FACEBOOK AS A TOOL TO PROMOTE THE USE OF ENGLISH IN WRITING
AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

SUZANA BINTI MOHD SUBOH

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my husband, Kamarulzaman Jamaludin for giving me the opportunity to pursue my studies at a higher level, for bearing the long weekends without me and attending to the children during my absence.

To my children – Nurul Diana, Nurul Amalina, Nurul Nadia, Kamarul Shafiq, Kamarul Sharmeen and Kamarul Shayree, thank you for your continuous support and understanding. I hope that my determination to complete my Master degree will give you some inspiration to be successful people to serve the society in future. May the efforts and hardwork inspired you to be better than me.

Love you indefinitely.

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media, such as Facebook, blog, Weblog, Flickr, Tumblr and Twitter, in and out of the classroom context has grown widely. However, we give very minimal concern on the significance of using such social sites to promote the use of English language in writing and enhance students' confidence in using the language. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate Facebook as a tool to encourage students of University College Shahputra to improve their written and reading abilities and simultaneously, boost up their confidence to communicate with peers virtually and in real life. In line with the purpose, the objectives of the study elicit students' perceptions in using Facebook and to promote the use of English in writing in their learning tasks. It also investigates the factors contributing to students' confidence in using the English language without much worry on grammatical rules. Twenty two UiTM students of Diploma in Art & Design are recruited from one of the classes taught at University College Shahputra Kuantan (UCSA). This study is conducted using two instruments. Firstly, by using a survey questionaire and secondly using an online interview in the Facebook close group. Data obtained from both instruments are later analysed using the quantitative approach. Findings revealed that students in this study initially became part of the Facebook community because they wanted to keep in touch with. Later, they discovered that Facebook had more effects than mere social course formal and informally, but also to write and communicate using the English language and improved their reading and understanding significantly. This six-week study showed some very positive improvements in terms of students' confidence in using the English language to write in their learning tasks.

ABSTRAK

Kewujudan media sosial seperti Facebook, blog, Weblog, Flickr, Tumblr and Twitter yang muncul di dalam dan luar konteks pembelajaran telah berleluasa. Walau bagaimanapun, perhatian kurang diberi kepada kepentingan laman sosial ini untuk tujuan meningkatkan penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris dalam penulisan dan memantapkan keyakinan pelajar untuk mengguna bahasa ini. Oleh itu, tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah bertujuan untuk mengetahui samada Facebook mampu dijadikan alat untuk menggalakkan pelajar-pelajar Kolej Universiti Shahputra untuk memperbaiki mutu penulisan dan pembacaan serta meningkatkan keyakinan berkomunikasi bersama rakan-rakan di alam maya mahupun di dunia nyata. Sehubungan itu, objektif penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mencungkil maklumat tentang persepsi pelajar terhadap penggunaan Facebook dalam usaha meningkatkan penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris di dalam penulisan dalam pembelajaran. Ia juga mengkaji factor-faktor penyumbang terhadap keyakinan pelajar dalam penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris tanpa terlalu menghiraukan tatabahasa. Dua puluh dua pelajar UiTM dari jurusan Diploma Seni Reka & Seni Lukis dari sebuah kelas di Kolej Universiti Shahputra Kuantan (UCSA) dipilih untuk mengambil bahagian. Dua kaedah digunakan iaitu kaji selidik dan temuramah secara virtual (bertulis) melalui grup tertutup di Facebook. Data yang diperolehi melalui kedua-dua kaedah kemudiannya dianalisa melalui pendekatan kuantitatif. Kajian mendapati pelajar-pelajar pada awalnya mendampingi Facebook sekadar untuk menghubungi semula sahabat-sahabat lama. Kemudian, mereka mendapati Facebook memberi kesan yang lebih dari sekadar bersosial, malah menulis dan berkomunikasi di dalam Bahasa Inggeris secara formal mahupun tidak formal.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Recent development in technology is gradually replacing traditional settings that have served to manage and limit access to knowledge. The number of people having access to Internet is growing globally (Gartner, 2009; Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2010; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Students of today, growing up in the Information Age, have a vast knowledge available at their fingertips. Recent technological advances have resulted in a changed online experience that is often referred to as "Web 2.0".

