Motivating low proficiency EFL literature students via social media

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines an innovative use of social media for the instruction of EFL literature. The instructional design included videos from an American teacher providing cultural perspective on literature texts and social media interaction to discuss the lessons and construct knowledge. Data included content analysis of the students’ social media comments and replies, exit interviews, and the perceptions of the authors as teacher/participants. Students embraced the instructional design and appreciated having the perspectives of two teachers, but cultural influences sometimes affected their willingness to disagree with other students. Pedagogical implications are provided.

Key words: CMC, CALL, team-teaching, NET-LET, EFL, social network, literature.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st Century, English is the global language. Wherever two people meet who do not speak the same mother tongue, chances are that English will be the common ground for communication between them (Dörnyei, 2005). But the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) occurs in many different contexts, and with many different levels of success. In Taiwan, the site of this case study, students begin learning English no later than the third grade of elementary school. After high school, students who continue their education go to either technical or academic universities, where English proficiency is a requirement to graduate.

It is considered vital in Taiwan for high school graduates to continue to the university level, and it is Taiwan’s policy to make higher education as common as possible. Many academic and technical universities have been founded around Taiwan for this purpose, but given the preference for the more prestigious academically focused institutions, technical universities which rank lower can often only recruit students with low proficiency. Technical university graduates are less likely to use English extensively in their professional careers after graduation (Chen, 2003). EFL instruction for these low proficiency university students is, therefore, a vital issue in the Taiwanese higher education system.

One of the most challenging areas of EFL learning for students is typically literature (Carless and Walker, 2006). Although reading can stimulate understanding of technical elements, like vocabulary and grammar, it can also improve cultural understanding and critical thinking (Beckett, 2001). In countries where there is no surrounding population of English speakers, however, EFL literature students often struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and with cultural references that are unfamiliar to them. Therefore, the more natural and painless English learning can be made, the more likely students are to engage themselves and actually acquire advanced skills (Marek and Wu, 2011). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, can provide an environment that students find to be comfortable and engaging, but academic research into using social media for EFL instruction has infrequently addressed its use for learning English literature.

The authors are a Taiwanese EFL faculty member teaching English literature at a technical university in central Taiwan, and an American communications faculty member at a public liberal arts college in the Midwestern...
United States. Over several semesters they have collaborated in an instructional methodology that uses social media videos and discussion forums to assist low proficiency EFL students understand short stories in their English Literature textbooks (Wu et al., 2009a; Wu et al., 2009b; Marek and Wu, 2011; Wu and Marek, 2014).

There are many factors making it difficult to investigate this methodology as a true controlled experimental study. The authors believe, however, that examining the dynamics of student learning as a case study can reveal the potentials and best practices for such an instructional design. The following inquiry questions guided this case study:

1. What are the challenges faced by low-proficiency students in Taiwan in English Literature classes?
2. Can an instructional design using social media to promote active learning succeed in an EFL literature class?
3. What is the student reaction to such an instructional design?
4. What is the teacher reaction to using such an instructional design?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to review this case, it is necessary to explore the conceptual framework employed by the authors. This review includes both the key concepts employed in the development of the instructional methodology, and concepts applied in analyzing and interpreting data.

Profile of low proficiency EFL learners

The setting of this case study is Taiwan, where most citizens have little need to use English on a daily basis, or maybe only a few words of English for Specific Purposes needed to interact on a limited basis with international visitors (Chen, 2003). Learning often happens without any immediate opportunity to use English for actual communicative functions outside the scope of the classroom and interaction with the English teacher and classmates (Lan, 2005). A 2005 survey by the Wall Street Journal, surveyed 16,000 working people in seven Asian countries and found that students in Taiwan had the lowest level of confidence of all the countries in their own ability to use and understand English, behind Mainland China, Japan, Thailand, and South Korea (Wall Street Institute, 2005).

Students in Taiwan are often not highly engaged in their English learning. Many conceptualize that they are studying only to pass a course or to graduate and most have little opportunity to communicate in English outside the classroom, even though such communication opportunities have been shown to increase motivation and confidence (Chen, 2012). This has been a long-term trend. Reynolds et al. (1993), Lescano (1995), and Yang (1996) all found that the low proficiency and weak EFL motivation in Taiwan is the result of a lack of a wider engagement with an English-speaking community, combined with instructional techniques that promote passive learning and decrease motivation (Kao, 2011; Yu, 2011).

