

From correspondence distance learning to crowd learning via social media – a case study of Polish teachers of English groups on Facebook

Od korespondencyjnego uczenia na odległość do uczenia się w tłumie poprzez media społecznościowe – studium przypadku grup polskich nauczycieli języka angielskiego działających w grupach społecznościowych na Facebooku

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Economic development of society depends on permanent education, children as well as adults. People need to learn constantly, no matter how old they are. This policy is called lifelong learning and its meaning differs among countries. OECD defines lifelong learning as a conception of learning that includes personal development and development of all social features in all forms and in all contexts; in formal system (...) and informal. According to Eurostat „Lifelong learning is the lifelong, voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. The overall aim of learning is to improve knowledge, skills, and competences. The intention to learn distinguishes learning activities from non-learning activities such as cultural activities or sports activities”¹. In Poland, it refers to the term *kształcenie ustawiczne* meaning learning at school for adults and completing general knowledge, skills and vocational qualifications outside a school. It is referred to people who fulfilled a school obligation².

How does non-formal and informal education look like in the twenty-first century? Plentiful innovations in education were possible thanks to the development of Web 2.0 movement. The creator of the term Web 2.0 Dale Dougherty, the vice-president of Tim O'Reilly Publishing House, defines it as „the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among

¹ EUROSTAT, *Glossary: Lifelong learning*, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Lifelong_learning [20.02.2018].

² Ustawa o systemie oświaty z dnia 7 września 1991 roku z późn. zmianami, MEN, Dz.U. 1991 Nr 95 poz. 425, Art.3, pkt. 17, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19910950425/U/D19910425Lj.pdf> [20.02.2018].

those rules is this: Build applications that harness network effects to get better the more people use them”³.

It is also referred to „bi-directional collaboration in which users are able to interact with and provide information to central sites and to see that information collated and made available to others⁴.” The fact is that Web 2.0 movement has changed the way people communicate, work and learn. In the twentieth century, adults who would like to raise their qualifications took part in courses, training, read professional literature. Education was limited by time and place. Then learners could use possibilities of distance learning and e-learning, however, synchronized interaction between students and educators was impossible. Nowadays people all over the world use platforms and apps to communicate and learn from each other free of charge, at any time and place. They often learn not from the educators but in the crowd, in many-to-many interaction, use the wisdom of crowds, they create the content opened for other users and they take advantages of the content created by other members of a social community. The phenomenon is called crowd learning.

Historical background

To understand social and technological changes which caused the development of crowd learning it is crucial to look back at the history of distance education. Its basic concept is that teachers and students are in different places and they need some communication technology in order to interact with each other.

Concepts of modern distance education date back to times of Jesus Christ who taught face-to-face, in groups which means that communication was synchronous. Later St. Paul, whose community was dispersed, wrote letters to individual church groups in order to read them during the worship as individuals were illiterate and could not learn at home. Although the communication was asynchronous it gave the beginning of distance education.

More than 150 years ago appeared correspondence study based on print technology- books and newspapers delivered by post. First correspondence courses appeared in Sweden (1833), Britain (1836), Germany (1856), USA (1883), France (1907).

Expansion of radio and television contributed to the development of the one-way communication period by broadcasting. Audio-visual media were added to the courses however, they had instructional character, its main use was to inform

³ O'Reilly T., *Web 2.0 compact definition: Trying again*, <http://radar.oreilly.com/2006/12/web-20-compact-definition-tryi.html> [19.02.2018].

⁴ Goodchild Michael F., *Citizens as Voluntary Sensors: Spatial Data Infrastructure in the World of Web 2.0*, [in:] *International Journal of Spatial Data Infrastructures Research*, 2007, Vol. 2, 24-32. <http://ijmdir.jrc.ec.europa.eu/index.php/ijmdir/article/view/28/22> [19.02.2018].

and visualize the content. In the early 1920s radio was used for the first time to support distance education in Great Britain as Government was not able to found formal education in small villages and towns. Next countries following that idea were: China, the USA, Canada. Some attempts were made before the Great Depression to produce educational programs on television, however, a lot of research on television were done after 1940. First educational television was established in 1945 in the USA. Next following countries were: Hungary (1952), Japan (1961), France (1966).