Facebook is a Web 2.0 application serving a large online community. It gains huge popularity and in Malaysia, according to Socialbakers (2012), the number of Facebook users reached 15,948,040 in July 2012. The largest group of Malaysian users comprised those aged between 18 and 24, who accounted for 33% of the total Facebook population in Malaysia. As this age group consists mainly of students who study at the university level, Facebook is used in this study as a social networking tool to promote English language in writing in students' learning tasks.

Web 2.0 is a term used around 1999 to describe the second-generation Internet experience (DiNucci, 1999; O'Reilly, 2005), which revolves around technological features that maximize the potential for content creation and allow any Internet user to connect, communicate, create, and contribute in the online environment (Alexander, 2006; Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). The Web 2.0

phenomenon has opened up a vast new realm of Internet user participation and interaction, making the Internet interesting and attractive to large numbers of new users, facilitating collaborative and distributed online practices, democratizing the content of the World Wide Web, and offering new possibilities for digitally-mediated learning delivery. While Social Network Sites (SNS) users allows the possibility of meeting strangers and develop connections that would not have been made otherwise, this networking function is not the primary feature of these sites.

The unique aspect of an SNS is that it allows users to articulate and make visible their social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This may be an important and useful feature in some educational contexts, while receding in importance in others. For example, in educational SNS use, the value of network articulation may give way to the utility of other common features of SNS such as (a) the hosting of customizable personal profile pages that support the establishment and maintenance of individual presence in the online learning environment, and (b) the provision of a collected suite of varied social software tools.

Among the many emergence of SNS, like Twitter, Weblog and Friendster, Facebook ever increasing popularity raises questions on its impact on college students life (Kirschner, 2010). In Kirschner's study on Facebook and academic performance, it was mentioned that this social network emerges as a college-age phenomenon. The next group user was between 25-34 years old with an increase of 181%, while 35-older group increased 98%. It was quoted that 50% of 350 million Facebook users are logged on to this site everyday (http://www.facebook.com).

Facebook has been a platform for students to write, but this writing is different from the writing done in school for academic purposes. Students regard the informal writing outside school (including Facebook, blogs and Twitter) as 'communication' and the school writing as 'writing', which is an exercise in test taking (Yancey, 2009). The

students are unable to see the connection between the two forms of writing (inside and outside school) and, the students are unable to consider writing as an engaging activity to express themselves as well as a tool to perform in academic situations. Yancey (2009) discusses how Facebook and similar tools such as blogs and online forums can be used so students can see writing done in these new media as "writing" and they can make use of these media to become better writers. In the process help students become thoughtful and informed writers.

Northcote, and Kendle (2001) postulate that participating in online learning activities such as discussing in online forums and searching for information online may give students the opportunity to acquire many practical online skills in a more incidental, informal manner. Some of these skills that would be useful for language learners are critical analysis of resources, effective online communication, and filtering and deciphering information. In order to attain the above skills, Roth (2009) suggests that technology should be made a "significant component in the curriculum by drawing on Plato's goals for education and adapting and realizing them" and "the teaching and learning should be interactive, personalized and holistic" that will aid students to "move away from the passive realm of reading and into the interactive world of digital pedagogy" (p. 127). In this respect, which is quite similar to incidental learning, Fox (2002) views networked learning from the socially situated learning theory and underlines how this type of learning theory "draws our attention away from all formal educational attempts to manage learning towards the many social spaces where learning takes place 'naturally,' so to speak" (p. 81). The above notions of incidental learning and socially situated learning inform us that learning does not necessarily mean learning in a formal setting, within a formal classroom and guided by an instructor; for instance, learning can also take place anywhere as long as there are meaningful interactions between learners that lead to knowledge construction. Clearly, incidental learning or socially situated learning theory does not have the capacity to explain all forms of learning, practices and experiences that occur in a Facebook community.

Research and anecdotal evidence has disclosed both positive and negative impacts from the use of Facebook for learning. The positive impacts encompass learner motivation and engagement (Mills, 2009; Northcote,& Kendle, 2001); strengthening of students' social networking practices (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009) and learning experiences and events (Selwyn, 2009). On the other hand, the negative impacts include wasting or overspending of time (Fodeman, & Monroe, 2009); and encouraging negative attitudes (such as lying) and affecting students' social growth detrimentally (Queirolo, 2009). Due to this mixed impact of Facebook, there is an ongoing debate among researchers and academics as to whether Facebook should be taken seriously as a learning tool or a learning environment, especially in higher institutions. Many educational institutions have embarked on the effort to reach out to students using social networking platforms such as Facebook (more as a marketing tool) and "spread the word about educational opportunities and programs, and promote achievements on campus" (Violino, 2009, p. 29).