Motivation theory

In the same way that ideas about the goal of EFL have changed from that of speaking to native speakers to a goal of being able to communicate across many cultures, perspectives about motivation have changed considerably in recent years. Many studies have shown that motivation, confidence, and ability interact with each other and are directly related (Butler and Lumpe, 2008; Phillips and Lindsay, 2006) affirming Labrie and Clément (1986), who said, “A high frequency of positive contacts will lead to greater self-confidence than a low frequency of negative contacts… The resulting self-confidence is the immediate determinate of motivation to learn and use the second language” (p. 270). All three of these learning variables are influenced by the cumulative experiences of the EFL student, inside and outside the classroom, that is, they each strengthen or weaken as a result of positive and negative experiences when using English (Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009).

It has long been accepted that students are best motivated when their goal is to achieve satisfaction and enjoyment (Gardner, 2001; Wang, 2008). Dörnyei (2005) proposed a more complex model of beneficial motivation, driven by how the student imagines an idealized future English-speaking self. This vision of a future self is based in part on a desire to participate in international society and in part on actual encounters with other English speakers. Learners who have this kind of strong vision tend to be more motivated than students who have no such vision.

Jenkins (2000) also noted the changing goals in EFL learning, which she said have led to the use of English as a “lingua franca” to communicate with other non-native speakers, that is, English as an International Language (EIL). She observed that EFL teachers and programs have often not adjusted to this changing paradigm and continue to assume native speaker interaction. As a result, there has often been little dialog between faculty and students about the integrative reasons to study English and engage in the broader culture of the world (Wu and Bright, 2006).

Benefits of student centered active learning

Many researchers have found that passive learning is a primary cause of lower proficiency among technically oriented Taiwanese students (Lescano, 1995; Reynolds and Wang, 1993; Yang, 1996). Active learning, which
deemphasizes lecture/memorization in favor of “hands on” activities that foster engagement, is based on the social constructivist philosophy in which student collaboration and student/teacher interaction leads learners to evolve their own knowledge foundations, and which depends on the building of positive relationships and interaction among students and between students and instructors (Brandon and All, 2010). In this way, a learning community is formed that helps members construct new knowledge that is well-connected to other knowledge held by the students. There are demonstrated benefits from rooting this active learning in authentic experiences related to the target language (Fuji and Mackey, 2009; Gilmore, 2007). Knowledge based on active learning is retained after the test or class is complete, whereas knowledge stemming from lecture/memorization methodologies is often not retained.

Literature as part of EFL learning

Many studies have shown that in young children learning English as a primary language, reading is an independent variable affecting vocabulary, writing proficiency, spelling, and conversational ability (Lerkkanen et al., 2004; Miller and Gildea, 1987; Nippold, 1999; Sinatra, 2008). The study of literature as a means of helping EFL learners understand the nuances and subtleties of English language and culture within the scope of linguistic learning is a globally recognized truth in almost every language institute (Hall, 2005). Literature often greatly challenges native-speaking students, not to mention low proficiency students reading literature in a foreign language in which they are far below the mastery level (Picken, 2005). Such low proficiency students regard English literature as charged with abstruse meanings grounded in obscure Western culture. Many works of literature dating back to previous centuries seem totally irrelevant to the contemporary experiences of low proficiency learners. Despite growing exposure to Western culture, many EFL students still express dismay over cultural figures of speech, literary tropes, and themes shrouded in elevated literary language, even though understanding these cultural references is necessary for anything other than basic language comprehension (Inoue, 2007). In other words, most non-native English speaking students fear literature at a time when there is a growing recognition among EFL instructors that cultural understanding is an important part of language learning and that it is not possible to separate culture and language (Liao, 2004; Nault, 2006; Peterson and Coltrance, 2003; Zaid, 1999).

