideal than those whose specialization is not language. Lastly, since the ABEL and BA Com students went through the rigors of admission requirements of the university and the Department of Languages and Literature (DLL), which offers the programs, the students are perceived to be good in the English language and are subsequently expected to manifest their ability in their Facebook threads.

Only the generated data from the online questionnaire was used as a source of information. The gathered data were not cross-checked with the respondents' social media accounts in order not to infringe on the privacy of the students.

Lastly, since there were only a few respondents in this study, results obtained from the research may not be generalizable to the whole population of the locale of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section highlights three concepts that served as bases for the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study. Specifically, it presents a brief review of the following: 1) vocabulary learning; 2) social media; and 3) social media and language learning.

VOCABULARY LEARNING

Vocabulary is the first and basic element that English language learners should acquire. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002), vocabulary is a set of lexemes, including single words, compound words, and idioms, that predicts someone's language performance in terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Richards and Renandaya, 2002). Thus, second language vocabulary knowledge determines the success or failure of any communication engagement (Alqahtani, 2015).

Considering the value of vocabulary for successful communication, teachers and administrators alike should find ways on how to motivate students to acquire the lexical knowledge that their contexts require. According to some experts, it is highly suggested teaching vocabulary using objects, pictures, drawings, mimes and gestures, enumeration and contrast, by drilling, spelling, active involvement, and guessing from content. Furthermore, the technological developments in the past years lead to the exploration of innovative and responsive strategies and approaches for vocabulary teaching and learning (Ma, 2017). According to Triansari (2017), teachers can also use social media networking as media. These applications promote interactivity, which distinguishes them from the traditional websites and some learning tools.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an internet based-technology (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) that is anchored on the conceptual and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the transmission and reception of one's thoughts, information, and ideas through the creation of online networks and groups (Dollarhide, 2021). Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users go online using technological devices such as a personal computer, smartphone, tablet through web-based software or applications such as Facebook/messenger, Instagram Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, and YouTube.

Facebook is a social media platform that promotes efficient communication among family members, friends, and co-workers on various topics: political, sports, business, entertainment, lifestyle, academic, among others. On this social site, users may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when the users update their profile, making it the leading social media platform globally.

Instagram is a free, online photo and video-sharing application. Users can edit photos and videos, add captions to the materials, and use hashtags and location-based geotags to their posts. The use of hashtag and geotags allows users not just to index their posts but making them searchable as well. Users also have the option of making their profile private so that only their followers can view their posts (Holak, 2021).

Twitter limits its users to send a 140-word message (or tweets). This challenges its users, as they need to be clear and concise in making their thoughts on point given the word limit set by the app. Twitter users can read and post tweets from other users and retweets them. They can also create learning hashtags that can help other learners to read the tweet and be able to give feedback and communicate.

Pinterest has been described as a visual search engine. It comprises mainly of pins (bookmarks of image ideas, or products) and boards (spaces used to save and or organize pins of multiple themes). Users can follow and unfollow other users as well as boards, which would fill the home feed.

Snapchat is a device that allows users to share videos, photos, texts, and drawings. One of the key features of the application is the disappearance of the sent texts or photos from the recipient's device after a few seconds.

YouTube is a video-sharing device, which could sustain the interest of students. Using the app, teachers can create and upload instructional videos that students can watch anytime they want, save on their devices, and share between and among them. Students, likewise, can comment, which can be used as a platform for students to share their reflections and lessons learned from the video (Arumugam, et al., 2020).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The proliferation of social media in the World Wide Web and the interest of teachers to incorporate social media use in their classrooms has inspired researchers to do empirical studies to determine its feasibility and practicability. In Malaysia, for example, Sivagnanam and Yunus (2020) and Arumugam, et. al (2020) explored the use of social media in teaching vocabulary. It was found in both pieces of research that the students benefited from the numerous functions of social media in learning and developing English vocabulary. Also, Zainal and Rahmat (2020) found that through social media, their respondents learned new words and grammar structures that enhance their communication skills and that they were motivated by the applications to use the language more frequently as they are exposed to authentic and meaningful English materials such as videos, posts, captions, and tweets.

