

# The Effectiveness of Facebook Groups on Teaching and Improving Writing: Students' Perceptions

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**Abstract**—Language learning has grown beyond the boundaries of the four walls of the classroom; in fact, most language learning occurs outside and informally. Informal learning, through a medium like ICT therefore, is a significant alternative environment for language practice and use. This study attempts to investigate the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of Facebook (FB) groups for teaching and improving writing. The authors see a need to carry out this study as it provides a platform to discover pedagogical implications that would benefit the Y-generation in terms of improving their writing skills in a Malaysian ESL context. The respondents of this research comprise 43 third year students completing their bachelor's degree in TESL, in the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The students' perceptions were measured through a questionnaire comprising 10 close-ended items and 3 open-ended ones. Respondents were required to participate in a Facebook group created by the researchers. The Facebook group, called 'Write Out Loud' was hosted by Facebook here:

[http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_193133474042344&ap=1](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_193133474042344&ap=1). The findings showed that 'Facebook groups' is an effective tool in improving the students' writing skills, especially in the brainstorming of ideas before the actual writing. The results of this study may be beneficial to ESL educators in incorporating ICT into their teaching repertoire. It is suggested that future research should focus on the challenges of integrating Facebook groups for teaching and improving writing, and look into the perceptions of the teachers as well. In addition, experimental research could also be done to see how FB and FB groups help in improving writing skills.

**Key-Words**— Facebook, Facebook Groups, ICT, Writing, Learning, Perception, Social Network

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development in information and communication technologies (ICTs), various changes have been made in terms of the methods in the teaching and learning process [1-6]. Currently, social networks are used by millions of users, most of whom are students and adolescents, for a variety of purposes but with a heavy emphasis on social needs. Social networks are defined as web-based services that

allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public

profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system [7]. Some of the examples of social networking sites are MySpace, Friendster, Twitter and Facebook. Although Facebook started out in early 2004 as a

Harvard-only social networking site [7], Facebook is currently the leading social networking site with more than 500 million active users as of March 2011 [8]. Interestingly, 70% of Facebook users are from outside of the US. Indonesia has the highest number of Facebook users in Asia, numbering 18.9 million, while Malaysia follows in the fifth rank with 5.1 million users [9]. According to Facebook statistics, its users spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook. The Facebook phenomenon is happening all over the world. In America, 42% of teens of ages 12-17 communicate via Facebook, replacing landline phones and email [10]. Undeniably, the young generation now is spending more and more time online, and on Facebook. The question is, with the growing amount of time the youth is spending on social networking sites like Facebook, how should educators consider these to be of value for educational purposes? Truly, in this era of technological advancement, ICT and the Internet, teachers have an invaluable well of resources from which to draw from. Unfortunately, these sources' potential as a tool for learning in the classroom has not been fully tapped into by ESL educators. The researchers, therefore, have chosen to investigate the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of Facebook groups, a feature available on Facebook, as a medium that is both fun and interesting especially to the ICT-savvy Y-generation youth of today, for teaching and improving writing.

The focus of this was limited to the use of Facebook groups only. Studies that deal with other social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace, Friendster and Tumblr were excluded. This decision is made because Facebook is currently the most popular online social networking site among students [11]. 'Facebook groups' is a feature that is available on the social networking site Facebook. This feature allows for an unlimited number of members to participate, communicate and interact via post and chat style for a specific purpose. For this study, a Facebook group was created specifically for the purpose of providing students with a space where they were in control of the content and the direction of their learning, as well as providing more opportunities for students to write. The teacher merely acts as a facilitator for the group. Facebook groups also allow for almost immediate feedback and fun interaction that the researchers hope will motivate students in improving their writing. The researchers hypothesize that Facebook groups will benefit the students in the brainstorming stage of the writing process the most. However, the researchers are also open to investigate how Facebook groups might impact other aspects of writing and motivation as a whole. In order to facilitate the investigation regarding the

effectiveness of FB groups in teaching and improving writing, the researchers formulated the following research questions:

1. How does FB group help students in their writing process?
2. What are some of the challenges teachers might face in integrating FB group into the teaching of writing?
3. How does FB group influence the affective domain of the students in terms of writing?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Social Networks and Facebook*

