

IMPROVING TEACHERS' EDUCATION THROUGH FACEBOOK COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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Abstract:

Considering the specifications of the online-based environment within modern social practices, which dominated various classes of information exchanges and educational opportunities, it is becoming more significant in teaching and learning situations. This research identifies the importance of taking advantage of technological facilities to allow language teachers to develop procedures entirely distinct from traditional ones by building an online community of practice (CoP) on the Facebook platform Algerian Association of English Language Teachers.

The research opts for a descriptive research method whereby a survey was administered to 70 EFL teachers from different Algerian educational institutions. The results showed that correspondents share knowledge, resources, advice, and insights. They collaborate and interact all together to provide feedback, support each other, and essentially act actively as a community.

Key words:

Community; education; Facebook; online CoP; teaching

1. INTRODUCTION:

The web age links individuals at any time and from every piece on the planet, which has altered all facets of human existence, including educational and professional practices. Educators have endeavored to recognize the value of technology in enhancing teaching and learning circumstances throughout the last two decades; yet, instructors are not often targeted. As a result, the creation of online communities for teachers switched focus from face-to-face engagement to electronically focused communication, in which instructors share their experiences, seek guidance, and offer critics via blog forums, Facebook postings, and using Tweeter.

These platforms know a huge turnout as the facilities they provide the users with in different domains. Teachers and learners, though, are active operators looking after enhancing their teaching and learning practices, especially through Facebook. Accordingly, they tend to create and join such online communities to fulfill their needs.

1.1 Research objectives

This paper emphasizes the significance of online Communities of Practice (CoPs) established through the Facebook platform for English language teachers. It seeks Algerian tutors' perspectives regarding online CoPs and how they affect their education. Teachers, on the whole, have favorable views towards the usage of online communities, which assist in developing their teaching abilities and offer them excellent tools that promote their teachers' education.

1.2 Question and hypothesis

To reach the above-mentioned goal, the following question requires a detailed answer:

- What are the perspectives of Algerian EFL teachers concerning the use of online CoPs through the Facebook platform?

Accordingly, if the Algerian teachers of English have positive attitudes regarding the use of Facebook CoPs, they are likely to use it frequently to improve their teaching practices.

2. Literature review:

Communities of practice (CoP) are Practitioners who share their expertise, concerns, and ideals in a friendly environment. According to Wenger (1998), CoP necessitates the reciprocal engagement of members in a shared environment. Members share repertoires of various means, experiences, behaviors, and words developed or formed by the community. Therefore, Jung & Brush (2009) claimed that CoP differs from groups or assemblies, seeking to develop members' abilities and knowledge to sustain the community. According to Jones and Preece (2006), the concept of CoP arose widely, referring to a group of individuals who exchange thoughts and resources relating to their work environments explicitly or informally. They propose that, with new technologies, CoP may be virtually configured to be backed by technical facilities. Scholars highlight the need of actively participating in these communities of practice in order to learn.

An online COP is a virtual community of participants who share the same area of interest and sources with the primary objective to develop knowledge and share experiences. According to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015), CoPs have three primary characteristics: the domain, the community, and the practice. As a result, CoPs include friends or connections, as well as those who have a same interest. Thus, a participant commits to this common domain, which necessitates the development of related competences. These individuals establish a community in which they assist one another, communicate knowledge about the common repertoire, such as experiences and tools, and allow cooperation and interpersonal interactions to facilitate learning.

An online CoP focuses on the professional development of individuals within their discipline while highlighting the significance of relationships, caring, and mutual support within the community (Brody & Hadar, 2015). Additionally, online CoPs enable more communication, participant interaction, and implementation of collaborative pedagogy paradigms (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). Hence, online CoPs facilitate simultaneous and asynchronous communication and access to and from physically separated groups and international information exchange (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). They develop a sense of connectedness, similar interest, and knowledge growth can be fluid and cyclical due to constant engagement (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007).

Gannon-Leary & Fontainha (2007) stated that given components are vital as the utility of technology, confidence, approval, interpersonal connectedness, cross-national and cross-cultural dimensions of the CoP, shared perceptions, a shared sense of purpose, and longevity. They (2007) further clarified that a virtual CoP requires access to technology, continuous communication between members, developing mutual trust, and sharing the feeling of belongingness. CSF necessitates the CoP to have a purpose. An online CoP should have a clear objective that could be attainable through ICTs. The purpose behind the CoP involves leadership to monitor, regulate, maintain boundaries and respond to the change (Stuckey and Smith, 2004). The necessity for driving leadership becomes increasingly critical, as the group gets large.

Although online CoPs proved their efficiency, some disciplines, such as the sciences and technology fields, may require specialized expertise to conduct a virtual CoP (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). A virtual CoP compels hard work to manage energy and a high level of cooperation and assistance in which membership shifting would lead to the group's destruction (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). In addition, an online CoP lacks the opportunity of face-to-face interaction, which may fail to engage them and create a sense of mistrust (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007).

