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### **Using Facebook in Teaching and Learning English**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study attempts to explore the use of Facebook in teaching and learning English in a Malaysian college. The aims are to examine the kinds of language teaching and learning activities carried out via Facebook, the use of Facebook in facilitating the teaching and learning and the limitations of using Facebook in teaching and learning. The findings indicate that reading, writing and discussion activities can be held via Facebook and all of the participants agreed that Facebook helps them in learning English. This study implicates that the use of Facebook as an alternative tool can be used for teaching and learning to enhance students' interactions outside the classroom.

Keywords: Social Networking, Facebook, Teaching and Learning English

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The needs of alternative tool in teaching and learning come in to enhance the ability of students in academic writing (Saadiyah Darus, 2009.) This is mainly because from the pedagogical perspective, Malaysian students are used to spoon-feeding style of teaching and learning ( Josepd Wong Kee-Kuok, 2004). The problem doesn't stop there as Nowlan (2008) believes that contact hour for students and lecture is another obstacle to be faced. According to him one or two hour of teaching and learning English per week is not enough to enable the students to practice English and getting guidance for academic writing.

Therefore, there is a need to find the solution to the above problem particularly in creating environment to the students to use English language and learn how to write a good research even outside the classroom. Current global developments especially in computer technologies have opened up more opportunities for educationists to design and implement Information Communication Technologies (ICT)-based lessons to make teaching and learning more interesting, motivating as well as meaningful (Kenning, 2007).

The use of technology has been implemented to expand coverage and accelerate the teaching of English. For instance, Dohn (2009) suggests that Web 2.0 applications may trigger some 21st century skills namely critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and communication, global awareness and information literacy which is crucial for in writing academic research (Rashidah et al. 2011).

Teaching and learning academic writing in English subject is also connected with the ideas of using internet or computer-based environment (Saradetch, 2012) as the language needs to be practiced all the time and internet will ensure the process is continue after the class end.

Alternative teaching and learning using computer based has been used by many researchers, for example, "Using Facebook Groups in Teaching ESL Writing" by Melor et al. (2012). However, these areas still have a lot of potentials to be researched as technologies develop very fast and operate differently according to the contexts.

#### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In tertiary level, English subjects focus on the developing the communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal educational systems. At this level, teachers need to know and

understand the weaknesses that learners experience in learning the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to prepare effective lessons and to guide learners in developing their language proficiency

Academic writing is at the centre of teaching and learning in higher education, fulfilling a range of purposes according to the various contexts including assessment, learning and entering particular disciplinary communities (Coffin et al. 2002). It is fairly typical of syllabuses aimed at tertiary level students from a variety of countries and mixed disciplines (Lea & Street, 1994). Starts with focusing on separate study skills, it is later developed and refined with more spoken and written projects added so that the use of skills could be more integrated (Jordan, 1997)

According to McNeil (2008) there are some interesting issues that can be related to the use of SNSs in higher education including discursual expectations emerge from the use of an informal 'outside' space to host a learning community, whether the communication alter the power dynamic between tutors and students, lessening social distance between participants, or forms the identity in individual performances. The issue is also regarding the key characteristics of language use in an SNS.

Facebook has a variety of interactive features and it attracts the users to play and enjoy it (Ellison et al., 2007). The Facebook provides a convenient environment for the development of discourse communities with its varied participatory mechanisms. The students can create their personal profile page allowing them to list interests and activities and share with others. They also belong to a 'Network' defined primarily by the educational institution with which they are, or have been, affiliated.

Previous study by Melor et al. (2012) revealed that Facebook can be embedded in writing activity as the participants utilize the features in Facebook to learn new vocabulary by reading the comments of the other students in the group, discussion in getting ideas for writing, and spell-check by peers. The study also proves that using Facebook actually can help the students in completing their essays easier by participating in the Facebook group discussion.

Kho & Chuah (2012) did a study on Encouraging ESL Discourse Exchanges via Facebook . and from the result obtained, it is recommended that the educators incorporate the teaching and learning activity with online social networks such as Facebook in order to create more fun and interactive lessons. From the study, the students involved actively in exchanging ideas or opinions through Facebook compared to traditional classroom. Apart from that, the students claimed that their vocabulary were enhanced by reading the comments by their friends in the group.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The methodology employed in this study is a case study design as it involves a particular group of engineering students in a college. This research is meant to gain insights into students' and lecturer's perceptions on the use of Facebook as an alternative tool in teaching and learning English hence case study is the best method to be used as it helps the researcher to obtain holistic and meaningful information that might explain the events.

