UTILISING FACEBOOK GROUPS TO ENHANCE FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions of TESL Undergraduates in the Faculty of Education, UiTM Shah Alam, on the use of Facebook closed groups to supplement their face-to-face classes. The data are obtained from two sources which are the surveys and interviews of the respondents. The findings indicate that 54.4% the respondents dislike participating in the Facebook group. However, 77.2% of the respondents claim that they accessed the links and files that their lecturer posted in the group while 75.5% agree that Facebook can be an effective online study group. In addition, 79.5 % agree that Facebook helps them to ask questions about their studies, assignments and so on. Moreover, 61.4% wanted their lecturer to participate more in the Facebook group and 54.4% agree that some kind of incentives should be given to encourage them to participate in the online Facebook group discussions. Thus, this indicates that if the lecturers guide them and give some incentives, the respondents are willing to participate in the Facebook group. Furthermore, the findings from the interviews triangulated the findings from the surveys. In other words, what the respondents claim in the survey are also reflected in the interviews.

Keywords: Facebook groups, online interactions, asynchronous interactions, blended learning

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has provided a portal for blended learning called I-Learn. Nevertheless, the students are giving numerous excuses for not participating in the online portal such as the server is too slow to download, forgetting their password, too bored to join and the website is down. Thefore, since most of them have Facebook accounts and this social network is available on smartphones where most of them are readily online, this research was conducted to find out about their perceptions of using Facebook groups to supplement their face-to-face classroom. The use of social network could be a way which could attract the students to participate in online discussion.

Although Facebook has been associated with negative behaviour of wasting time among students, educators could explore new ways to effectively integrate Facebook as a medium to interact with students outside of their classrooms. This could eventually lead to positive social behaviour and understanding which could be difficult to cultivate in the limited time and resources in class. Features in Facebook allow

sharing links or files which could inform students not only about their present study but also motivate them to think about their future as well.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Munoz & Towner (2009, p. 2626) state that "other than the incredible usage rate among students, there are a number of unique features that make it amenable to educational pursuits. For instance, Facebook is equipped with bulletin boards, instant messaging, email, and the ability to post videos and pictures. Most notably, anyone can post information and collaborate within the system. Recently, Facebook has opened up development of downloadable applications, which can further supplement the educational functions of Facebook". The present research will also describe how the students perceive the idea of making use of Facebook to assist them in supplementing face-to-face interactions in classrooms.

Another study by Selwyn (2007, p. 1) on the education-related postings of his students finds five main themes emerged from the data that include recounting and reflecting on the university experience, exchange of practical information, exchange of academic information, display of supplication and/or disengagement and exchanges of humour and nonsense. It also argues that educators connecting with students on online social networks could help improve self-efficacy and self-regulated learning in college students. Through these online connections, they can promote students' motivation to learn, participate, and interact in classroom settings. As the respondents of Selwyn's study are native speakers, the researcher will compare his finding with her research which studies how second language learners use Facebook in education. The result could be different or similar.

Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe (2007, p. 1) examine the relationship between use of Facebook, and the formation and maintenance of social capital. Facebook usage is found to interact with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it might provide greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction. The present research described the interactions of the participants with their lecturers as well as the perceptions of the participants' on using Facebook to supplement their face-to-face classroom interaction could provide similar findings.

In addition, Bowers-Campbell (2008, p. 1) contends that educators can help improve self-efficacy and self-regulation of their college students by utilizing social networks, Facebook and MySpace, to connect on a more personal level. Although many researchers see Facebook as destroying modern discourse and damaging students' ability to learn and decipher complex texts, Bowers-Campbell notes that people everywhere love Facebook and this should be taken advantage of to improve learning techniques and create more communication between teachers and students in the new communication age. Communication is the key in education. Knowing how students communicate with each other and how they respond to people of authority, specifically educators, aids in furthering their learning because education thrives on individualistic connection rather than a stringent connection.

Russo and Benson (2005, p. 1) point out students use Facebook to meet more students at their university and connect with others with the same interests. These online communities may enhance student interactions not only among peers, but also between educators and fellow students. They further mention that more institutions of higher learning are embracing online tools and interactions. This has resulted

from emergent technology and the ever-present demand for change in education systems. The study provided evidence how students could benefit from the discussion that they have with their friends and lecturers on the specific groups I created for academic purposes. This is also important to prove that Facebook could help students interact with people of the same interest, especially their classmates more easily.

