A Study on the English Teaching Model in the Facebook Environment[*]

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Abstract—The social network of Facebook has its own advantages, such as openness, interactivity and timeliness, which provide an opportunity for the reform of English teaching model. According to the theory of constructivism, an English teaching model was constructed in the Facebook environment, including context, collaboration, conversation and meaning construction. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, it is found that the teaching model is effective in promoting learners' comprehensive language application ability and enhancing their subjectivity and enthusiasm in English learning.

Index Terms—the Facebook environment, English teaching, teaching model, construction

I. INTRODUCTION

Facebook has played more and more important roles in social interaction and become the world's largest and busiest social networking site (Alice, 2009). Facebook is successfully used in many fields abroad. For example, Facebook has been put into use in library service by some well-known libraries, such as Boston University, New York Public University, and Columbus Library. Some scholars use Facebook as an online educational platform and some learners take full advantages of Facebook to achieve autonomous learning, collaborative learning and interactive learning. Nowadays more and more people in China begin to use Facebook to learn English because it can provide opportunities for English learners to communicate in real contexts. Therefore, Facebook has been a platform for English learning. Some scholars have done some research on the microblog (Wan, Wang & Zou, 2012). However, seldom are focused on the construction of teaching models in Facebook environments to foster English learners' comprehensive language application ability in China.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FACEBOOK ENVIRONMENTS

Compared with other social networking site, Facebook has its unique and powerful functions which make it convenient for users to communicate with each other and learn from each other. Firstly, it is free for users to register in Facebook without any extra restrictions. Any users with their effective e-mail accounts can register in Facebook and become the Facebook users. Secondly, message boards can be used for leaving messages within friends which can be seen by others and personal messages are only kept between communicators. Thirdly, Facebook supports forums. Users can participate in the established groups to have a discussion or propose a topic to initiate discussions. Users can update their states of mind, publish their logs, and upload the documents, video, audio, images, animation and so on so that the resources can be shared with each other. Facebook can also be used for questionnaire surveys. Fourthly, various software systems provided by a third party can be installed in the Facebook account, such as LibGuides, Booth Library Ask, and Slide Share. Facebook can also be linked with many other interfaces of internet so that users have more room to make friends and can access plenty of resources on the internet.

Facebook has become more and more popular in education due to its power on learning. For one thing, Facebook is free from the restriction of time and space so that learners can log in Facebook and visit the internet resources with their electronic devices instead of the heavy paper books. For another, Facebook, as a learning tool, makes it probable to integrate learning into learners' daily life, and learners can obtain learning resources according to their own learning needs. Furthermore, learners can communicate and discuss with peers synchronously or asynchronously. Facebook is beyond the classroom. There are varieties of resources on the internet for learners to expand their extra-curricular knowledge. Besides, with large numbers of users in Facebook, learners can communicate with all walks of life to promote their culture literacy. Soft wares, such as Sliceshare and iRead make resource sharing come true.

Facebook can facilitate teacher to prepare for the lessons as well. Teachers can build their discussion areas so that they can share ideas and views with each other, and deal with teaching problems with collective intelligence. They can make a survey on the learners' attitudes towards the teaching so that they could adapt their teaching to learners' needs.

Facebook, as teaching platform, can be used by teachers to enrich course content by creating proper course interfaces. Teachers can update their internet logs, express their ideas and thoughts to give learners guidance. They can upload

texts, images, video and course wares, and other learning resources so that learners can share the resources with them. Teachers can also create forums to solve learners' learning problems. Learners can propose their learning problems and teachers responds to them. As for the teaching resources, learners can make some comments as well.

Facebook, as intelligent learning tools, brings it into reality for learners to log on at any time with their mobile phones and computers to achieve autonomous learning. Learners can also set up their own discussion groups and ask the peers with the common interests or learning problems to join in. In this way, learners can talk freely, help each other and cooperate with each other. In addition, learners enlarge their learning content through communication with many celebrities and learners from other universities. And learners can also join in online discussions and take part in community activities, such as reading activity, writing reading activity, listening reading activity, etc.

III. The Comparison between the Traditional Teaching Model and the Teaching Model in the Facebook Environment

Compared with the traditional English classroom teaching and learning environment, Facebook, as a social network, has the advantages of openness, interactivity and timeliness which mean that the Facebook social network is open to all, and its rich and authentic English language resources are accessible to learners and it has the instant messaging function so that English learners in China can communicate with the native English speakers.