In gathering data for the study, 35 students and 1 lecturer were selected for the purpose of the study. The students are BCSC students and took the subject of Technical Communication III. Three instruments used in this study are document analysis, observation form and interviews. The documents include course plan for Technical Communication III, Facebook conversation contents, journal/assignments, pictures and videos. In obtaining data for this study, the verbatim of participation via Facebook by students and lecturers were analyzed to see how it contributed as the alternative tool for teaching and learning English. The observation data was recorded in the form of field notes made by the researcher who assumed the non-participant observer role at the time of the study. Four aspects were focused in the observation form: activities, posting, attachments and students' participation. As interviews enable the participants to describe detailed personal information (Creswell et al, 2007), it was conducted in order to inquire specific questions to elicit information from the participants of this study. Semi-structured interview was used as one of the instruments in order to gain insights from students and the lecturer.

The page was observed by the researcher from time to time. All the activities in the group were analyzed including the post messages and comment. After a semester, the researcher gathered all the participants to be interviewed to gauge their narrative and the researcher took notes and also recorded audio of the interviews sessions after obtaining permission from the participants.

The data from the document in Facebook and interview were analyzed qualitatively. All activities in the group including post messages, file transfer, comment, 'like' and 'share' recorded in the observation field work form and were analyzed for this study. Semi structured interviews were conducted for the students and lecturer separately, and they were interviewed individually. Notes were made and the interviews were recorded throughout the sessions after obtaining permission from participants. The recorded audio were then transcribed and analyzed into thematic analysis.

#### 4.0 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

There are three categories of language teaching and learning activities identified. They are reading activities, writing activities and discussion activities.

##### Reading Activities

The lecturer uploaded a few journals that related to the topic discussed previously in the Facebook group together with the guidelines. The participants save the journals uploaded to their computers or other devices. This activity directed the participants' attention to the reading text which they need to read the text or at least part of it in order to do exercise. The majority of the students engaged themselves in this activity described that they have more focus in reading the text as the assignment plays as their guides. One of the participants said that the 'guides' are very useful to her especially when she knew what information that she need to find.

The importance of this finding is that students regardless of their experience in research writing could increase the understanding in reading the information online.

*"Mostly she (lecturer) uploaded about research, literature review. She linked journals and guidance. so I can learn that by myself. How to read and write..how to get information from article."*

Among the reading activities, three of it demanded the students to read with analytical approach. In this activity, the participants need to read and identify the requirements needed to ensure issues discussed in report are valid and reliable. From the findings, it is found that intensive reading also contributed in assisting the lecturer's teaching process. Through the interview with the lecturer participant, she realized that the reading activity via Facebook helped to enhance the quality of reading among the students.

*"Lecturer: I think it will help a lot in terms of reading and writing. I found that the students read journals according to my instructions, maybe because they are degree students so they take serious in every activity. For example when I ask them to locate information in the text, they were able to do. So it always helps to have an extension to knowledge by reading even after the class hours."*

From the analysis of entries in the Facebook group, reading for the purpose of enriching vocabulary is one of the activities identified. In the activity, the participants read the articles attached in the Facebook and they looked for definition of terms that suitable to their research. By this reading activity, the participants able to find suitable terms to be highlighted by reading article related to their topic. The lecturer explained how the intensive reading helped her students in the context of research writing:

*"Lecturer: I asked them to read a lot of the articles and bring the printed articles in class to prove it. Prior to that, they kind of unmotivated to start their writing but after the reading, they know what they are going to write and start engaged with the research writing"*

From the field notes, it is revealed that the activity of reading via of Facebook group helps the participants in developing ideas in writing the research report. Through the interview, students believed that the reading other professional journal linked by their lecturer in the Facebook group fulfilling their needs in generating ideas for the research writing.

To support the extensive reading, computer-assisted reading is one of the choices. Based on the document analysis focusing on this activity, the lecturer did not only urge the participants to read the journals but she also asked them to download software to help the participants in organizing and managing their materials. Facebook allowed the participants to read different words resources for papers. From the interview,

the participants claimed that students usually read what they find on the World Wide Web, sometimes often what they can google and not going to more scholarly data bases. Therefore, the reading activities instructed by the lecturer in this study showed different result with the help of the Facebook features.

### Writing Activities

There are 4 types of writing activities recognized in this study which are pre-writing activities, writing the draft, responding and review and revising and editing. Under the topic of introduction to research, the lecturer asked the participants to prepare an outline for their research. Prior to that, the participants encouraged to read journals and have a brainstorming session with their friends. The outcomes from the discussion were recorded and developed as the outline of their research writing. After that the participants prepared the outline and uploaded it to the Facebook group to be checked by the lecturer. In the interview session, the lecturer specifically explained about the task:

*Lecturer: I guided the students from the beginning, in class and outside the class (Facebook). From the beginning I motivate the students to write in the group. They need to share their research outline referring to the literature that they read previously.*

This activity promotes the participants to have proper beginning to their writing. By reading other students outlines, it helped the participants to amend, re-arrange ideas for a better research write-up. Flower and Hayes (1981) cited in Hedge (2000) contributed to the understanding of planning when they suggested that it goes on at many levels and throughout the process of composing.