Harwood & Blackstone (2012, p. 1) introduce Facebook pages to two National University of Singapore (NUS) communication courses: Business Communication (ES2002) for business students and Professional Communication (ES2007S) for science and engineering students, focusing on skills such as effective presentation techniques, interpersonal communication and business writing. It discusses the decision-making processes concerning what type of Facebook page to use, the design, form and content of the Facebook pages, guidelines for lecturer and student use, as well as the means by which lecturers can encourage students to increase participation in courses using Facebook as an educational tool. Detailed survey feedback from a pilot study of students who used the two courses' Facebook pages is discussed. According to the researchers, the success of the course Facebook page very much depends on how educators manage it and what sorts of assignments are given. They should also upload links and make posts and comments that provide good models for the students. However, they must be careful not to dominate the platform, giving students ample time and space to contribute.

The present study examines the perceptions of the students of using Facebook to supplement their face-to-face classroom; hence it could provide insight to a more successful implementation of using Facebook in education as well as presenting suggestions by the students on how to make the interactions more engaging and beneficial to them. Hence, the study is attempted to address the following research question:

What are the UiTM TESL students' perceptions on using Facebook in academic settings?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The respondents of the study are (Teaching English as a Second Language) TESL undergraduates who are in their third year at the Faculty of Education, UiTM Shah Alam, Selangor. The respondents are selected to be the sample of the research due to convenience sampling as the researcher is working at the university and know the students. This is to ensure that the process of data collection could be carried out smoothly. Moreover, they are computer savvy and most are them are familiar and avid Facebook users. The study was only confined to data derived from the interactions of UiTM TESL students aged 21 to 24. Even though this group has been interacting in their social network, they do not represent the entire online community which is the limitation of the study. However, this cohort of Facebook users can be representative of this particular group of language users on account of their educational and ethnic background.

The data is derived from 57 respondents in a survey where they were asked about their perceptions on using Facebook as a supplement for their face-to face class for the subject Second Language Acquisition (TSL515). Then another source of data is the structured interviews that are conducted with some of the respondents as part of my attempts to ensure that data could be triangulated. Twenty five (25) male and female respondents were interviewed guided by a set of questions on their perceptions of using Facebook

as an online study group. In order to make the interview valid and reliable, the same questions as the survey questions were used to all respondents. In the process of interviewing, the researcher probed them to get more reasons of their answers. This was to confirm with the answers that they had given in the survey. Data from the questionnaires were quantitatively analysed using SPSS version 20.0. For the open ended questions, the researcher did document/content analysis where the respondents' responses to the questions were coded according to patterns or themes. Data from the interview were analysed using the same method. This is to address the research question and at the same time will triangulate the data of the study.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings from the Survey

Based on Table 1, 75.5% agree that Facebook can be an effective online study group. This is further strengthening their agreement that Facebook can be used as an effective online study group as 79.5% nagree that Facebook helps them to ask questions about their studies, assignments and so on. On the other hand, only 57.9% of the respondents agree that Facebook motivates lifelong learning and autonomous learning.

Table 1 Respondents' Perceptions in Participating in Academic Interactions on Facebook

Question	Facebook can be an effective online study group	
	No.	Percentages (%)
Strongly Agree	5	8.8
Agree	38	66.7
Disagree	14	24.5
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	57	100.00
Question	Facebook helps me to ask questions about my studies, assignments etc.	
	No.	Percentages (%)
Strongly Agree	11	19.3
Agree	40	70.2
Disagree	6	10.5
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	57	100
Question	Facebook motivates lifelong learning and autonomous learning	
	No.	Percentages (%)
Strongly Agree	2	3.5
Agree	31	54.4
Disagree	20	35.1
Strongly disagree	2	3.5
Total	55	96.49

No response: 2 (3.5%)

Based on Table 2, 54.4% the respondents dislike to participate in the Facebook group as compared to 28.1% who like to participate in the online study group. Nonetheless, 61.4% want their lecturers to participate more in the Facebook group.

Table 2 Respondents' Perceptions in Participating in Academic Interactions on Facebook

Question	I like/dislike to participate in the TSL515 FB study group.	
	No.	Percentages (%)
Like	16	28.1
Dislike	31	54.4
Not Sure	7	12.3
Total	57	100.0

No response 3 (5.3%)

Question	I want my lecturer to participate more in the TSL515 FB interaction. Yes/No.	
	No.	Percentages (%)
Yes	35	61.4
No	14	24.6
Total	49	86.0

No response 8 (14.0%)

Based on Table 3, 77.2% of the respondents claim that they accessed the links and files that their lecturer posted in the group and 54.4% agree that some kind of incentives should be given to encourage them to participate in the online Facebook group discussions.