Facebook and other social network sites are being adopted educational environments as educators explore possible applications of SNS to instruction, communication, marketing, student retention and engagement, faculty development, and other purposes (Schwartz, 2009; Terris, 2009). For the classroom, a well-designed instance of educational SNS, or Educational Social Software (ESS) (Anderson, 2005a) can offer multi-modal and multi-media communication and content delivery capabilities and provide a virtual space where course participants can meet and take part in various formal and informal interactions centered on shared learning objectives. This social space can be a positive component of an online course (Palloff & Pratt, 2003), and can encourage the development of the object-centered social structures (Engstrom, 2005) that arise naturally around the content, activities, and learning objectives that constitute commonalities shared by course participants.

The internet has become an integral part of our daily lives for many people. It does not only limit to the youngsters and adolescents, but parents, workers, government officers and policy makers are also drawn into the computer technology. Social Network Sites (SNS) are the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a private or public profile for the purpose of interacting with people in their present network or establishing new contacts.

Due to this phenomenon linked with academic performance, a study is in need to investigate Facebook as a tool to encourage expression of ideas among students especially at college or university level by investigating the students' attitudes toward using the information technologies in their learning tasks and identifying the factors contributing to students' confidence in expressing ideas defiantly on Facebook.

1.2   Background of Study

University College Shahputra (UCSA) began with the establishment of Institut Fitra on December 24, 1997 and was fully owned by the Shahputra Education Sdn. Bhd., a humble private Bumiputera company. In its insignifant beginning, Institut Fitra rented shop houses at, Jalan Tun Ismail, Kuantan located opposite the Berjaya Megamall, Kuantan. The building accommodated 2 classrooms, a small hall, a computer lab with 20 units of computer and an administration office.

Due to the increasing number of students, Institut Fitra moved to a new premise with a built up area of 8 hectares in Pekan, Pahang. The new location proved to be more conducive for learning. At the same time, the name Institut Fitra was renamed Kolej

Shahputra upon recommendation from Universiti Putra Malaysia and the Ministry of Education Malaysia. By 2011, Kolej Shahputra gained recognition and was upgraded to a university college with a permanent campus in Bandar Indera Mahkota, Kuantan. with an encouraging number of 4,000 students.

Initially, Shahputra had very limited programmes offered. With two courses, namely Diploma in Business Management and Diploma in Information Technology from a twinning programme with University Putra Malaysia (UPM), it expanded to many other courses not only with UPM but also with Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Gradually, after being recognized as a University College, UCSA offers diploma and degree programmes in Nursing, Medicine, Biotechnology, Pharmacy, Science, Islamic Banking, Business, Psychology, Early Childhood Education, Mass Communication and Multimedia.

As more courses are offered at the college, more students applied to study here. Quality of their previous examination results are no longer an important criteria provided that they have enough credit to enroll. Some of the students with bad result for English are still accepted to continue their studies here. Despite intensive course provided by the college, they still make no improvement. This makes it difficult for students to excel in their studies especially courses which require students to use the English language in their work assessment such as Mass Communication and Multimedia, Tourism and Art & Design.

With the concern of students' poor performance in public examinations and at the university, the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia is closely monitored and often debated in the Malaysian parliament (Kabilan, 2007). In order to further encourage the learning of English, the use of information and communication technology ICT and Internet platforms such as Facebook to assist teachers in teaching English is widely

encouraged in Malaysia at all levels by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education.

The issue of unemployment of our graduates has been a bane for the Malaysian government. It has been reported in 2006 that 70% of graduates from public universities, 26% from private higher learning institutions and 34% of those graduated from foreign universities are still jobless (Suresh, 2006). Factors commonly cited for unemployment of our local graduates are lack of communication and critical thinking skills (Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005) and not able to work in a team (Nurita, Ainon, & Shaharudin 2007). In one research study carried out in a public university, lecturers that were interviewed find that in general, student's performance and abilities have been gradually decreasing over the years (Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005). They remain passive learners, accepting what is given without any questions.

This deterioration began particularly after the Malay language replaced English as the medium of instruction in schools in 1980. English was then given official status as a second language in Malaysia. The need to learn and master English is demanded at every level of education, from primary to higher education because of its lingua franca status and its importance for business sector and knowledge dissemination.