As for the interactivity, two functions are involved which are community group function and language communication function. Based on the two functions, learners can set up discussion groups and share information with one another. The Facebook environment helps the improvement of learners' communicative competence and the change of teacher-dominated classroom. According to the theory of constructivism, teachers are not only organizers and guiders, but also promoters and facilitators. It is the learners that process information. Meaning construction is achieved by collaboration and helped by teachers and peers. Context, collaboration, conversation and meaning construction are the four essences of Facebook environments which are in accordance with the theory of constructivism, which is beyond the traditional classroom environment.

In traditional teaching models, teachers and learners use the same textbooks and the learning content is mainly on the language knowledge, context construction neglected, which is not beneficial for learners' meaning construction. In the Facebook environment, teachers can use the authentic English social and culture background to create contexts to adapt to learners' learning goals. With regards to collaboration, the traditional English classroom teaching is lack of authentic language environment, and the collaboration between teachers, learners and materials is superficial so that the collaborative learning model cannot be put into use thoroughly. While in the Facebook environment, there are varieties of learning resources and interactive methods, making the interaction and collaboration between teachers and learners possible. Learners screen and analyze the corpora, and thus put forward to hypothesis, make an assessment of learning effects, and ultimately achieve the goal of meaning construction (Zhang, 2015). Conversation is a crucial way and means to learners' meaning construction. In the traditional English teaching, group activities, due to the big class and large numbers of students, are difficult to carry out. However, in the Facebook environment, the interactive function can be used to set up study groups so that tasks can be assigned, teaching goals accomplished, and each learner's achievement shared through conversations and collaboration. In terms of meaning construction, learners learning English individually by rote learning in the traditional English classroom teaching, which prevents learners from meaning construction. Nevertheless in the Facebook environment, various learning materials and approaches can help learners construct knowledge meaning according to their own cognitive schema and experience to find out the nature of language and rules of language learning. Therefore, the Facebook social network is an important platform for English learning. English teachers can make full use of the advantages of the Facebook environment to promote learners' English learning and their cognitive competence.

IV. Research Design

This study aims to employ the Facebook social network to foster learners' comprehensive language application ability, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities, communication competence and critical thinking ability.

A. Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to clarify the effectiveness of the English teaching model in the Facebook environment. The research questions are as follows:
(1) Is the English teaching model in the Facebook environment effective in fostering learners' comprehensive language application ability?
(2) What are learners' attitudes towards the English teaching model in the Facebook environment?

B. The Participants

This study was carried out in a comprehensive university in China. Two English major classes were participated in the study. One was experimental class and the other was control class. There were 41 students in the experimental class and 40 students in the control class. According to the result of pre-test, there was no significant difference between the

experimental class and the control class. The English teaching model in the Facebook environment was used in the experimental class and the traditional English teaching model in the control class.

The English teaching model in the Facebook environment was constructed according to the theory of constructivism. Qualitative and quantitative data were used to test the effectiveness of the teaching model.

C. Data Collection

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to clarify the effectiveness of the experiment. Before and after the experiment, comprehensive language application ability was examined by questionnaires, and interview as well as observation was made in the process of the experiment.

D. Research Procedure

The experiment was carried out in the academic year 2015-2016. There were three steps in the experiment which were setting tasks, giving guidance and making assessments. Five types of tasks were related in the experiment, including listening and speaking communication, such as voice communication, video communication, appreciation of masterpieces, hot forum; reading communication, such as narration reading, argumentation reading, exposition reading; writing communication, such as narration writing, argumentation writing, exposition writing; daily communication; and cultural communication, like customs, religious belief, values and orientations, etc. During the process of experiment, the experimental class was given proper guidance and feedback. Learners' learning process were known to the teacher by observation and assessment. After the experiment, questionnaires and interview were employed to test the effectiveness of the teaching model in the Facebook environment.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the end of the experiment, the questionnaire survey was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the experiment. The questionnaire recovery rate is 100%. Interview was also made to learn about the learners' attitudes towards the teaching model in the Facebook environment.