Table 3 Respondents' Perceptions in Participating in Academic Interactions on Facebook

Question	I accessed the file/links that my lecturer posted on Facebook. Yes/No.	
	No.	Percentages (%)
Yes	44	77.2
No	11	19.3
Total	55	96.5

No response 2 (3.5%)

Question	Should there be any motivation to encourage you to participate in the online interaction via Fb group? Yes/No.	
	No.	Percentages (%)
Yes	31	54.4
No	19	33.3
Total	50	87.7

No response 7 (12.3%)

4.2 Findings from the open-ended Questions

In the open-ended questions section, the respondents were also asked about the reasons for their answers. Their answers were recorded verbatim. According to Table 4, the respondents claim that they dislike participating in the Facebook group because sometimes the discussions are difficult to understand. They also do not go online as often and are not used of using Facebook to study. Facebook can also be distracting as they tend to do other things on the internet. They also claim that they are using Facebook more for socialising than learning. Others claim that sometimes they have to wait for quite some time for the respond and that made them feel bored and discouraged. Low internet access is also another reason for not liking to participate as they claim that it will take too long to download files. A few respondents claim that they seldom access the Facebook group because sometimes the network is slow and that demotivates them to participate. They also think that if they make mistakes they are going to make a fool of themselves. Sometimes they are lazy to find answers and others say that things that they want to say have been said by others. They usually go online for leisure and go online for a short period of time. Others think that there are people who are trying to show off and just doing it for marks. There are also those who feel inferior because they may not know what the discussion is about. Others think that time

constraints and always being busy with other things are other reasons for not participating in the group. They also think that Facebook is for fun and use it to interact with friends only.

Table 4 Reasons for not Participating in the Facebook Group

Question	State anything that you don't like about using Facebook as an online study group?
Answer	**Difficult to understand**
1.	Sometimes hard to explain certain topics, i just don't prefer this method, more comfortable using fb as social medium
2.	I cannot understand the intended meaning as it is in the forming conversation/speech forms
	It's hard to get people to respond to discussion
3.	Repetition of ideas, not interactive as learning in class or face-to-face, hard to make sure all online at the same time
4.	Everyone can see my points, I'm not confident enough to state my points
5.	When it's formal, no interesting elements (pictures), when it's not interesting
6.	We can't see each other, everything is typed, could lead to misunderstanding
7.	It could be confusing since it can be redundant in class
8.	I often want to browse statuses instead of doing a discussion
	Seldom on Facebook
1.	I'm not always online, I usually forget by the time I'm online
2.	No direct face-to-face interaction
3.	No participation, private info is on stake, have to find access to internet first
4.	Late response, no responses
5.	All announcement made on fb, when i'm not online, I don't get the announcement
6.	I only logged in fb for a while or I'll get bored so I barely have time for online study group, i feel more comfortable discussing f2f, we can't chat freely as we have to type our points discussed.
7.	Not used to fb for study, don't go online often
8.	I'm not always on the net
9.	Seldom used – lost track of the topic being discussed
	Distracting
1.	Easily distracted, not all participate, doesn't feel real
2.	Will you open fb and do academic work?
3.	It tends to be something else, fb one way to socialise, fb is not suitable to study
4.	Could not upload large things, can't web chat with a lot of peopl
5.	There might be distractions
6.	Things get jumbled up, there's distractions
	Hectic
1.	If involves lecturer, too formal, less genuine/authentic, need to impress to get marks but a bit burdensome
2.	Internet access low, took hours to load few things, busy no time to go online for study group.
3.	I tend to get overwhelmed to give good answered reply, consequently, I ended up not posting anything
4.	Sometimes the discussions are too formal and long
	Lack of Motivation
1.	There are lack of participation from other members especially those from my group, which demotivates me
2.	I rarely post things but look at updates, things I want to say already said by someone else, not confident about information I want to say
3.	I like to observe what other people are discussing so that i can put it all in my own understanding
4.	Sometimes I don't feel motivated, I participate depending on the topics, sometimes I feel inferior
5.	I think those who participates are less genuine, show off, just doing it for marks and I always forget, the discussion is quite formal, hard to express opinion with the burden of formality and the lecturer might judge
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	5.	Sometimes I don't feel motivated, I participate depending on the topics, sometimes I feel inferior
	6.	I think those who participates are less genuine, show off, just doing it for marks and I always forget, the discussion is quite formal, hard to express opinion with the burden of formality and the lecturer might judge
	Slow Connection and Time Constraint	
	1.	Time constraint, internet access low, lack of knowledge, less-interested
	2.	Network connection not always accessible, i feel intimidated with my friends, i'm afraid i make mistake and make a fool of my side.
	3.	Don't have time, rarely online on Facebook, focus on assignments
	4.	Network connection not always accessible, i feel intimidated with my friends, i'm afraid i make mistake and make a fool of myself.
	Too lazy to find answers	
		I am not interested, have no time, lazy to find answers for questions asked
		There are lack of participation from other members especially those from my group, which demotivates me.
	Facebook is for fun	
	1.	Facebook is just for fun, not suitable to discuss on Facebook, I log in for short time just interact with friends and I put aside formal interaction.
	2.	It's stressful to use facebook as a learning tool I usually do online for leisure