3. Methodology

3.1 The method

This study aims to identify the attitudes of Algerian EFL teachers towards the use of online CoPs through the Facebook platform. Accordingly, the research opts for a descriptive study. Gay and Diehl (1992), the descriptive design includes collecting data to find answers about the actual status and to determine how the case is. Thus, an online questionnaire was delivered to the participants. The questionnaire is a method of collecting data through interviews or surveys and aiming to reveal the general view of the group (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2015).

The questionnaire was submitted online. It contained two sections: (1) personal information and (2) teachers' attitudes regarding the use of virtual CoPs. The first part targeted the participants' age, teaching experience, teaching cycle, and the use of ICT features. However, the second part included questions about the participants' participation in Facebook groups, the effect of Facebook CoPs on teaching, approaching the teachers' needs through these communities, and the advantages of

using them. The section ended with an open-ended question to identify the teachers' views concerning the significance of Facebook CoPs in developing teaching.

The majority of questions were created in accordance with the Likert Scale, quantitative results were analyzed according to the descriptive statistics (the means and standard deviations SD) through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS Statistics), and the qualitative data were analyzed using the computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data analysis software (MAXQDA).

3.2 The sample

The participants of this study included English teachers connected to the Facebook group Algerian Association of English Language Teachers. It is a public group related to the teaching of English and administered by Algerian English language teachers. Accordingly, the questionnaire was delivered through the platform, and 70 teachers randomly responded. They work in different academic establishments.

All participants (100%) have willingly taken part in the study. The participants' age ranges from less than 21 to more than 50-year-old. Some participants (11%) are less than 21 years old, others (28%) are aged between 21 and 30, the majority (35%) ages between 31 and 40, (21%) of the correspondents' age varies between 41 and 50, and (5%) of them are older than 50 (Mean= 1.425, Sd.= 0.291). Hence, almost (54%) of the participants are middle school teachers, (27%) of them teach at secondary schools, (14%) are teaching at in private schools, and (5%) teaches at university (Mean= 1.326, Sd.= 0.248). Regarding the teaching experiences, (18%) have a teaching experience for less than 5 years, (23%) are experienced in teaching English as a foreign language between 6 year and 10 years, (19%) are teaching English from 11 to 15 years, (25%) are teachers from 15 to 20 years, and (15%) teach English for more than 20 years (Mean= 1.837, Sd.= 0.464). Table N°01 summarizes the description of participants

	Valid	Percentage	Mean	Sd.
Age	Less than 21	11%	1.425	0.291
	[21-30]	28%		
	[31-40]	35%		
	[41-50]	21		
	More than 50	5%		
Teaching cycle	Middle school	54%	1.326	0.248
	Secondary school	27%		
	Private school	14%		
	University	5%		
Experience	Less than 5 years	18%	1.837	0.464
	[6-10]	23%		
	[11-15]	19%		
	[16-20]	25%		
	More than 20 years	15%		

Table N°01: Description of the participants

Personal information

The results revealed that the participants have different levels concerning ICTs use. The majority (46%) have an average level using the information and communication technologies, others (34%) are competent users of technological devices, (10%) of teachers indicate that they were pretty skilled when using ICTs, (6%) claim that they had a poor level manipulating technological devices, and (4%) have poorer ICT skills (Mean= 1.694, Sd.= 0.385).

Nowadays teachers are regarded as digital natives, being raised under the influence of technology and internet facilities (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). According to the results, the majority of teachers are somewhat competent using technological devices like smartphones, tablets, or computers. As revealed by Palfrey & Gasser (2008), those who do not manage to use ICT features appropriately are digital immigrants as they are unable to cope with modern developments. This would create a gap between teachers who are digital natives and teachers who are digital immigrants affecting their practices, especially when considering that learners are digital natives and use technological devices more frequently.

3.3 Teachers' attitudes towards online CoPs

Teachers' answers differ concerning joining online communities on Facebook. The majority (10%) of participants are members in 5 groups or less, others (19%) are members in about 6 to 10 communities, (25%) belongs of the teachers are members in 11 to 15 groups, (30%) joins from 16 to 20 Facebook groups, and (16%) belongs to more than 20 online Facebook communities (Mean= 1.521, Sd.= 0.283). Facebook is no longer considered as an entertainment tool merely, it is rather becoming an efficient pedagogical means (Ghaouar et al. 2019).

Teachers' answers showed that (25%) of them are strongly influenced with Facebook CoPs, (31%) find Facebook groups important for teachers, (15%) remain neutral, (17%) are not interested in what CoPs develop, and (12%) are not impacted by these communities (Mean= 1.703, Sd.= 0.492).

Accordingly, (28%) consider Facebook CoPs extremely efficient to fulfill their needs as attempting to enhance their teaching practices, (34%) find CoPs important helping teachers improve their skills, (13%) are neutral, (12%) claim that Facebook CoPs do not meet their requirements, and (13%) believe that Facebook communities are far away from their expectations (Mean= 1.590, Sd.= 1.413).