In the process of writing the draft, students had gone through several phases of planning and writing that needed them to get approval from the lecturer. In other words, this process is started in the class and continued in the Facebook. The lecturer and the participants themselves can look at the drafts uploaded through the 'files uploaded' features.

In terms of data obtained from the interview, findings prove that participants liked if their works or documents were uploaded and were read by their friends and lecturer. This activity was considered as helpful to them in providing feedback from their friends and also from the lecturer.

The third activity identified from the writing activities is responding and reviewing other participants' work. The participants required to choose the first draft posted by their friends to review and give comment. Majority of the students agreed that the comments from their friends were useful, helped them to increase knowledge and assisted them in correcting their mistakes in writing. In addition, the participants suggest that the comments helped them in changing the writing style, act as reminder of the errors and give confidence to submit it to the lecturer.

*" we have enough time to do exercise compare to do it in classroom. For example we had to review our friend's essay. We can do it at home and post it in Facebook. The comments from my friends help me to change it."*

Findings shows that another writing activity identified is editing and revising. The participants required to edit and revise their first draft that was commented by other participants and corrected by the lecturer. Based on the interview, participants claimed that this task is challenging for them as it required a careful revision depends not only on the participants' skill but also on the purpose of the writing (academic writing) and formality required to write it (Hedge, 2000). P5 responded towards this activity by stating that this stage is useful to him to improve his writing skills and also to revise his ideas:

*P5: writing activity is like I have to submit my draft to lecturer. I wrote it at hostel then I posted in Facebook. But before that, we have to edit because our friends read and commented it before. Macam.. diorang akan baca dan tengok yang mana boleh baiki..lepas tu baru hantar ke Madam. (they read and later I will submit to the lecturer)*

### Discussions Activities

The third activity identified in this study is discussion. Data were obtained from field notes, participants' explanation in the interview and document analysis of Facebook entries. The primary findings

from the field notes have illustrated that the use of Facebook facilitates communication, interaction, and knowledge sharing between the participants to participants and also participants and lecturer. Three sub-themes recognized from the discussion activity which are commenting the post and chatting and private message.

The field notes illustrate that Facebook's activities encourage students to respond and reflect in the discussion. The students gave their comments in the Facebook either to answer question or to give opinion on particular issue highlighted in the post. According to the data collected via interview, all of the participants said that they left comments at least once in the group. From the document analysis, the comments from the participants are very few. The participants stated in the interview that they were very careful in writing the comments in the group as they were conscious about what people thought about their answers. Majority of the students engaged themselves actively in the discussions primarily for the reason to exchange their ideas and experiences without feeling shy, being discriminated and fear. Likewise, this statement has been supported by similar findings in the interview session.

*" Yes. Because when we go back hostel, we still can see the group and discuss about it outside the class. We can say anything and not shy. In the class we usually shy. Write on Facebook more comfortable."*

This finding agreed with the previous study by Bicen & Uzunboylu (2013) that Facebook is a supportive learning environment that increase students' interests in lesson and make learning more enjoyable. Apart of that, sharing document via commenting the post actually increased the originality in giving answer or opinion. It is so because the participants realize that everybody read the comments and they tried not to repeat the same answer and avoid redundancy. Since the students will feel humiliated or ridiculed in class and will not speak up, Facebook activities acted as an alternative platform for the students to participate actively if they failed to do so in the class.

According to the data collected by the interview, 100% of the participants sent private message to their lecturer. When comparing to communicate face to face and through Facebook, all the students agreed that they are more comfortable communicating via Facebook. There are several reasons being mentioned by them. First, the participants claimed that their poor English proficiency made them shy and afraid to speak face to face with the lecturer. Scared of making mistakes is one of the main reasons why they chose not to speak English. However, by sending message to the lecturer, the participants feel more confident as they have enough time to modulate their response and refer to the dictionary or friends (Delahunty and Garvey, 1994). They also claimed that they have adequate time to edit the sentence before they push the 'send' button.

*"I think Facebook because face to face..sometime we shy. sometime no time..we have class.."*

This seems to agree that shy learners are less discouraged by appearance and social differences because these are not prominent in Facebook as in face-to-face settings. The time constraint faced by the participants in completing task of academic writing influenced the acceptance of using Facebook as the alternative platform for teaching and learning process especially in discussion activity.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Therefore, implementing Facebook for education is must come with the valid environments, and supports from all partakers. Learning via Facebook does not only help to improve students' team working skills, but also helps them to achieve better results in learning. By using Facebook, students can get to know each other better and take education to its highest level and made it more interesting, therefore creating richer learning environments.

It is suggested that the lecturers should be more active in conducting activities in the Facebook group. This in turn will motivate the students to participate more. The design of the study plan also needs to be planned prior and ensure that all topics are involved in using Facebook in doing the activities. The educational institution should aware of the capability of Facebook in supporting the process of teaching and learning. Thus, they should provide a better internet connection facility to the students and lecturers. Lack of access to participants was problematic to the study.

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