

Chapter 14

A Model for Mobile Social Media Integration in Constructivist ESL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Social media, with its ability to create opportunities for interaction, presents a platform for applying technology into social constructivist learning contexts in innovative and meaningful ways. This chapter proposes a model for integrating mobile social media in a content-based ESL curriculum. Newly-arrived international art students were introduced to popular social media platforms and were trained on how to use these tools to conduct research and document their experiences in the field during a summer intensive program. Results are discussed in terms of effects on students' academic English knowledge and abilities, knowledge of local academic and creative cultures, and technology literacy. Finally, limitations and implications for future studies are explored.

INTRODUCTION

The growing number of digitally native students raises awareness of the urgent educational challenges and needs in terms of integrating technology into the curriculum while engaging students in an authentic social context. To be successful in academic careers, these students are required to learn 21st century skills, including technology, media, and global literacy skills (Yeh & Kessler, 2015), collaborative skills (Hampel, 2006; Jones & Youngs, 2006; Kessler, 2013), communicative skills (Larsen-Freeman, 2007), and intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1995). To help students meet these requirements, one of the frequently used approaches is implementing instruction and strategies of mobile social media into curricula to offer easy access to knowledge and create opportunities to learn through collaboration, discussion, and negotiation of meaning in an interactive learning environment (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014).

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In the past decade, researchers have investigated mobile technology, especially social media, and found that a positive correlation between the use of social media and the learning outcomes, including better understanding of how to (1) construct new information, (2) work collaboratively with others, and (3) become active learners (Mondahl, Rasmussen, & Razmerita, 2009; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014; Razmerita, Gouarderes, & Comte, 2005). As a result, educators are encouraged to integrate these new communicative tools into their curricula to better prepare students to effectively perform in the 21st century world.

Social media has become a part of everyday life for communication and interaction. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn have been used for not only personal communication but also business networking and academic tools (Dyrud, 2011). Facebook reported 1.86 billion active users at the end of 2016, and Facebook Chief Financial Officer David Wehner estimates that number will reach two billion in 2017 (Fiegerman, 2017). More than 2.5 billion people are registered for some form of social media, which is one third of the world's population (Statista, 2016).

Mobile devices are now the driving force behind social media consumption in the U.S., accounting for 62% of the time Americans spend on social network sites (comScore, 2015, p. 19). This chapter uses the term “mobile social media” to refer to situations where both mobile technology and social media are used to perform certain functions. According to Humphreys (2013), “mobile social media can loosely be considered software, applications, or services accessed through mobile devices that allow users to connect with other people and to share information, news, and content” (p. 21). This highlights the importance of the complementary roles social and mobile technologies play. Rather than, for example, taking pictures while they are out and uploading them when they get home, users are able to share their experiences and interact with their peers instantly. For students, and language learners in particular, this enables interaction with instructors, peers, and content—or in social constructivist terms, knowledge-building—to occur anytime, anywhere.

This chapter aims at demonstrating a content-based curriculum for mobile social media integration in constructivist English as a second language (ESL) classrooms. Initially, this model was created for an ESL summer intensive program (SIP) titled “U.S. Language and Creative Industries in Western Markets.” This is an intensive ESL curriculum designed to address the needs of incoming international students who have had limited experience studying in the U.S and have limited knowledge about creative industries in the Western world. Both language and content (i.e., creative industries) curricula were developed based on social constructivist learning theories (Kanuka & Anderson, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978) aiming to (1) improve and refine students' academic English skills; (2) enhance students' intercultural competence and understanding of local and academic culture by conducting a multimedia language project; (3) develop students' technology literacy skills by using mobile social media, (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter) in their projects; and (4) help students understand and differentiate creative industries in Western markets, broadening their knowledge about entrepreneurial and leadership roles in the creative arts sectors. The program helps students research industry practices to identify and develop opportunities for working in the cultural and creative sectors in global markets, while working in teams to pitch their ideas using various presentation techniques and visiting various creative spaces.

This chapter begins by examining the notions of social constructivist learning theories and approaches in ESL settings, followed by demonstrating a content-based curriculum for mobile social media integration in constructivist ESL classrooms. The results of the program, based on instructor observations, follow-up discussions, and online interactions, are then discussed. Finally, implications of the mobile social media integration teaching approach for higher education will be discussed. The implications of

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