Technological and political progress between 1960 and 1990 accelerated development of distance education. The arrival of telecommunication and audio-teleconferencing made an opportunity for teachers to interact with their students. Two-way communication audio period started. Between 1980 and 1995 satellite, television, fiber-optics and video conferencing were main tools in distance education around the world. They became more affordable for individuals in developed countries.

Global co-operation

In 2004 movement called Web 2.0 started to change and improve distance learning much more. Unlike Web 1.0, it provides direct connections of more than a billion people and reaches above the virtual world boundaries joining lots of not mobile objects. It was possible thanks to the growth of computing power, efficiency and network coverage and access to tools needed for value creation and being competitive. New web means community, participation, and partnership. This new global co-operation is called Wikinomics. The first innovators were entrepreneurs who opened their secret business data and they used wisdom of the crowd in order to expand their economic activity: Rob McEwen the general manager of Goldcorp Inc., A.G. Lafley the general manager of Procter & Gamble shared their companies' database and invited people to present their ideas and propositions of solution. It was shocking and risky in those days however it did work. „The wisdom of crowd theory suggests that a collective can solve a problem better than most of the members in a group can by acting alone”⁵. People began to create web content, share their ideas, modify content, enjoy, earn and learn. According to Tapscott and Williams, authors of *Wikinomics. How mass collaboration changes everything* the central concepts of Wikinomics include:

- Being open, which includes not only open standards and content but also financial transparency and an open attitude towards external ideas and resources.

⁵ Kalisz D.E.: *Crowd learning: Innovative harnessing the knowledge and potential of people*, [in:] Tiwari S.R. (ed.), *Innovative Management Education Pedagogies for Preparing Next- Generation Leaders*, IGI Global 2015- 313. <https://safaribooksonline.com/library/view/innovative-management-education/9781466696914/978-1-4666-9691-4.ch004.xhtml> [18.12.2017].

It is the transparency of previously secret corporate information to partners, employees, customers, shareholders and other interested participants. People and institutions interacting with companies are gaining unprecedented access to important information about corporate behavior, operations, and performance.

- Peering, which replaces hierarchical models with a more collaborative forum. Participants in peer production communities have many different reasons for jumping in, from fun and altruism to achieving something valuable. Tapscott and Williams refer to the development of Linux as the "quintessential example of peering."

- Sharing, which is a less proprietary approach to (among other things) products, intellectual property, bandwidth, scientific knowledge.

- Acting globally, which involves embracing globalization and ignoring "physical and geographical boundaries" at both the corporate and individual level⁶.

In that year Facebook- the king of social media appeared to sustain relations with acquaintances, friends and create one's positive image. One year later a new pedagogical theory, called connectivism came out. Its author George Siemens states „Connectivism is the integration of principles explored by chaos, network, and complexity and self-organization theories. Learning is a process that occurs within nebulous environments of shifting core elements – not entirely under the control of the individual. Learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state”⁷.

Principles of connectivism are:

- Learning and knowledge rest in diversity of opinions.
- Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources.

- Learning may reside in non-human appliances.
- Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known
- Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning.

- Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.

- Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) is the intent of all connectivist learning activities. Decision-making is itself a learning process.

⁶ Tapscott D., Williams A.D., *Wikinomics. How mass collaboration changes everything*. Portfolio Penguin Group 2007, pp. 20-30.

⁷ Siemens G., *Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age*, http://er.dut.ac.za/bitstream/handle/123456789/69/Siemens_2005_Connectivism_A_learning_theory_for_the_digital_age.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [18.01.2018].

- Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision.

All these changes resulted in new, informal ways of distance education. People search for information, gain the knowledge they need from websites, blogs, video blogs, but they also learn in groups. The key word of consideration above is crowd learning, „by its definition is strictly linked with the crowdsourcing, and it is related with the learning over the time and the ability to remember future directions of knowledge”⁸. The concept of crowd learning engages the knowledge and potential of people to give an immediate answer or provide a solution to an addressed problem.