Moreover, Kabilan, et al. (2016) have proven in their study that students feel more confident and motivated to learn vocabulary when using social media as it creates an environment that does not involve face-to-face interaction. This is noteworthy, as intrinsic motivation has been proven to predict desirable outcomes in terms of output quality, which includes academic performances (Mayama, et al., 2016).

In addition, in a study conducted by Khan, et al. (2016), their findings revealed that social media play an important role in vocabulary development as they facilitate the learning of new words and vocabulary among students and provide context conducive for learning as they may use social media tools for a long time without any hesitation or boredom.

Lastly, Nesrallah and Zangana (2020) examined the role of social media in improving EFL vocabulary knowledge. The findings attest to social media's potential use in the context of teaching and learning foreign languages.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive research design in identifying the role of social media in the enhancement of vocabulary development of university students. Eighty-three (83) AB in English Language and AB Communication students enrolled during the second semester of the academic year 2020 – 2021 in a state university in the Philippines participated in the study. They were considered based on the following criteria: a) all have social media accounts; b) they are active social media users; c) they are bona fide students of the locale of the study during the conduct of the research; and d) all signified their willingness to participate in the research through the signing of an informed consent document. In getting the data needed, the researchers designed an online survey questionnaire that was tried out to 15 potential respondents and was revised subsequently based on their comments and suggestions to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Before asking the respondents to answer the online survey questionnaire (google form), the researchers followed the informed consent process to ensure that the conduct of the study is within the bounds of ethical research. Specifically, the researchers addressed the following: conflict of interest, vulnerability, informed consent process, privacy and confidentiality, risks, voluntariness/withdrawal, incentives or compensation, and community considerations.

To make sense of the data gathered, the study made of descriptive statistics such as frequency count, ranks, and percentages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the respondents' social media use, perceived use of social media on their vocabulary development, their reasons and general views in using the social media for vocabulary development.

RESPONDENT'S SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Regarding social media use, the researchers also looked into the following variables: commonly used social media accounts of the students, the number of accounts that they actively use, and their social media consumption a day.

In identifying the commonly used social media platforms, the respondents chose three from the options listed in the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the data gathered.

TABLE 1. Respondents' commonly used social media platforms

Social Media Platform	Number	Percentage	Rank
Facebook/Messenger	83	100.00	1
Instagram	11	13.25	2
Twitter	10	12.00	3
Pinterest	4	4.82	4
Snapchat	3	3.61	5
YouTube/others	2	2.41	6

*multiple response

As shown in Table 1, Facebook/Messenger is the commonly used social media platform of the respondents (100%) which is similar to the results generated by Kulidtod and Pasagui in their study

in 2017. This is not surprising as 96% of the total internet users in the Philippines accessed Facebook in the third quarter of 2020 (Statista Research Department, 2021). This result is due to the following factors: 1) free Facebook use in the country; 2) plan promos offer unlimited internet connection to subscribers; 3) the university, the locale of the study is Wi-Fi - ready; 4) teachers use Facebook as a supplemental educational platform; and 5) ease of use of the platform. Meanwhile, the number of social media accounts owned by a typical university student is also presented in (Table 2).

TABLE 2. The number of social media accounts of the respondents

Number of Social Media	Number	Percentage	Rank
1	16	19.3%	4
2	23	27.7%	1.5
3	23	27.7%	1.5
More than 4	21	25.3%	3

Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents have two or three (55.4%) social media accounts. Filipinos are very social people and known for their close-knit relationships with family and friends. Hence, social interactions are a basic part of the Filipino culture. Having at least two accounts would allow them to extend that sense of belongingness (Mehmood and Taswir, 2013) even to total strangers. In addition, having more than two accounts would allow them to reach their target audience or group as social networks are designed for a specific purpose and audience.

Meanwhile, the study also determined the number of hours spent by the respondents in a day as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Number of hours spent on social media each day

Number of Hours	Number	Percentage	Rank
1 – 2 hours	15	18.1%	4
3 – 4 hours	26	31.3%	1
5 – 6 hours	20	24.1%	3
More than 6 hours	22	26.5%	2

As to the length of time, 31.3% of the respondents use social media platforms for 3 – 4 hours a day, 26.50% for more than 6 hours, 24.10% for 5 – 6 hours, and just 18.10% for 1 – 2 hours. This corroborates with the findings that the social media users in the Philippines spend an average of three hours and 53 minutes daily (PDI, 2021), higher than the global average for daily time spent on social media which is two hours and 24 minutes. The data imply that social media use is becoming a habit among students since they use those in uploading/downloading materials, getting information related to their academic or future career, exchanging conversations with friends, and watching online films (Kanagarathinam, 2014). Moreover, according to Kulidtod and Pasagui (2017), it is difficult for students to study for one hour without logging in to one of their accounts. This data is significant in this study as the length of social media use may affect the level of exposure of the students to new vocabularies that they may or may not acquire.