In spite of concern that literature can be difficult to understand, EFL students have generally been shown to appreciate access to authentic materials in language learning (Son, 2007). They see authentic materials as true representations of the L2 culture. O’Donnell (2009) noted that authentic materials are often too difficult for students with low proficiency. O’Donnell found that use of authentic texts that have been created or modified to support student pedagogical needs allows better understanding by L2 readers. The question for literature teachers, therefore, is how to balance authentic materials with the need to match the ability level of the students to challenge them, but not have them be perceived as difficult to the point of intimidation. This is particularly true when the EFL students are of relatively low English proficiency.

Technology as part of EFL learning

Technology-infused EFL instruction is much in demand among students and many researchers have explored the use of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) for EFL instruction (Guthrie and Richardson, 1995; Liou, 1997; Van Aacken, 1999; Wiebe and Kabata, 2010). Twenty-first century students are already common users of CMC technologies for their personal and social interaction with friends and family. As a result, they quickly grasp the advantages of using similar technology for classroom-related interaction. Research is clear that such online CMC tools can improve the listening and speaking skills of EFL learners (Terrell, 2011), but the CMC literature rarely addresses real communication between people of different cultural groups (Wang and Chang, 2011). In addition, many teachers and academic programs are often nowhere near as advanced as their students in use of technology.

Sharma and Barrett (2007) proposed a “blended learning” approach not only as an innovative pedagogical method but as a form of balance and reciprocity between technologies and human resources. Blended learning stresses the combination of two alternative techniques -- face-to-face classroom instruction and an appropriate use of technology. In this way, they said, students can benefit from two diverse modes of teachings, and these two types of instruction can complement each other to produce better learning achievement.

Blended learning via social media

Blended learning employing technology sometimes takes the form of a Local English Teacher (LET) working in partnership with a Native English Teacher (NET) who interacts with students via technology (Carless and Walker, 2006). LETs who are not native speakers must painstakingly prepare themselves to address the cultural allusions in the texts which NETs grasp intuitively (Tsou, 2005) allowing them to serve as cultural informants.

It is a natural step to extend such an instructional framework to the classroom use of social media. In such a context, the native English speaker could be anywhere in
the world and use synchronous or asynchronous social media to interact with students. Students have been shown to be open to this kind of use of social media (Marek and Wu, 2012).

**Systems orientation for case study analysis**

Traditional EFL/CALL research has focused on identifying differences that result from the use or non-use of a particular instructional methodology or technology. Systems analysis, however, represents an alternative approach that is not experimental in nature. de Rosnay (2011) advocated the viewpoint that the systems approach is separate from, and complimentary to, the analytical/experimental model of analysis. Describing a complex form of organization therefore means connecting the various elements or elementary functions operating within the overall environment, including those that emerge on their own, not as a result of the formal instructional design or intent (Colpaert, 2010, 2012; Dörnyei, 2012). The case study format, therefore, is appropriate for this study because of the required description of disparate and complex factors influencing an instructional design.

**RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

**Case study design**

Case studies have been widely used to analyze diverse disciplines. It is therefore impossible to define a universal format, design, and methodology for conducting a case study. Yin (1993), however, stressed the importance of articulating the theoretical perspective of those performing the study and suggested five basic components of a case study research design:

1. A study’s questions.
2. A study’s propositions (if any).
3. A study’s units of analysis
4. The logic linking of the data to the propositions.
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings.

**Propositions**

The conceptual framework of this study, combined with the experience of the authors over several academic years, lead to the following propositions or postulates as the basis for data collection and analysis:

1. Learning occurs best using the social constructivist philosophy, meaning that instructors should use student-centered active learning and downplay traditional lecture/memorization methodologies.
2. Success, therefore, can be measured, in part, by the extent to which students engage in well-formed active learning activities presented by the teacher.
3. The growing availability of "smart phone" mobile computing devices can provide rich content that is available anywhere the students go and at any time, which should increase acceptance by students of this form of instructional design.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Instructional design**

The LET and NET in this case study taught three short stories from Jean McConchie's *20th Century American Short Stories, Vol. 1*, “Love” by Jesse Stuart, “A Blizzard Under Blue Sky” by Pam Houston, and “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemmingway. In “Love” a father and son find a female snake near a farm field and the father orders a dog to kill the snake. Later they see a male snake coiled against its dead mate and the father has second thoughts. In “A Blizzard Under Blue Sky” a woman who is experiencing depression goes winter camping with her dog and feels better as a result. In “Hills Like White Elephants” a woman has become pregnant and her boyfriend tries to convince her to have an abortion, but the meaning of the dialog is veiled deliberately.