Adult education in Poland

Kształcenie ustawiczne in Poland was neglected up to 1990s. In those days resolution concerning *kształcenie ustawiczne* ensured the ability to complete general education by adults (meaning mainly 16-24-year-olds), to gain or change professional qualifications. In 1996 an amendment to the bill specified educational institutions and organizations enabling completing not only general education but also gaining professional skills. It was stated that system of *kształcenie ustawiczne* includes education, training, and development of vocational skills, in both forms: at school and outside a school. In 2003 next amendment was introduced concerning the quality of adult education by granting accreditation to educational institutions and organizations. OECD's data indicate that in those days 19% of Polish people were taking part in adult education in comparison to other European countries whose 31% of citizens were taking some training⁹. The twenty-first century and the development of new media has changed everything in humans' life including education. Until 2006 participation in adult training in Poland was very low. „Firstly, the lifelong learning culture has not yet been accepted by older and less educated generations (...) least qualified and older people tend to be rather passive, lack self-motivation, do not see much sense in training and refer to financial and time constraints. When workers do participate in training, it is often due to some form of external pressure (...). It also seems to be the case that access to information on

⁸ Kalisz D.E.: *Crowd learning: Innovative harnessing the knowledge and potential of people*, [in:] *Innovative Management Education Pedagogies for Preparing Next- Generation Leaders*, Tiwari S.R. (ed.), IGI Global 2015-313.

⁹ Osiecka-Chojnacka J., *Kształcenie ustawiczne i kształcenie dorosłych w Polsce*, Kancelaria Sejmu Biuro Studiów i Ekspertyz, Wydział Analiz Ekonomicznych i Społecznych, Warszawa, Informacja nr 981, p. 3. http://biurosejmu.sejm.gov.pl/teksty_pdf_03/i-981.pdf [02.03.2018].

training availability can be a problem”¹⁰. One of the goals of Ministry of Education and Sport's Educational Strategy 2007-2013 was permanent raise of qualifications among adults, especially vocational qualifications and general competences necessary to function in a modern society¹¹. The idea was to develop a pro-educational attitude of citizens through enrichment of constant education offer and development of different forms of education. According to „Perspective of Lifewide and Lifelong Learning”- a strategy document resulting from international obligation there is a difference between the Polish and European definition of adult learning¹². Polish meaning concentrates on young adults (up to 24) learning in formal institutions while European involves people over 25 to minimum 65 learning in different forms and places. This is the main reason why the level of lifelong learning in Poland was so low. Strategy actions included, among other things, broader opening for different kinds of learning (not formal): classes with a tutor, classes in groups at school, distance learning and online learning, training organized by employers, public institutions and organizations, classes in large groups like an audience, internet forums. In 2013 CSO Social Surveys and Living Conditions Department published data showing growth of adult education, formal non-formal and informal. To understand these terms correctly we need to look at their definitions. Formal education- education in a schooling system (from primary to tertiary) organized by schools, educational institutions, whether public or non-public sector, authorized to teach. Non-formal education- these are organized educational activities, which are not school education. It does not result in the change of education level however it should be performed with the participation of a teacher, an educator or an instructor. Finally, informal education is a self-study in order to gain knowledge or skills improvement. It should be performed without the participation of a teacher, outside schooling system and organized forms of education. Percentage of society taking formal courses was constant (5,5% in 2006 and 5,4% in 2011) however, participation in non-formal courses had increased from 18,6% to 21% and in informal education from 25,4% to 29%. Teachers were raising their vocational qualifications in formal courses (11%), non-formal courses (40%) and informal (16%)¹³. In

¹⁰ OECD (2016), „Education and Training: Boosting and Adapting Human Capital”, in OECD *Economic Surveys: Poland 2006*, OECD Publishing http://dx.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-pol-2006-6-en [05.03.2018].

¹¹ MNES (2005), *Strategia rozwoju edukacji na lata 2007-2013* (Educational Strategy 2007-2013), Ministry of National Education and Sport, Warsaw. http://www.fio.towarzystwoamicus.pl/do_pobrania/biblioteka/strategie/19strategia_rozwoju_educacji_na_lata_2007_2013.pdf [05.03.2018].