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PERCEIVED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

The second objective of this study calls for the identification of the perceived impact of social media on vocabulary development. In realizing this, the researchers identified various potential use of social media in introducing vocabulary to users. Table 4 shows the consolidated data gathered from the students.

TABLE 4. Perceived roles of social media on vocabulary development

Items	Number	Percentage	Rank
Social media present...			
1 new words (neologisms, creative words) that are vital in this generation	68	81.92%	1
2 idiomatic expressions and figurative languages	43	51.8%	2
3 word information strategies: clipping, blending, acronyms, compounding)	33	39.8%	3
4 contexts as to how the words are to be used	32	38.6%	4
5 slang and/or colloquial terms necessary for conversation English	26	31.3%	5
6 technical terms necessary for technical and/or business English	18	21.7%	6
7 high sounding (hifalutin) words	8	9.6%	7

*multiple response

Of the seven items listed, Table 4 shows the top three situations where students perceive social media as instrumental to their vocabulary development. First, they believe that social media presents new words that are vital to their generation (57.80%). Some of the examples that they shared are the following: 1) woke (used to be the past tense of wake, now the word 'woke' refers to someone's awareness of social issues such as discrimination); 2) the struggle is real (which means that a person is facing challenges or in tough times); 3) flex (for showing off something); 4) acronyms such as HB for high blood (used to be just a term for an illness but now, it means being angry); and 5) avatar (an image that represents someone in the social media).

Second, the students believe that social media presents contexts regarding the correct use of idiomatic expressions and figurative languages (51.80%). According to Abulaish, et al. (2020), figurative languages online come in the form of sarcasm, irony, simile, metaphor, satire, hyperbole, and humor.

Lastly, social media also show word-formation strategies (39.8%) like clipping (also called truncation or the removal of some segments of an existing word to create its synonym), blending (combining the parts of two words to create a new term), acronym (first letters of the words in a phrase are extracted and put together to form a new entity, and compounding (combining two words to create a new term). The table below shows some examples of word formation strategies observed by the students on social media platforms.

TABLE 4. Examples of word-formation strategies as observed by the respondents

Words/Word-formation Strategies	Meaning
Clipping	
App	Origin: application

	Meaning: a software, usually downloadable, that could perform several functions
Feed	Origin: newsfeed Meaning: a feature of the app that allows someone to view ones content
Fam	Origin: family Meaning: usually refers to someone (not by blood) who is considered as a member of the family
Bio	Origin: biography Meaning: a space in social media platforms that is used to introduce digital profiles
Cray	Origin: crazy Meaning: abbreviation for crazy
Blending	
Blog	Origin: web and log Meaning: a website managed by an individual or organization that usually uses informal or conversational style
Ebook	Origin: electronic and book Meaning: an electronic version of a book
Webinar	Origin: web and seminar Meaning: online seminar or presentation
Socmed	Origin: so ²⁴ and media Meaning: websites and/or applications that allow users to create and share contents or participate in social networking.
Geotag	Origin: geography and tag Meaning: adding a geographical location to a post (online material)
Acronym	
TBH	Meanings 1) To be honest 2) This is a phrase that expresses someone's honesty in saying something
DM	Meanings 1) Direct message 2) sending a private message to someone through his/her inbox
IM	Meanings 1) Instant Messaging 2) Real-time, direct-based communication between two or more individuals
F2F	Meanings 1) Face-to-face 2) Person-to-person communication
RT	Meanings 1) retweet 2) This happens when a user found a content in his/her feed that is useful to share again.
Compounding	
Crowdsourcing	Combine (2) rds: crowd and source(ing) Meaning: using a large group of people to generate ideas, services, or content via a social network.
Facepalm	Combined words: face and palm Meaning: this is a symbol (word) used when someone did something stupid
Newsjacking	Combined words: news and jack(ing)