For each lesson, the NET prepared a short video explaining cultural references in the stories, based on advice from the LET, but did not express opinions about the overall meaning of the story. The students first read the story, section by section, and discussed it in class, as they would have in a conventional literature class. Then they viewed the American professor’s video about the story, typically 5-10 min in length, followed by social media discussion of the story as well as of the video explanation of cultural references. For the first lesson, students were given specific questions to address. In the second and third lessons, they were assigned to make more open-ended comments. They were also instructed to reply to each other.

Over 100 students participated, in two sections of the same class. The students in both sections were considered to have relatively low English proficiency, based on their scores on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) tests. No students in the class had reached the 750 point level, defined as high proficiency. Twenty-three were at 550 or above, meaning that less than a quarter had reached the intermediate level of TOEIC. The remaining students were lower, indicative of very low proficiency, or had not yet attempted the TOEIC.

Class A chose to use Facebook for their social media interactions. Class B chose to use the Asian social media site wretch.cc. The NET placed the videos on both sites and the
LET monitored the parallel discussion of the two classes. In this way, the students were only interacting within their own classes. The NET did not interact extensively with the students during their online discussion phase, in order to not express opinions that might bias the conclusions they reached.

Multi-modal data sources and analysis protocols
Case studies benefit from multiple sources of data in order to provide multiple perspectives. Because the goal of case study analysis is not numerical or statistical evaluation but rather a richness of understanding of the case, the authors used three sources of data: content analysis of the social media discussion of the students, exit interviews conducted with students at the conclusion of the study, and the researcher’s own experiences as participant-observers.

Content analysis
First and foremost, the authors have employed qualitative content analysis, seeking themes, recurring ideas, and observations drawn from the actual social media discussion of the students about the stories and videos in their lessons. Students were assigned numbers, so that neither their Chinese nor English names would play a role in the analysis and the social media comments and replies were edited to replace actual names with the numbers. The researchers read the student comments repeatedly and studied them for concepts and issues that recurred repeatedly, grouping them into themes which addressed the research questions and propositions of the case study.

Exit interviews
At the conclusion of the study, six students were selected for voluntary semi-structured qualitative interviews, performed by the Taiwanese researcher in Mandarin, the native language of the students. The protocol for the interviews was developed based on a review of the literature and on the experiences of the instructors in the current study as well as previous research. The questions addressed the instructional design of the study; motivation, attitudes, and level of participation of the students; and the practical considerations of how the study went. In keeping with the semi-structured interview technique (AECT, 2001) the interviewer was free to deviate from the protocol to explore student comments in more detail. Students were assigned pseudonyms that deliberately were different from the students numbers used in the analysis of the Facebook posts.

Researcher reflective analysis
In addition, the researchers took a step back from their data analysis and reflected on their own experiences as LET and NET in this semester. They, in effect, interviewed each other as participant-observers, using semi-structured interviews addressing questions including the biggest perceived benefits to the students in the study, the biggest successes, the biggest difficulties, and things that should be done differently when the instructional design is used in the future.

RESULTS
Content analysis of social media dialog
The analysis of the students’ comments and replies in each literature lesson found three themes, beyond statements reflecting simple comprehension of the text, 1) Reflections on the video lessons, 2) Reflections on ethics related to the stories, 3) Reflections on the art of writing. Each theme is discussed in detail in this section. It should be recalled that the students in these classes were considered to be of low proficiency. Grammar and spelling have not been corrected, except where indicated, in order to provide a richer understanding of the experiences of the students.

Reflections on the video lessons
Many of the student comments were directly about explanations and visuals provided in the video lessons about the stories. Student 45 said:

After seeing [the American teacher’s] video, a blizzard under blue sky, I thought I got more inspiration of the story. The film was very attractive me. I have never seen snow before because Taiwan’s weather does not snow so far that the temperature never goes down 35 degrees below zero Celsius, but I like cold weather. I also want to try Kool-Aid drink because I love drinking sweet. I like to contact with nature. It is a good way to make you happy when you are depressed.