In handling the issue discussed above, a group of students of the college is chosen as participants to examine if the social network site, particularly Facebook, can be a tool to promote the usage of English language in writing. The first semester Art & Design students are chosen for the study for a few reasons. Firstly, these students are required to design fashions in which at the end of the course they need to justify their designs in an interview session with a panel of lecturers. This interview is conducted in English language to prepare them for the real world. Secondly, these students were previously in my class and their attitude towards study is very positive. Since they are

comfortable with me as their instructor, it is rather easy to get these students to participate without much hassle. I feel that this group is best used as an experiment.

1.2   Statement of Problem

Lack of confidence in expressing ideas using the English language in class interaction and writing is very common (Tubaishat, Bhatti, & El-Qawasmeh, 2006). The same issue is present among University College Shahputra (UCSA) students. Students' inability to express their views and respond to comments on other people through writing or speaking would be a hindrance to their future success in later life. Thus, Facebook is chosen as the social network used around the world for both non-academic or learning process (Mahmud & Ching 2012, Palloff & Pratt, 2003). The virtual world is deemed appropriate as a medium to help students to be more expressive in delivering ideas and improve their confidence in using the English language. This also helps us to understand much better about the learning process that has not been taught in class. It also gives them a head start of learning something which is more understandable and productive (Bakar, 2009).

It is not only that students' lack of confidence in expressing their views that worries the institution, but the adverse effect on the students' level of performance towards the end of their course too, as it is a part of the course requirement that students will be interviewed in their final project on the product that they have created. Therefore, it is vital for these students to improve their confidence and confidence levels in order to express their feelings and ideas on their work of art more openly with others

from the use of technology   (Tubaishat, Bhatti, & El-Qawasmeh, 2006). Most importantly, students need to feel the excitement of being able to use English language in their writing in order to express their opinions or ideas about current issues, people around them, politics, religion or any topic of common interests.

For this particular reason, a study should be done to promote the use of the English language in writing through Facebook among the college students so that they can easily communicate formally and informally in their later years.

1.3.   Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to elicit students' perceptions in using Facebook and to promote the use of English in writing in their learning tasks. It also investigates the factors contributing to students' confidence in using the English language without much worry on grammatical rules. It investigates Facebook as a tool to encourage students of University College of Shahputra to improve on their written and reading abilities and at the same time boost up their confidence to communicate with peers virtually and in real life.

1.4   Research Objective

The objectives of this research project are hoped to be achieved by the study:

1. To investigate students' perceptions in using Facebook as a tool to use English in writing.

2. To identify the factors contributing to students in using English language on Facebook.

1.5   Research Question

This research is aimed at examining Facebook as a tool to promote the use of English language in writing among college students. The study attempts to answer the the following research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions in using Facebook as a tool to use English in writing?

2. What are the factors contributing to students' confidence in using English language in Facebook?

1.6   Scope of Study

This study investigates the students' perceptions in using Facebook as a tool promote English language in writing and identify the factors contributing to students' confidence in using the language on Facebook.

For this, 22 students from the UiTM Diploma in Art & Design enrolled in end of February 2013 at University College Shahputra Kuantan (UCSA) are chosen as the participants. They are taken from one of the classes taught in which the subject lecturer also acts as the course instructor. Since almost all students use the social networking to communicate with their friends and classmates, it is agreed that a Facebook group is created for easy access to the students in terms of assignments and announcements and is monitored by the course instructor. However, the main purpose of this group is to motivate students to write and respond to peers and instructor's comments or status using the targeted language no matter how simple it may sound.

For the purpose of gathering information, two important instruments are used, which are factual questionnaire and online interview. The analysis from both instruments are guided by a set of questions that is hoped to answer the research objectives. These instruments are used to complete the study for the duration of six weeks.

1.7   Significance of Study

The study of Facebook as a tool to promote the use of English language in writing would benefit several areas of the education system. First of all, the study would be able to benefit the Diploma in Art & Design students of UiTM in general. The research would be able to provide them the idea on using Facebook as a tool to promote the use of English language in writing in their learning tasks. This would allow them to perceive the social network site as more than merely furnishing the social functions but also indirectly, serving the educational purposes. **The study also would allow them to be more confident in using English on Facebook to pass comments, convey views or to make a standpoint.**

In this light, the lecturers of the English Language Department would also benefit from this study. The results of this study would allow the academic staff to become more aware that the company mission and vision can be achieved through the social network site. This way, teaching and learning affairs can be made more fun using the technology of today. At the same time, the department can achieve much better results in their examinations hence maintain the credibility of their profession.