Nevertheless, (31%) state that Facebook communities are very advantageous foster the teacher's teaching competencies, (33%) find them fairly beneficial, (9%) respond neutrally, (15%) assert that virtual CoPs are not helpful tools for teachers, and (12%) regard CoPs as invaluable tool which may not affect teaching (Mean= 1.509, Sd.= 0.372).

The correspondents responded differently to the open-ended, in which they have all shared several benefits of using Facebook CoPs. (27%) of the participants claim that CoPs help them find and share different resources and materials. Others (44%) state that members exchange knowledge regarding their teaching practices. The majority (56%) assert that joining Facebook CoPs help improving the teaching skills as (40%) believe that they boost self-reflection, (36%) think they develop innovative teaching practices, and (44%) claim they inspire collaboration. The following table N°02 depicts the teachers' answers regarding the importance of Facebook CoPs for them.

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Sharing resources	19	27%
Sharing knowledge	31	44%
Improving teaching skills	39	56%
Boosting self-reflection	28	40%
Developing innovation	25	36%
Encouraging collaboration	31	44%

Table N°02: The significance of virtual CoPs

The participants praised Facebook communities of practice as a resource for problem-solving that members who have different backgrounds and degrees of knowledge try to assist others by offering advice, encouragement, feedback, or even sharing their own experiences. As a result, Facebook CoPs are beneficial to most of them since they can discover new traits, solve problems, and cooperate with other members.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate English language instructors' engagement in various teaching communities on Facebook and the consequences on teachers' education. The sample represents Wenger and Wenger-(2015) Trayner's contention that CoP can vary in size, geographic location, and primary aim. The Facebook group manifested Wenger and Wenger Trayner's (2015) three components: domain, community, and practice aspects. These conditions are met by the Algerian Association of Teachers of English Facebook group, which aims to engage its members in collaborative learning environment.

Teachers' participation in an online CoP assisted in breaking down barriers and enhancing their professional growth. To generate effective professional development, environments that encourage teacher educators to communicate their experiences, attitudes, and conceptions must be present (Ben-Perez et al., 2010). As a result, Hadar and Brody (2010) asserted that the importance of the early establishment of connections and the social character of learning as a prerequisite for discussing additional topics was critical.

Teachers established the structural and supporting human environment required to promote purposeful, collaborative learning and apply that learning via an online platform, resulting in ongoing advancement in teacher education. Participation in online CoPs supported the teacher education growth process by creating important dialogues and fostering a shared conviction among group members. It also produced hard scenarios to improve the level of engagement to address problems and aid in building instructors' abilities in dealing with such situations. Joining these communities extends features of group process such as commitment, safe space, professional relationships, and shared emphasis.

Facebook appears to be used by nearly all people in society. However, there are still unanswered problems regarding the use of social media to support instructional practices. This study revealed that when individuals in the same domain join a community to support their profession, they might develop a collaborative and supportive CoP even on the Facebook platform. It does not imply that Facebook is the sole social media medium for organizing a CoP or that any Facebook group can be a CoP that promotes learning.

The Algerian Association of English Teachers is indeed a promising online CoP where Algerian English teachers have the same desire to grow their teaching techniques, and its success is dependent on community members' willingness to trust, share, and engage in the CoP. Since the data for this study was acquired and evaluated, the Facebook group has continued to be used. As a result, the Facebook platform is seen as more than just a social networking site for conversing and pleasure. It promotes teaching and learning practices by establishing various advantageous places and communities where both instructors and students can freely meet electronically and enhance their skills.

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6. Appendix

Teachers' questionnaire

Dear participants,

This survey is intended to identify Algerian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the use of Facebook communities of practice. Your participation is valuable that we will be grateful if you take part.

I. Personal information

1. Indicate your age

Less than 21 ☐ [21-30] ☐ [31-40] ☐ [41-50] ☐ More than 50 ☐

2. Choose the cycle you work in

Middle school ☐ University ☐

Secondary school ☐ Private school ☐

3. Teaching experience

Less than 5 years ☐ [6-10] ☐ [11-15] ☐ [16-20] ☐ More than 20 ☐

4. Indicate level in technology use:

Very poor ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Competent ☐ Very competent ☐

II. Teachers' attitudes towards the use of online CoPs

1. How many online communities do you belong to on Facebook?

Less than 5 ☐ [6-10] ☐ [11-15] ☐ [16-20] ☐ More than 20 ☐

2. Did online communities affected your teaching?

Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐

3. Does your interaction in the online CoPs fulfill your needs?

Far below standards ☐ Below standards ☐ Meets standards ☐ above standards ☐ Far above standards ☐

4. Is the use of online CoPs advantageous?

Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐

5. How can you state the significance of these communities to the teachers' education?

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