	Meaning: refers to the practice of capitalizing on the popularity of a news story to amplify one's sales
Bookmarking	Combined words: book and mark(ing) Meaning: saving a post to a 'library' so that it could be found easily in the future
Livestream	Combined words: live and stream Meaning: a real time video broadcast in a social media

The results clearly show that social media contribute to the development of English vocabulary among students. According to Khan, et al. (2016), social media plays a dominant role in English language learning because it provides opportunities to the English language learners to improve their writing, reading, and similarly, to read new text and phrases to improve their vocabulary.

ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

To determine the reasons regarding the use of social media platforms as tools for vocabulary development, the respondents identified the listed advantages of the platforms Table 5.

TABLE 5. Advantages of social media as a tool in the development of vocabulary

Advantages	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
The social media's multimodality (videos, print, photos, etc) enhances language learning	63	75.9	1
Accessibility is not a problem as some social media platforms are free	54	65.1	2
The social media platforms are user-friendly	37	44.6	3
Almost all have social media accounts	28	33.7	4
Social media platforms are more appealing than printed materials	24	28.9	5
Social media decreases communication anxiety	18	21.7	6

*multiple responses

Table 5 shows that the students acknowledge the multimodality feature (75.9%) of the social media platforms as their edge over the other tools that promote vocabulary development. Unlike the other platforms that are unimodal (newspapers, books, e-books, etc.) social media expose students to new vocabularies through a variety of ways such as in the form of posters, photos, videos, etc. Moreover, the students consider these factors as the key features of social media that enhance vocabulary development: accessibility (65.1%); ease of use (44%); universality as all have social media accounts (33.7%); and general appeal (28.9%) which means that the platforms are interactive, flexible, and entertaining (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019). It is noteworthy that students also consider social media as a platform that decreases communication anxiety (21.7%) which is vital in the context of language learning. According to Abbasova (2016), students' interaction on social media helps them enhance their vocabulary and literacy skills as it gives them the chance to exchange ideas either writing (chat and posts) or in speaking (voice and/or video chat).

The result shows that social media has a positive advantage in the development of English vocabulary among students. According to Sivagnanam, and Yunus (2020), students utilize social

media to acquire new vocabulary as the platforms increase their level of motivation to learn. In addition, the platforms are interactive tools that help students to learn subconsciously.

GENERAL VIEWS IN USING THE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Overall, the majority of the students (71.11%) believe that social media are very effective and effective platforms for vocabulary development. However, 26.5% of them consider social media as somewhat effective only while 2.4% consider the platforms not effective.

TABLE 6. General view on the use of social media in vocabulary development

Effectiveness	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	11	13.3
Effective	48	57.8
Somewhat effective	22	26.5
Not effective	2	2.4

The result of the study supports the findings of Zainal and Rahmat (2020) when they found that social media facilitates the enhancement of one's language skills. Moreover, this corroborates with the findings of Khan, et al. (2016) when they found that a majority (66.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that social media use plays a dominant role in vocabulary development.

However, the data presented in Table 6 imply that not everyone (2.4%) views social media as a good platform to use in enhancing one's vocabulary. This may be due to some factors such as preference, availability of technology to use, and their geographical location as there are still places in the country where internet connectivity is a challenge.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the reviewed literature and the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the students in the context of the study have high social media engagement as reflected in the number of accounts that they manage and the number of hours that they are log – in a day. In addition, the students perceive social media as contributory and effective platforms to the enhancement of their language and vocabulary skills due to the media's accessibility, universality, ease of use, multimodality, general appeal, and its role in lowering communication anxieties.

In light of the conclusions drawn, the researchers recommend the following. First, since Facebook is the commonly used social media platform of the students, teachers are encouraged to maximize its use in their classrooms as long as school policies allow them to do such. Second, future researchers are encouraged to use qualitative design in order to get richer data on the use of social media as a tool for vocabulary development. Third, it is suggested to pilot the study on a larger scale so that conclusions drawn from the results are more generalizable. Lastly, researchers are encouraged to conduct experimental researches in this area to determine the relationship between social media use and the vocabulary skills of students.

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