¹² MNE (2013), *Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie*, Ministry of National Education, Warsaw. https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/plll_2013_09_10zal_do_uchwaly_rm.pdf [05.03.2018].

¹³ CSO, Social Surveys and Living Conditions Department SO Gdańsk, Centre for Education and Human Capital Statistics (2013), *Adult Education Survey 2011*, Warsaw. http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/ED_ksztalcenie_doroslych_2011.pdf [05.03.2018].

2016 45,1% of society took part in different kinds of courses: formal (11,2%), non-formal (20,9%) and informal (30,7%)¹⁴. These data show the importance of non-formal and informal education in adult learning. The next paragraph concentrates on the teaching profession and new forms of informal training.

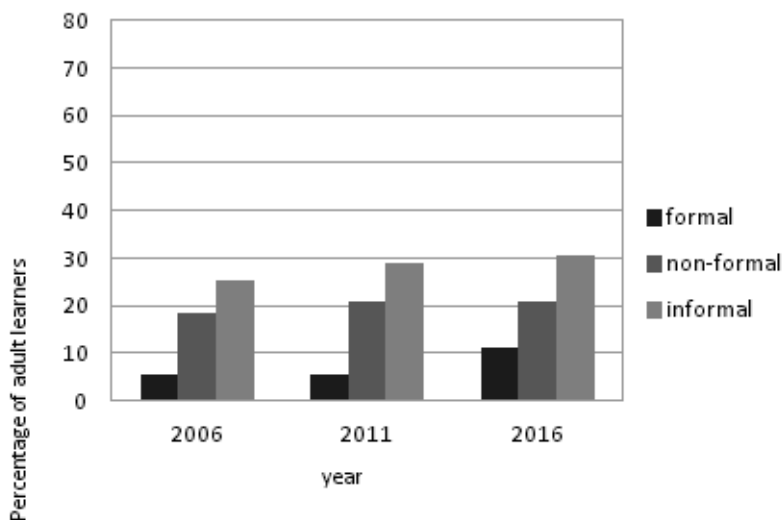


Fig. 1. Percentage of Polish society aged between 25-65 lifelong learning

Facebook as a medium of crowd learning

Educators use the internet and mobile apps in classrooms to in order to adjust their teaching methods to students called the net generation, who have grown up in an environment in which they are constantly exposed to computer-based technology. What is more, most teachers are going to teach children who are not born yet and who will live in a completely different, not known, world. Consequently, teachers, like other professions, are obliged to increase their professional qualifications. Emerging of Facebook created another opportunity for informal teacher training. Tutors gather together in groups created according to the subject or a specific problem. It is the phenomenon of great significance for media researcher as groups are connecting thousands of lecturers. The table below presents 10 exemplary groups of English teachers in Poland.

¹⁴ SO, Social Surveys and Living Conditions Department SO Gdańsk, Adult Education Survey 2016, www.stat.gov.pl [05.03.2018].

Name of the group	Amount of members
Uczę dzieci	2398
Nauczyciele angielskiego	16180
2M czyli Mentoring Metodyka	1847
ZaTIKowani Nauczyciele	920
Metodyka nauczania języków obcych	5322
Z gramatyką Ci do twarzy	401
Nowoczesne lekcje	6299
Light my fire	2461
Out of the box	1346
Asy z Ósmej klasy	1146

Tab. 1. Exemplary Facebook's groups of Polish Teachers of English as at 20 February 2018

The study conducted by the author included the analysis of group descriptions, information about the administrators/founders of groups, and a questionnaire conducted among members consisting of four multiple questions:

1. What ways of vocational training do you take part?
 2. What kinds of courses do you participate more: stationary or online?
 3. What forms of vocational training do you consider as the most useful and effective?
 4. What kind of member are you?
- and one open question:
5. What are the advantages of using social media in improving professional qualifications?

The research showed that groups established by innovative teachers and teacher training experts are forums of networking, exchanging experiences and discussions. They remain closed, so posts are not visible for the whole Facebook's community. Founders of groups are administrators who approve one's membership and they are content curators. Members' posts very often need to be approved by the administrator. Not every administrator approved author's request to proceed a survey among the group. Due to the content curation the essence of the

specific group remains clear. There are no advertisements, spam, offensive and charity posts.