4.3 Findings from the Interview responses of the Respondents

The interviews were carried out among 25 respondents for data triangulation. The researcher started the interview by asking them how many times they accessed Facebook. Most of them claim they access Facebook almost every day but respondent 1 and respondent 4 said that they will only accessed if there are postings from the lecturer of their friends. This is based on Extract 1

Extract 1
Respondent 1
When there are postings from you or my friends I will access it but if not I won't. Because I assume there is nothing new but if there are new
Respondent 4
Only if there is an announcement or anything

When asked the question whether they prefer using Facebook for academic and non-academic interactions most of them prefer using Facebook for non-academic interactions. This is based on the responses of respondents 4, 8 and 11 in Extract 2

Extract 2
Respondent 4
Facebook is for escapism Madam.. not serious stuff.. I will just...hmm write anything I want
Respondent 8
Facebook is where I could release tension Madam .. so serious stuff is not very suitable Madam.

Respondent 11
Question: Do you prefer to use Facebook for non-academic or academic interactions?
Answer : Non-academic
Question : Why?
Answer : My internet connection is not stable Madam ... I don't like to stare in front of PC too long

The interview also revealed that most of them think that Facebook can be an effective online such as respondent 18 but respondent 5 thinks otherwise based on extract 3

Extract 3
Respondent 18
Question: Do you think Facebook can be use as effective online study group?
Answer: Well, I think so because you can open the link and go to other websites
Respondent 5
Question: Do you think Facebook can be used as an effective online study group?
Answer: No
Question: Why?
Answer: Facebook is more suitable for socialising Madam..study group.. I don't think so .. too serious, tedious.. no time to respond to the question.

In the interview, the respondents are asked if they think Facebook helps them to ask questions about their studies and whether Facebook promotes autonomous learning. Most of them agree to the statements such as based on the responses of respondents 6, 22 and 23 in Extract 4.

Extract 4
Respondent 6
Question: Do you think Facebook help you to ask questions about your studies and so on?
Answer: Sometimes..I can also read other people's answer on the wall
Question: Do you think Facebook promote lifelong and autonomous learning?
Answer: I think so because I use my own time to get info from the link

Respondent 22
Question: Do you think Facebook promote lifelong and autonomous learning?
Answer: Yes. It enhances my knowledge, it allows me to exchange and retrieve knowledge

Respondent 23
Question: Do you think Facebook promote lifelong and autonomous learning?
Answer: Yes. I think it provides me knowledge of SLA and encourages me for critical thinking

When asked anything that they did not like about the Facebook group, they feel that sometimes someone has answered the questions, too tedious and they have no time to access it. This is based on the responses of respondents 7, 17 and 23 in extract 5.

Extract 5
Respondent 7
Question: Can you tell me anything you don't like about the Facebook group?
Answer: Sometimes when I want to participate, my friend already answer it .. so no point Madam.
Question: Anything else?

Answer: Well.. mostly I have no time to participate .. I also seldom online.. too busy ..Madam.