A. Students' Comprehensive Language Application Ability

The results showed that the experimental class made greater progress in the aspects of listening and speaking, daily communication, cultural communication and critical thinking. However, there were no significant differences between the two classes in reading and writing (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE EXPERIMENTAL CLASS AND THE CONTROL CLASS

Items	Experimental Class (%)			Control Class (%)		
	Apparent	not apparent	no change	Apparent	not apparent	no change
Listening and speaking	94	5	1	74	20	6
Reading	86	8	6	82	11	7
Writing	87	11	2	79	16	5
Daily communication	93	7	0	75	5	20
Cultural communication	90	10	0	74	5	21
Critical thinking	83	16	1	60	14	26

There may be several reasons for the results. Firstly, the Facebook environment provides synchronous communication opportunities, real language environment and authentic resources for the English learners. This enviroment, integrating texts, voices, images, animation and interaction, is fundamental for learners to comprehend and take in the English language. As a result, learners' interest, enthusiasm and motivation are activated and their comprenhensive language competence is enhanced. Secondly, listening and speaking activities, daily communication and cultral exchanges are quite approaprite for the learners to cooperate with each other and help each other. Online collaboration tools, such as discussion board forum, chat room are of great help for learners' group work. Their awareness of cooperation and particaipation have been improved, which indicates the experiment has a positive impact on their learning initiatives. Besides, based on the teamwork, learners communicate with each other so that they learn to take the matters into consideration from different perspectives and learn about different opinions on the same issue. Therefore, their critial thinking is improved. Thirdly, due to learners' individual diffences, they have different learning styles. Some are so sensitive to the multimodal teaching that they benefit a lot from the experiment. However some may not be accustomed to the teaching model in the Facebook environment. Therefore, they make less progress. Furthermore, learners have different cognitive planes and different affective features, and their motivations of learning English are so different that what they obtained in the experiment are greatly different.

B. Learners' Attitudes towards the Teaching Model in the Facebook Environment

The qualitative data were also collected to learn about the learners' attitudes towards the teaching model in the Facebook environment, a semi-constructed interview were made to learn about the learner' attitudes towards the teaching model in the Facebook environment. The interview was mainly about what they thought of the effectiveness of interaction between teachers and learners, and learners and learners, learners and learning materials, and of the

effectiveness of the teaching model in the Facebook environment and their views on the teaching environment. Ten students in the experimental class were chosen as the subjects in the interview.

According to the result of the interview, most of the students agreed that the teaching model in the Facebook environment enhanced their awareness of participation and collaboration and they could take an active part in the activities, which were quite beneficial for them to learn about different opinions on the learning tasks and achieve meaning construction. They said contexts were fundamental for them to communicate with each other. There were some comments from the learners:

I like the discussion area, through which I can talk with my friends freely and I can communicate with teachers without any anxiety. This is a new experience. I like it. (L1)

I like to look through the Facebook networking site in my spare time. I can make full use of my spare time in learning English and communicate with English. (L5)

I like to discuss with others and learn about their opinions on the same issue. By this means, I have learned how to analyze the problems in different aspects. (L8)

I can get help from many other people, such as teachers, peers, many native speakers and other friends. My horizon has been broadened. (L9)

By making friends with different cultures and different backgrounds, I have been fully aware of the importance of culture in communication. I have learned a lot of different traditional cultures and customs. (L10)

They preferred the teaching model in the Facebook environment to the traditional teaching model. They could tell the differences of the two different teaching models in a critical way. Some learners stated as the follows:

I would like to learn English in the Facebook environment. It is quite different from the traditional classroom environment. Based on the Facebook environment, I can get feedback from all kinds of people instantly at all places. (L2)

I take more active in the activities, such as discussing with others, exchanging opinions with others. Because the teaching model in the Facebook environment provides us more chances to communicate. In traditional English classroom teaching, we have fewer chances to have discussions or express our opinions owing to the limited classroom time. (L4)

I think my English ability has been improved. I can communicate with others freely about the daily life. And I can analyze reading material more deeply. (L5)

By sharing information and resources with others, I have enlarged my knowledge. I like sharing my resources with others, which brings me confidence and pride. (L7)

I hope we can continue to use the teaching model in the Facebook environment. What we can learn is more than before. I can take overall views into consideration when I am asked to talk about something. (L8)

In the group activities, everybody was engaged in them. If anyone escaped from the activities, it was a great shame. By sharing and commenting, we all benefited from the teamwork. (L10)

The teaching model in the Facebook environment makes me pay more and more attention to my learning process. I can realize my progress step by step, which activates me to study harder and further. (L10)

According to the Suwannatthachote's study (2012), there were significant correlations between the sharing events and group engagement, between commenting and group engagement. In this sense, we can safely say that the learners' critical thinking in the experimental class is improved. This is in perfect accordance with the results of the observation.