What is more, educators all over the world belong to international groups connected with a specific apps used for teaching. These are both: opened and closed groups created in order brainstorm with other teachers from all the globe.

Name of the group	Amount of members
ClassDojo Mentor Community	15779
Nearpod Teachers	1792
Kahoot! Teacher community	13943

Tab. 2 Exemplary international Facebook's groups of teachers using specific app as at 21 February 2018

A survey made among members of Polish teacher of English groups on Facebook was aimed to indicate and explain what sort of training is the most popular and practical in the era of Wikinomics and collective intelligence. Although educators take part in traditional training performed by vocational training centers, conferences performed by Publishing Houses, specialist literature, and stationary trainings, a majority of training (57,1%) are those taken online.

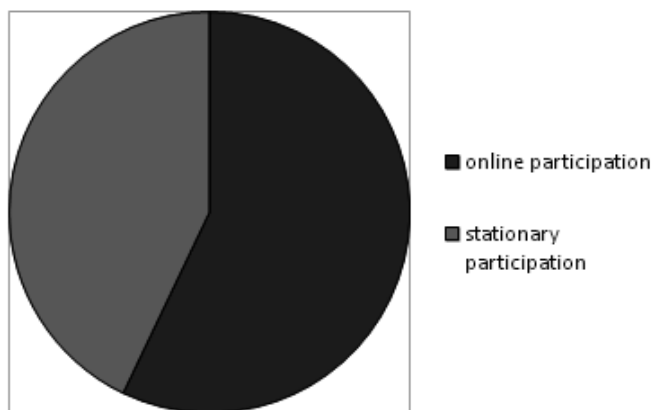


Fig. 2. The proportion of online training to stationary training

The research indicates that the most popular and useful at work are new informal ways of learning:

- training available online

- activity in social media
- educational blogs and video blogs

Facebook is a kind of social media created to keep up an acquaintanceship, now stands for social software where teacher communities exchange knowledge, experience, and opinions. They share already discovered apps, lesson plans, posters, ideas and ready to go exercises. Lecturers are willing to train charge less other members of a community via live transmissions and organized online meetings. All of the comrades have a chance to make a request and find an immediate answers form the community. The wisdom of crowds provides a broad spectrum of knowledge connected with current English teaching methodology and helps to solve a dilemma. There are a lot of advantages of crowd learning via social media enumerated by participants:

- sharing knowledge
- fast information searching
- informing about new initiatives
- learning about new interactive tools used during the classes and during proceeding a project
- database of ideas
- variety
- disseminating information about training on a large scale
- direct exchange of information
- large groups of activists from all the country
- lots of inspirations
- immediate feedback
- immediate answer to a question
- an immediate solution to a problem supported by the experience of many users
- time flexible
- possibility to come back to the content many times
- time-saving
- free of cost
- always available
- any place accessible
- easy access
- every day update
- verification of one's own activities
- shared experience comes from practitioners, not theoreticians
- ability to share documents and files
- possibility to ask questions directly
- matching with interests and time availability

In order to have a better glance at the phenomenon, we need to discover who the members of the social communities are. About 77% teachers belonging to social community are experienced teachers who are looking for inspiration. 8,9% call themselves as teachers/ methodology experts willingly sharing their knowledge, and 7,1% are beginner teachers searching for help and support in their work. 7,1% of members are educators creating their personal branding, their business is connected with paid teacher training.