Respondent 17
Question: Can you tell me anything you don't like about the Facebook group?
Answer: I don't have time Madam.. too busy

Respondent 23
Question: Can you tell me anything you don't like about the Facebook group?
Answer: I hate reading the long posting .. too tedious

The respondents also inform that they accessed the files and link that are posted by their lecturers and want their lecturer to participate more in the group because they want inputs from the authority or experts and their lecturer can confirm their answers. This is based on the responses of respondents 10, 19 and 23 in Extract 8. However, respondent 11 said it was unnatural to participate in the group as the lecturers were present and they had to behave themselves every time.

Extract 8
Respondent 10
Question: Do you access the files and links that your lecturer posted?
Answer: Yes... but not all yet .. I will soon when I have time Madam
Question: Do you want your lecturer to participate more in the group?
Answer: Yes... I don't mind…lecturers can confirm our answer madam and they can provide more knowledge too.

Respondent 19
Question: Do you want your lecturer to participate more in the group?
Answer: Yes. He can motivate me to read the postings

Respondent 23
Question: Do you access the files and links that your lecturer posted?
Answer: Yes. Of course
Question: Why?
Answer: I find them helpful.

Respondent 11
Question: Do you want your lecturer to participate more in the TSL515 FB interaction via Fb group?
Answer: Yes...sometimes..but sometimes I feel that I am not free to say what I want to say. For instance Madam, I will be careful to choose the right words to say...because I'm afraid the lecturer will judge me.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study has provided empirical evidence of the students' perceptions on using Facebook in education through the use of surveys and interviews. According to Munoz and Towner (2009, p. 2623) little empirical research has been conducted on the value of Web 2.0 (social network) in education. The findings from the interviews triangulated the findings from the surveys. In other words, what the respondents claim in the survey are also reflected in the interviews. Although 86% of the respondents prefer to use Facebook for non-academic interactions, 75.5% agree that Facebook can be an effective online study group. This is further strengthening their agreement that Facebook can be used as an effective online study group as 79.5 % agree that Facebook helps them to ask questions about their studies,

assignments and so on. The findings also concur with Munoz & Towner (2009, p. 2626) who state that "other than the incredible usage rate among students, there are a number of unique features that make it amenable to educational pursuits. For instance, Facebook is equipped with bulletin boards, instant messaging, email, and the ability to post videos and pictures. Most notably, anyone can post information and collaborate within the system. Recently, Facebook has opened up development of downloadable applications, which can further supplement the educational functions of Facebook". The findings show that the students are aware of the benefits using the technology such as Facebook in education. Thus, the findings also confirm Russo & Benson (2005, p. 1) findings that more institutions of higher learning are embracing online tools and interactions. This has resulted from emergent technology and the ever-present demand for change in education systems.

The findings are also is quite similar to Cohen's (2011, p. 1) who carries out an exploratory correlational design study to survey 283 Facebook members who were currently students enrolled in higher education through an intentional snowball sampling technique. Descriptive analysis was used to reveal that Facebook members generally did not perceive Facebook as a useful or important factor in achieving their academic goals, did not desire Facebook contact from their professor, or did not believe Facebook should be integrated into the educational process. In the present study, although 54.4% disliked participating in the Facebook group and 86% of the respondents prefer to use Facebook for non-academic interactions, 61.4% of the respondents wanted their lecturer to participate more in the Facebook group and 77.2% accessed the files and links posted by the lecturer.

The findings agree with the study by Harwood & Blackstone (2012, p. 1) on the use of Facebook for educational purposes. According to the researchers, the success of the course Facebook page very much depends on how educators manage it and what sorts of assignments are given. They should also upload links and make posts and comments that provide good models for the students. However, they must be careful not to dominate the platform, giving students ample time and space to contribute. This study which is quite similar to Harwood & Blackstone's study provides findings that 61.4% of the respondents expected the lecturer to post links and notes to the Facebook and expect feedback from the lecturers on their posted answers. Therefore, this shows that, the respondents will make use of Facebook in education if they have support and guidance from their lecturer.

Further research on the advantages and disadvantages of using Facebook to supplement face to face (f-t-f) classroom could also be explored. Other than that, more studies could be conducted on other popular social networks such as Twitter. Is Twitter suitable for educators to draw the attention of the students to participate in academic online interactions? Nowadays, other forms of social networks are getting more popular such as 'Whatsapp' and 'Telegram'. More research could be done to find out how people interact in these social networks as they are more private and personal. Besides that, more research could be conducted to investigate the use of these social networks for educational purposes as now technology is changing rapidly.

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