Likewise, the twinning university of the programme, UiTM would also benefit from this study. This study would relief their concerns regarding students' inability to use the English language in communication. This would provide the institution with an option that would be able to cater to the students' specific needs.

1.8   Definitions of terms

There are a few terms in this research paper that are conceptually and operationally defined for better understanding of the readers. These include the terms for Electronic Communication, Social Network Sites, Facebook, expression of ideas, Web 2.0 and attitude.

1.8.1   Electronic Communication

In this context of study, teachers of general second language classes show their desire to provide authentic communication partners (Cohen and Miyake 1986; Paramskas 1993), the recognition of the importance of cultural exchange (Soh and Soon 1991), and the desire to teach new learning skills to language minority students (Cummins and Sayers 1990).

In the late 1980s, second and foreign language teachers began to integrate electronic communication into language teaching. For teachers of second language writing, the rationale and confidence were largely the same as for their first language counterparts.

1.8.2   Social Network Sites

In this context of study, definition of Social Network Sites (SNSs) is web based services that allow individuals to construct profile within a controlled system, where a number of selected users are whom they share connections and views with. (Adam & Nor Zairah, 2010). Boyd and Ellison (2007) also share the same definition with Adam & Nor Zairah. They suggest that these web based services can be divided three major functions like construct profile, present a list of users to whom an individual is connected and view and follow the list. Boyd and Ellison also claim that the development of these technologies, allow users to articulate and make visible their social networks, have recently taken the lead of both commercial and academic interest.

1.8.3   Facebook

In this context of study, Facebook can be utilized for authentic language interaction, and can be used to increase motivation and improve the performance of English language learners. They argue that Facebook, has "unique features that offer constructive educational experiences while maintaining privacy and safety" and that the potential of Facebook is "growing everyday with new applications" (p. 8) that are yet to be explored and examined (Kabilan, 2010)

Facebook is currently considered as the most popular platform for online social networking among university students (Kabilan, 2010). Facebook functions as virtual social networks where an individual is able to present and preserve a personal image of themselves for others to perceive and understand (Sundar, & Kleck, 2007). Meanwhile, Ilyas & Khushi (2012) propose that on Facebook people typically have peer group relations among people they know, or sometimes there are friends who are made online. On that forum people share different interests. Sharing status updates is a way of letting other people know how one feels or what is going on in one's life (Gunter, 2010). This is supported by Holtgraves, (2002) who conclude that the context for the status updates is the social networking forum and the updates would be the social action which employs language for performing an action.

Facebook, with its unique features such as feed, online games and chat encourages users to interact and engage with anyone from any parts of world in any language that they are comfortable in. However, since most of the features are in English, one has to understand English in order to participate in the activities and functions provided by Facebook. All the above features of Facebook indicate that it has potentials for English language learning in higher education institutions.

1.8.4 Expression of Ideas

In this context of study, expression of ideas is an interaction between participants is generally to facilitate the experiences that might be left underdeveloped in a discussion within the group to illuminate the research participants' perspectives (J Kitzinger, 1995).

1.8.5   Web 2.0

In this context of study Web 2.0 facilitates collaborative and distributed online practices, democratizing the content of the World Wide Web, thus offering new possibilities for digitally-mediated learning delivery. While Social Network Sites (SNS) users allows the possibility of meeting strangers and develop connections that would not have been made otherwise, this networking function is not the primary feature of these sites.

The term Web 2.0 is used around 1999 to describe the second-generation Internet experience (DiNucci, 1999; O'Reilly, 2005). This technological feature allows amplification for content creation which allows any Internet user to connect, communicate, create, and contribute in the online environment (Alexander, 2006; Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). The Web 2.0 phenomenon has opened up a vast new realm of Internet user participation and interaction, making the Internet interesting and attractive to large numbers of new users.

1.8.6   Attitude

In this context of study, students' attitude towards social networking sites is examined. Some students happily use social networking to share information about their

course with their peers, in a similar way to how they might talk to friends on Facebook. Others are much more targeted in their use of online tools -- and will only log on to get the information they need, when they need it.

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