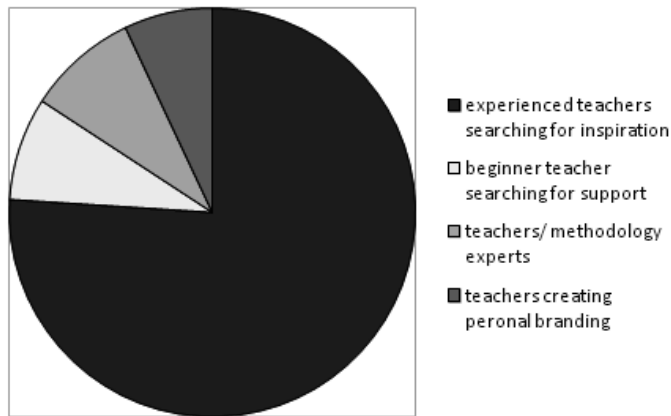


Fig. 3. Kinds of groups members

Discussion

Analysis of literature concerning lifelong learning, distance learning, Wikinomics, connectivism and crowd learning and research made among Facebook's teacher groups indicate that Polish people are ready and willing to use the wisdom of the crowd in order to enhance their qualifications. The research confirmed the thesis claiming that social media like Facebook are easily accessible and effective technological tools used for learning and enhancing professional qualifications. Where is the evidence? Firstly, we need to come back to idea of lifelong learning. According to the definition at the beginning of the article, it is a voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge. Facebook's membership is optional and members of communities are eager to learn, not obliged. It was also said that crucial thing about distance learning is that teachers and students are in different places and they need some communication technology in order to interact with each other. Teachers are from all parts of Poland gathered within specific groups and they use social media as a communication tool. Web 2.0 movement delivers

technological tools making communication interactive and direct. The theory of crowd learning assumes that a collective can solve a problem better than most of the members in a group working individually. Surveyed members mentioned the immediate solution to a problem supported by the experience of many users as one of many advantages of education via social media. In the era of connectivism humans do not have to have all of the knowledge but they have to have connections with people who have access to this knowledge. Facebook's groups are the example of that social networking where experts and experienced workers are the majority. Teachers know where they can find the information needed. In the end, Wikinomics which means that users are producers and consumers at the same time. Facebook's teachers are prosumers, they create lesson plans, interactive materials, projects, exercises, games and they use creations of others. Unfortunately, activity in social media and blogging is not recognized by employers as a kind of valued publication.

The director of Dutch Foundation Expertise Centre Practice.nl¹⁵ Ben Vaske „feels that social media has a lot more potential in basic skills adult education than most people think. The reason for this potential is that, according to Vaske, his target group is already active on social media: adults with low-level education are often seasoned users of mobile platforms, games and social media. Existing social media like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have functionalities that can be used in education. (...) We need a platform that allows innovative parties to initiate a transfer to a new style of learning”¹⁶. Further research should analyze ways of crowd learning and lifelong learning systems around the world in order to create model functionalities for modern lifelong learning system in the crowd in Poland, not only among teachers but also among different professions, and to find a solution how to reward active in social media employees.

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¹⁵ Its mission is to help non-formal and informal adult learners in need of boosting their basic knowledge and skills to better participate in society and working life.

¹⁶ Palmén M., *Where are the social media apps for adult learners?*, <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/where-are-social-media-apps-adult-learners> [7.03.2018].

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Słowa kluczowe:

uczenie się przez całe życie, kształcenie ustawiczne, uczenie się w tłumie, Wikinomia, konektywizm, web 2.0, edukacja pozaformalna, edukacja nieformalna, uczenie dorosłych

Key words:

lifelong learning, crowd learning, Wikinomics, connectivism, web 2.0, non-formal education, informal education, adult learning

Summary:

Technological and communication transformation in XXI century is growing rapidly. The emergence of Web 2.0 movement, global economic co-operation called Wikinomics and connectivism- new pedagogical approach contributed to evolution in lifelong learning and distance learning. This article presents how did people raise their qualifications in the past and how has the development of media and social media changed distance education. The editorial defines lifelong learning in Europe and in Poland. It indicates the participation of Polish society in different forms of learning: formal, non-formal, informal, and explains reasons why these data are lower than in Europe. The subjects of research are Polish teachers of English gathered in closed groups on Facebook. The aim of this study is to check the proportion of online participation in vocational courses to stationary participation in vocational courses. The research was done in order to define new ways of informal training and to describe groups members' attitude to social media as a technological tool for crowd learning. The author has undertaken a questionnaire among members of target groups to verify a thesis that social media are easily accessible and effective technological tools used for learning and enhancing professional qualifications.