Students #3 said:

After seeing the video, I saw many different cultures of America, such as the snow cave that can sleep in. I think that is impossible to happen in Taiwan. The mountain is so beautiful that I really want to go camping, and I should prepare a lot of clothes to let me get warmer. When I saw the picture in the video, it made me feel so cold at once. Nowadays, the weather in Taiwan is very cold, but it cannot be compared with America.
In the following exchange, the students lapsed into typical social media “chat” mode of quick comments and replies about their video lessons:

Original post from Student #42: Woo, there are many interesting story in [the American teacher’s] video. This video told me a lot of excited story. Especially the super woman, I like very much. And I laughed very loud~~~ Thank you~~~

Reply from Student #16: I agree with your idea!!!! I like wonder woman too hahahaha. you say wonder woman right?

Reply from Student #2: wow girl you are so crazy about this video.

Reply from Student #3: hahahahaha you are so happy I think you watch [the American teacher's] video very hard so do I.

Reply from Student #13: yes, this video is great and let us to know more about this story. I like this, too.^^

Student comments and replies related to this theme, therefore, demonstrated their acceptance and enjoyment of the video lessons about their English language literature texts.

Reflections on ethics related to the stories

The story “Hills Like White Elephants” generated a lengthy ethical discussion about the circumstances in the story, a woman who has found that she is pregnant and her boyfriend’s desire for her to get an abortion. The students did not focus on the legality or ethics of abortion, even though abortion is illegal in Taiwan, but rather on the lifestyles and attitudes of the characters, whether responsible or irresponsible. Here are comments about “Hills Like White Elephants”:

Student #46: I think that is a big problem. When the girl has a baby, but the man doesn't want the baby. Then the man want the girl to do operation. But it is easy for that the man what he say. Because he doesn't need to do operation. And it is important when the girl has baby. Because that is about a new life. So I think that is why she doesn't want to do operation. Finally, I think this problem have to think twice to decide.

Student #48: I think that boy has bad behavior because he tells the girl to abortion the baby. That boy is a irresponsible person. The girl uses “white elephants” to mean her belly that will become bigger. I like this story image because it is very meaningful.

There were few comments defending the position of the man in the story. Still, the students clearly reflected on the story and analyzed it in detail.

Reflections on the art of writing

The students also made some comments about the art and technique of the writer. Concerning “Hills Like White Elephants,” student #68 said this about Ernest Hemmingway’s writing:

This story concealed in fog. You seemed to see a part of the story; the other thing is out of your ken. If you don’t observe it very carefully, you don’t know what it is. Author doesn’t lay his fingers on story’s core clearly and definitely. But the story’s content described many scenes and much character’s action. When you regard theirs times, their conversation and observe the character’s action and scenes had changed, you will find out the story’s connotation. From this story, I learn an inspiration --- I think the art of writing is so interesting.

Student #6 looked beyond the details of the story to consider the way Jesse Stuart used more than one representation of love in his story to make his point.

I think it is difficult to judge whose behavior is wrong or right in this story. Every action they take in this story does express the emotions to the mates that they love. Love does not only represent the feeling between males and females. I think the “love” in this story is representing the feeling of care for someone. I admire for the author, because he uses a simple word “love” as a title, and he tells a story with love in different ways through the story.

Student #6, therefore delved into the literary theme of the study which is well beyond basic textual understanding. This analysis of the title is important to literary understanding, requiring logical thinking and analytical ability. In evaluating what the author intended to convey through the title, Student #6 was developing personal analytical thinking ability.

Exit interview theme analysis

Six students accepted invitations to participate in exit interviews. In order to ensure privacy, they were given the pseudonym designations Apple, Cherry, Grape, Guava, Orange, and Peach. Analysis showed that their answers were grouped into four categories – how they reacted to the instructional design of the study; their perceptions about their own motivation; and practical considerations
including how the assignments went, how they actually studied, and the outcomes they perceived.

**Instructional design**

The students appreciated the multimedia format of the class, using videos prepared by the American researcher to explain cultural references in the texts and the social media discussion. The student identified as Guava found benefit in having the perspectives of two teachers with different backgrounds.

