

Integrating Ethnic Culture Facebook Pages in EFL Instruction

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Introduction

An ethnic group is a social group sharing a common and distinctive homeland, language (dialect), cultural heritage, ancestry, history, religion, food, costumes, literature, arts, sports, architecture...etc. An ethnic group can be large, consisting of hundreds of millions of individuals such as Arabs, Bengali and Han Chinese people. It can also be small consisting of few thousand individuals such as Native American Indians, Amish and Mennonite groups in the USA; Maoris in New Zealand or aborigines of Australia. It can be a minority within a larger society such as ethnic Chinese or Spanish people in San Francisco; Berbers (Amazigh), Turkmen, Chaldeans and Syriacs in Arab countries.

Culture and language, as Kuo & Lai (2006) indicated, are inseparable. To enhance students' linguistic development, instructional strategies for teaching a second/foreign language through culture should be implemented. They added that culture must be incorporated outright, as an essential component of second language learning and teaching.

A review of the literature has revealed numerous studies that integrated several cultural elements (themes) in foreign/second language instruction using a variety of activities and technologies such as Rowan (2001), Paige, Cohen & Shively (2004), Yang (2006), Scarino, Crichton & Woods (2007), Schmidt (2008) and Sanchez (2009); Al-Jarf, (2006a); Al-Jarf, 2006b; Al-Jarf, 2006c).

Since prior studies have not investigated the effect of integrating ethnic culture(s) and social networks in second/foreign language instruction, the present study presents a model for integrating ethnic culture Facebook pages in second/foreign language learning and teaching. The model aims to help develop college students' proficiency level in EFL/ESL, i.e. their listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary skills; help them explore, understand, compare and contrast ethnic cultures or sub-cultures of interest to them; help them accept and respect diversity, develop a sense of pride in ethnic background, develop a liking for traditional and social activities of "my ethnic group"; and help them create a sense of belonging to a particular

ethnic group or ethnic culture.

Materials and tasks

The instructor and his/her students can create an ethnic culture page on Facebook to share information and knowledge about a particular ethnic group, sub-groups or several ethnic groups within the same country or across several countries. They can use English to study several elements (themes) of the ethnic culture(s) under study such as language, religion, dance, music, architecture, food (cuisine), customs, art, children's literature, festivals, sports or costumes that differ from place to place within the country or across several countries.

Instructional Strategy with Facebook

The instructor sets goals for creating an ethnic cultural Facebook page, tells the students what they need to do and focus on, and gives pre-questions to help them focus on the cultural element (theme) they need to explore. EFL students should focus on a single theme of ethnic culture at a time (over one or two weeks). The cultural themes chosen should depend on the students' interests, degree of familiarity, difficulty level and complexity and students' proficiency level in English. The students can search for articles, pictures, podcasts or videos related to the cultural

theme under study on their own. Then post a summary, a picture or video related to the theme on the timeline. They should not copy and paste from the internet or any other source. They should not listen to a podcast, or watch a video passively without having to perform a task specified by the instructor. They should summarize what they read in their own words, state their opinions, compare and contrast different sub-cultures in relation to the cultural theme under study.

The students should be required to respond to, engage, participate, and be actively involved in the discussion and comments. The students discuss posts, answers to questions, summarize or retell content posted on the timeline orally in class.

To motivate students to post cultural information, photos, videos, and podcasts, each can keep a log of her/his contributions. The instructor can give extra credit and include the Facebook timeline content on tests.

During all instructional phases, the instructor serves as a facilitator. The students should not be left to work on their own and should not post any material or irrelevant information on the timeline that has nothing to do with the cultural theme. The instructor should support inquiries while interacting with the students and should encourage them to fully participate in learning. His/her guidance is crucial in facilitating use of Facebook to improve

students’ English language skills, background and vocabulary knowledge. S(he) encourages and models the skills and cultural themes that the students need to acquire or practice.

Conclusion

Introducing EFL students to different elements of ethnic culture, similarities and differences between the ethnic cultures of the country and an ethnic culture that exists in several regions is an indispensable part of second/foreign language teaching and learning. L2 instructors can exploit latest technologies and social networks in helping student develop their second language listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary skills together with their ethnic cultural competence.

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