Chapter 25

Conducting Online Posting Activity on a Social Networking Site (SNS) to Replace Traditional Learner Diaries

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case examines online posting activity by international students in Malaysia. The aim of the case is twofold, where it provides a platform for the students to practice their writing skills and a way to gather data for a bigger project, which is a research project into their English language learning experiences. The issues revolved around a string of decisions made before embarking on the case and challenges faced in running and maintaining the case. They are dissected and presented in two stages and two phases. Decisions were made and challenges were solved in line with the two aims of the case by considering extant literature and good research practice.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This case was closely connected to a larger project. Thus, it is of paramount importance to introduce this project before the case is laid out. The major project is a research study aiming to explore the English language learning experiences of international students in a university in Malaysia. Studies of international students in Malaysia have highlighted problems that the students faced. Among these are problems concerning their English language proficiency (Noor Saazai et al., in press). Hence, the two components involved in the project are the students and the English proficiency program that they undertook. The students were from countries all over the world coming to Malaysia for further studies. They are postgraduate students from both science and social science faculties who enrolled in the English proficiency course run by the Language Centre for fourteen (14) weeks at the university. Precise demographic details are found in 'Setting the Stage' section. International students have to undergo the course to fulfill the English language requirements that are set by the university (Marlyna et al., 2012). For most of the students, the English proficiency course runs concurrently with their faculty courses. The English proficiency course offers reading, writing and oral communication classes. All three classes are compulsory for the students. Both reading and oral communication classes are conducted for three (3) hours each per week, whereas the writing class is for six (6) hours weekly. All of the classes are in the afternoon. At the end of the course they are required to achieve the band score as stipulated by the university.

The nature of assessment for each class is formative where the end score is the accumulation of marks from the tests, quizzes and assignments. For semester 1 of 2012/2013, one of the assignments in the writing class was online posting activity. It carried 10 per cent of the coursework marks. The main objective of the activity was for the students to expand their writing exercises. This marks the intersection between the project and the case.

The project used a qualitative research paradigm where one of the data collection methods was document analysis of learner diaries. The data gathered will inform the first author's thesis. Usually the activity of learner diaries is done traditionally using pen and paper where learners write their daily entries in a notebook or on pieces of A4 paper which are then compiled. However, due to the reasons which will be discussed in the next section, we have chosen an unorthodox method to do learner diaries.

Before we present the case, it is essential for us to first discuss the stage where we intend to find a medium that can ensure better quality learner diaries that fulfill both research and instructional aims.

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