In this course, I need the foreign teacher and the Chinese teacher. Both of them give us a lot of information. If I don’t understand the story, I can ask the teacher to use Chinese to explain. I like to watch the video because it is difficult. All of videos use English to explain. I think this way is more challenging for me, but other [students in the class] may not be sure. Most of them like having both the foreign teacher and the Chinese teacher because it is more helpful to understand the story.

The student identified as Guava made a similar comment:

In the class, we have a teacher to explain and a video to help us understand the story. After the school, if I forget the story I can watch the video again. Facebook is very convenient system. I like to watch the video then respond the message because it can impressed in my mind.

Apple also thought that synergy resulted from the LET-NET partnership.

The teachers’ views are different. We know that the different teachers are good at different things. They use different words to explain. [The LET teacher’s] explanation may be different from [the NET’s] explanation, but they are talking about the same things.

Students also appreciated the opportunity provided by the instructional design to watch the videos and interact via social media outside the classroom. The convenience was an important consideration to the students.

Apple: Facebook is pretty satisfactory, because it’s pretty convenient. When Facebook is convenient and immediate, that is better [than other instructional designs]. We can play the video once, and then go home and I can see it again.

Guava: Use this phone, you can review the [Facebook posts] and video everywhere. If books are heavy, you can bring the phone and sometimes review the information easily.

Peach: I like doing this homework at home because I will check the answer two times. The interviewees desired more opportunities for social media-based interaction. They cited a desire for more videos, so they could learn about more aspects of American culture, and more online interaction in a way that would strengthen their grammar and writing ability.

**Motivation**

The students found the instructional design to be more motivating. Several students expressed the opinion that traditional instructional designs, which do not use technology, are boring.

Apple: If we only see the words [in a textbook] without the teacher’s video and we have to read them by ourselves, that is boring.

Guava: If we only use the computer to teach, it is really boring. But we use the computer to watch the video and discuss the story, it is better than before. We can absorb more information quickly.

But while the students enjoyed the instructional design, some were not fully motivated to engage in dialog if they disagreed with other posts, as the result of cultural factors that cause students to avoid hurting the feelings of their peers.

Grape: I like to respond when the message is opposite to me because it is fun and exciting. On the contrary, sometimes the message is too similar too mine. I don’t like to reply to those answers. The advantage is we can take a look at each other’s messages and see the different ideas from other people. The disadvantage is using the computer to leave a message because I really worry about [people judging] my grammar. In fact, the conversation does not need correct grammar but we show our messages to everyone.

Two students expressed the desire for the instructional design to take the social media interaction even further.

Grape: It is only one-to-many [in the current study]. I want to one-to-one, because I want to ask about their culture, life, customs...

Guava: The foreign teacher upload a video about a social dance [the Texas Tw-Step], which let us understand quickly. I really want to introduce “the third young master” to the foreign teacher because I saw the movie last week.

Apple also desired a one-on-one experience to build her confidence.

Apple: I really worry about grammar, but many seniors say the when we talk to foreigners, we don’t need to care about grammar, you just talk directly.

**Practical considerations**

In their interviews, the students talked about the processes
they used during the study.

Guava: I always reply to the interesting messages and correct my mistakes. Sometimes, we don’t know what the meaning from the U.S.A, so we can search for the correct information and always prepare a draft before I upload the [Facebook posts]. I like to share the [Facebook posts] with each other because they can tell me where I have wrong grammar and words.

Cherry: Because I think Facebook is convenient, and maybe I’m familiar on it, there is also convenient. We will post everything in over there, and if others has any information that we will go to find, and that will be clearly; I think that is enough and it can’t too much. If we can reached the effect that is enough, that we have website which we can enter into.

On the other hand, sometimes the poor grammar used by other students affected the comprehensibility of the social media interaction.

Orange: Because you will not clearly to understand what she said, you will not know whether to endorse her ideas or not.

LET-NET participant observer reflections

As the final source of qualitative data for study, the researchers reflected on their own experiences as LET and NET during the study, interviewing each other as participant-observers, using the semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol included the biggest perceived benefits to the students in the study, the biggest successes, the biggest difficulties, and things that should be done differently when the instructional design is used in the future.