There are three possible reasons for the learners' responses to the teaching model in the Facebook environment. One is that the environment of the teaching model can make learners make full use of their senses, which can improve their learning efficiency. Another is that the carefully chosen tasks are suitable for the learners' cognitive levels and their individual needs, which can enhance their confidence and motivate their enthusiasm. Kuh (2009) put great emphasis on two major aspects of learners' engagement. One is academic engagement and the other is out-of-class engagement in relevant education activities. Involvement in co-curriculum activities and interaction with teachers and peers are important factors that are related to the learners' engagement (Junco, 2012). This engagement requires learners to devote their physical and psychological energy to the related tasks which are more likely to bring learners to obtain their desired outcome. The third is that information exchanges and sharing are basic methods for the learners to learn English. The teaching model in the Facebook environment offered learners chances of experiencing, exchanging and sharing information with each other (Clark, Lee. & Boyer, 2008). Learning is achieved by doing. There is no wonder that learners are in favor of the teaching model in the Facebook environment.

Owing to the different learning styles and individual differences, some learners are not used to the teaching model in the Facebook environment. Some like to listen to the teachers' explanation attentively and take notes in the classroom. Others like the face-to-face communication with their teachers and classmates which gives them feeling of safety and intimacy.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study by Lampe et al. (2011) indicated that students perceived motivation for communicating with others when using Facebook and were likely to use Facebook for discussion of class assignments. English, as an international language, is not only a communicative tool. The ultimate purpose of English learners in China is to improve their

comprehensive language application ability, including language abilities, their communicative competence, and critical thinking ability as well as the related knowledge. Learning how to cooperate with each other and how to share their opinions and views with each other are also the basic ability for them to acquire in the informational era. Taking full advantages of the Facebook environment to create a new teaching model so that learners can take in and internalize the various abilities and knowledge, which contributes to learners' incorporating their language learning into the discipline knowledge learning, conforming to the natural law of language acquisition (Doruer, Eyyam & Menevi, 2011). During this learning process, learners grasp language and cultures. After one academic year's experiment, the students in the experiment class showed their positive attitudes towards teaching model in the Facebook environment and their comprehensive language application ability was enhanced. Based on the experiment, the following conclusion can be drawn:

Firstly, compared with the traditional teaching model, the teaching model in the Facebook environment can improve learners' comprehensive language application ability. Secondly, the teaching model in the Facebook environment can stimulate learners' motivation, enthusiasm and confidence. Thirdly, the teaching model in the Facebook environment can promote and develop learners' awareness of participation and cooperation.

Owing to the objective conditions, the range of the participants is inadequate and the subjects are lack of variety. Future studies should take samplings and scopes into considerations. While designing teaching model in Facebook environments, teachers should take measures to elaborate the arrangement of the group activities, such as the division of the groups, time, frequency and learners' individuality. Tasks that contain academic tasks and out-of-class education activities should be more carefully chosen and set according to learners' cognitive levels, learning needs and academic requirements so that multidimensional assessment on learners' language competence, learning strategy, participation, cooperation, learning attitudes can be accessible (Sheldon, 2009). Finally, the relationships among learners' interaction, engagement and achievements should be deeply explored guided by dynamic system theory to improve the effectiveness of teaching models in Facebook environments. It is believed that with the further study and practice, teaching models in social networking environments will be a breakthrough in the reform of college English teaching.

Facebook brings the theory of constructivism into educational practice. The employment of Facebook breaks through the limitation of time and space, making it possible for learners to fulfill autonomous learning, collaborative learning and interactive learning. Learners might use different functions to enlarge their knowledge, exquisite the English language and improve their culture literacy. Furthermore, learners can make friends with many great minds so that they can be given guidance and solve their learning problems and make up for their disadvantages and weaknesses. Most importantly, Facebook can be used as a platform for teachers to carry out their online courses, through which teaching and learning resources can be shared, interaction and feedback between teachers and learners, and learners and learners can be strengthened. The Facebook social networking environment is to bring about the revolutionary change and its advantages of immediacy, authenticity, efficiency, and interactivity display the bright future for English teaching reform in China. The traditional classroom teaching model also has its uniqueness, for example, it can make learners receive systematic knowledge, and give learners a sense of intimacy and safety. Judgement and assessment of information and big data, and how to deal with different values of different peoples appropriately are also great challenges for English learners. English teaching models in Facebook environments transform the way in which learners learn, communicate and think. With the development of technology and the progress of English teaching, it is predicted that the integration and interaction of traditional face-to face teaching models and teaching models in Facebook environments bring English teaching and learning forward in the near future.

<div align="center">REFERENCES</div>

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