Biggest benefits to the students

It was clear to both the LET and the NET that the students in this story were very fond of using social media as communicative technology in learning English. They commented repeatedly on the speed, efficiency, and flexibility of social media as a learning tool. In addition to this feedback, received repeatedly from the students, the researchers found four principal benefits of the social media instructional design for the low proficiency students in the study, as follows:

1. Receiving different approaches to texts: Many students welcomed the two different approaches to texts that they received from their LET and their NET. They repeatedly commented that they found the two perspectives to be helpful and even inspiring.

2. Broadening cultural perspectives: The social media framework of the class allowed the native speaker to offer the precise cultural information needed by the students to understand their texts, both in the original videos and in the following interactive communication about the text.

3. Sharpening English skills: The online videos and related printed materials allowed the students to train their listening and reading skills. Some students said they downloaded the videos and listened repeatedly at home. Some spent time checking on extra information mentioned in the NET’s videos. In addition, the subsequent social media dialog about the text offered natural training in reading, writing, and communication that did not feel like learning.

4. Cultivating independent thinking: Even though the goal of the social media interaction was not deep critical thinking, the students still had to reflect over the meaning of the texts, and the NET’s videos in order to write their social media comments. This type of critical thinking about texts and cultural elements is valuable both for language learning and for the future professional use of English by the students when they graduate.

Biggest successes

The biggest successes of this study, as perceived by the teacher/researchers, parallel the perceived benefits to students. The different approaches offered by the LET and the NET made studying literature interesting and amiable to students, even though students are often intimidated by foreign literature. The social media framework made learning interesting for the students and also made teaching more stimulating than conventional classroom methodologies. The online interaction between the two teachers and the students was low cost, easy to implement, and led to an exchange of ideas that was richer than often found in the traditional classroom. The online interaction also offered another venue for teacher observation of student learning behavior outside the classroom, and strengthened the teacher-student relationship.

Biggest difficulties

The teachers worked hard to use language in the video presentations that was familiar to the typical student in the class and to explain the cultural elements in ways that the students could understand. In spite of this, the LET was sometimes still required to explain cultural implications in the native speaker’s presentations to students. In such cases, the local teacher had to explain the video presentation which, in turn, was explaining the literary text.
Particularly given that the English proficiency of the students was low, the variability in ability from student to student was also sometimes challenging. Throughout their use of social media, both in this study and in their personal use, the students did not use perfect grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, but rather had the goal of communicating their basic meaning. In their online comments, students sometimes wrote with poor grammar and/or short sentences that did not display deep thought, resulting in little feedback. The thinking of most of the students was relatively shallow and centered narrowly on their own life experiences. It was difficult for the teachers to correct their online comments because of Asian cultural values in which public correction would be embarrassing to the student and thus demotivating. The instructional design did not include a mechanism for such correction. On the other hand, the instructional design fit with the theory of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), that is, that perfect grammar is not necessary and the most important thing is simply to be able to make oneself understood (Savignon and Wang, 2003).

Collaboration
The LET and NET in this study were friends and colleagues. In general they collaborated effectively, however the development and execution of the study still required negotiation and give-and-take. The teachers needed to explain and convince each other about their viewpoints concerning the literary texts and about the instructional design. In such collaboration, learning to appreciate each other’s perspective, as well as each other’s culture, is very important. The time difference, 13 to 14 hours for the teachers in this study, was a difficulty to overcome. Even though emails are helpful, face-to-face discussions were necessary and the teachers often used Skype for video-conferences.

Next time
Although the teacher/researchers were pleased by the outcomes of their study, completion of the study resulted in several ideas for adjustments that could be made in future implementations of the methodology. The two key needs they perceived were avenues of helping the students develop more and better social media posts, including ideas that are more thoughtful and independent, and better ways of providing private feedback about grammar and other technical issues to students about their social media posts.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
Research Questions
The case study findings above allow the authors to answer the research questions as follows:

1. What are the challenges faced by low-proficiency students in Taiwan in English Literature classes?

   Studying literature can be difficult for any student – even for native speakers. Studying literature in a second of foreign language can be intimidating, particularly for low proficiency students, for whom the vocabulary may be challenging, the meanings intended by the author difficult to uncover, and the cultural allusions and references mystifying. Such students may lose motivation and/or do the minimum necessary to pass the class.

2. Can an instructional design using social media to promote active learning succeed in an EFL literature class?

   The study findings show that use of familiar social media platforms, such as Facebook, as part of an overall instructional design, can engage students and draw them into active learning. This happens because the students are already familiar with use of the platform and translating that use into the classroom context is natural for them. With the social media stimulus, the students in this study understood the texts better, learned more about Western culture, improved their reading and writing skills, and improved their critical thinking.

3. What is the student reaction to such an instructional design?

   The incorporation of social media in the instructional design employed in this study was widely accepted by the students, who saw it as more beneficial and more interesting than traditional classroom instructional designs, which do not use technology. There were, however, cultural influences that affected how they interacted in the social media venue which can be addressed in future uses of social media for EFL literature instruction. In addition, it is important to note that the students were, indeed, already familiar with the platform used in this study. Were a “new” social media system, not previously used by the students, to be substituted, the student reaction could likely be considerably different.

4. What is the teacher reaction to using such an instructional design?

   The teachers in this project enjoyed implementing the instructional design and found it to be beneficial for students. The study continued the work of the researchers in previous academic years, but the current study was the first time that the perceptions of the teacher/participants have been included in a manuscript for publication. The teachers found that incorporation of social media is particularly beneficial for their low-proficiency EFL students because the familiarity of the technology stimulates motivation and engagement in learning, whereas low proficiency learners...
might otherwise give up and do the minimum needed to pass the class.

**Propositions**

In developing their methodology to address the research questions, the researchers had adopted three propositions. The findings now allow comment and conclusions about these propositions.

**Proposition 1:** Learning occurs best using the social constructivist philosophy, meaning that instructors should use student-centered active learning and downplay traditional lecture/memorization methodologies.

The findings of this study have reinforced the beliefs of the authors in social constructivism and the value of student-centered active learning. The academic literature is brimming with studies that demonstrate this, so there is no surprise in this conclusion. This study, however, situated the use of constructivism in the realm of social media for the purpose of EFL literature learning. Thus, the instructional design used active learning to both assist the student to learn the literature, itself, and also to allow the student to expand knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, cultural knowledge, and critical thinking.

**Proposition 2:** Success, therefore, can be measured, in part, by the extent to which students engage in well-formed active learning activities presented by the teacher.

The current findings, again, reinforced the authors’ belief in this proposition. The findings, however, also shed light in factors that determine whether EFL literature learning activities using social media are “well formed.” In particular, literature learning requires the stimulation of critical thinking, not just determining what the teacher thinks and agreeing. The learning activities in the current study injected cultural information into the discussion which was not readily available from other sources. This information provided perspective but did not present conclusions, leaving the students to construct their own meaning. The study also revealed ways, within the social media context, that teachers can further enrich the value of the learning activities, such as finding ways to give feedback privately to the students on their vocabulary and grammar use in their posts.

**Proposition 3:** The growing availability of “smart phone” mobile computing devices can provide rich content that is available anywhere the students go and at any time, which should increase acceptance by students of this form of instructional design.

The current study was not specifically focused on testing the use of smart phones and tablet computers, but the findings show that these were popular ways that the students accessed the NET’s videos and interacted with their fellow students. Mobile computing devices are reality available to students and any use of CALL technology outside the classroom should be designed in light of the ubiquitous nature of Internet access today.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

This case study has presented multiple sources of qualitative data from a semester-long implementation of social media for EFL literature learning by low proficiency university students in Taiwan. The authors hope that their findings reinforce the value of literature learning in the wider field of EFL instruction, and that their instructional methodology will stimulate similar instructional designs that make use of social media to provide student-centered active learning.

Students today are typically so technologically savvy that instructional designs that do not make considerable use of technology are seen as boring and not worthy of effort. The challenge for individual teachers, and for entire academic programs, is to develop CALL and CMC applications that are both welcomed by students, such as the social media design of this study, and address the fundamental instructional outcomes required for student success.

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