In this age of modern technology and ICTs, online social networks have captured the attention of educators and policy-makers as an alternative tool for language teaching and learning. Bartlett-Bragg defined social networks as a “range of applications that augments group interactions and shared spaces for collaboration, social connections, and aggregates information exchanges in a web-based environment” [6] [12]. While social networking sites (SNSs) have integrated a wide range of technical features, they basically consist of a ‘profile’ and a list of ‘Friends’ who are also users of the system [7]. The user has complete control over the content of his or her profile, and in some SNSs, its visibility to other users as well. Besides the ‘profile’ and ‘Friends’ list, these SNSs offer ‘commenting’ and ‘private messaging’ features, photo-sharing and video-sharing capabilities too. However, between different SNSs, different visibility and access options are provided. Currently, the most popular of these SNSs is Facebook. FB is essentially a personalized profile of which users have complete control over its content. A user’s profile can be viewed by other users in the same ‘network’ by default, unless the profile owner specifies otherwise. Users are able to share photos, comment on friends’ walls, send messages, chat, create and join groups within this online community. Of educational interest is the fact that this means that users are continuously involved in the sharing of information, interacting and communicating with other users, collaboration and the sharing of ideas and opinions via posts and status updates. Hence, the researchers believe that FB possesses huge potential as an educational tool due to these features offered [13].

### B. *Informal Learning and Facebook*

Language learning has grown beyond the boundaries of the four walls of the classroom; in fact, most language learning occurs outside and informally. Informal learning, through a medium like ICT therefore, is a significant alternative environment for language practice and use and thus, should not be taken lightly. Informal learning experiences are seen as the link or the bridge between social media and academic content. So it offers more opportunities for students to be highly engaged with educational content in formal learning settings [14]. Educators are too rigid and narrow-minded in the idea that learning cannot take place outside of a classroom. For certain, learning shall always require a formal setting in which the dissemination of

knowledge can occur. However, the learning processes that go on outside of the classroom through the use of technology—negotiation of meaning, construction of knowledge, social and inter-personal interactions and formation of relationships—are equally as important. Selwyn (2007) validates this:

computers and other aspects of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) allow children and young people a wide variety of activities and experiences that can support learning, yet many of these transactions do not take place in traditional educational settings. In fact, many of these may not be considered ‘educational’ according to our conventional understanding of that term [15].

In a research conducted with first year undergraduate students at a British university, most of them generally saw FB mainly as a means for social interactions, secondly for informal learning purposes but completely rejected the idea of FB being used as a tool for formal teaching [16]. Focusing on FB use for informal learning, 46% of the respondents conceded that though they started using FB for purely social reasons, they increasingly used FB for discussing academic work on a daily or weekly basis. More importantly, these discussions, revisions and academic queries were all student-initiated, and not a requirement for a course. However, the fact remains that students still see FB as a social tool, and not an academic one.

Selwyn also discusses the potential of Web 2.0 applications as alternative environments in informal learning and finds that while FB holds personal and social significance, it also plays a strong role in student language learning. Selwyn claims that FB reflects a good model of learning by its collaborative and active participatory roles of its users. In a FB community, community building, inter-personal relationships and social networking occur without the conscious effort of the user. This can be seen as learning and practice opportunities for learners via informal learning, which occurs outside of the classroom. Learners work together to construct knowledge, work collaboratively to negotiate content and meaning and indirectly learn from one another, forming a dynamic community that builds each member up. This is in line with the notion of constructivism, which is relevant to how FB has come to be used by its current users. Blattner & Fiori also highlight the benefits of authentic language interaction as well as the socio-pragmatic awareness that is gained through use of FB groups, which are more often than not neglected if learned through language text books [17].

### C. *Why Facebook? Affective Influences of Facebook*

Facebook is now the forerunner as far as social networking sites go, in addition to which, it is a Web 2.0 application which boasts high user-content and participation. As with all Web 2.0 applications, FB is designed in a way that facilitates mass participation from its users. O’Reilly, who is generally accepted to be the originator of the relatively new

term 'Web 2.0', refers to the 'network effects' of such applications, whereby the value and usefulness of the service or web activity actually improves in tandem with the increase of participating users [18]. This worldwide sharing of information and content is done collaboratively and in innovative ways which are in no way possible for any one single person. FB, therefore, can be seen as a platform in which students are able to appreciate and value the benefits of collaborative learning, which are not available to them if they are to work individually. FB clearly has the ability to connect learners with each other in new networks of collaborative learning that are both social and academic in nature [15].

SNSs have grown in popularity because it allows people, especially adolescents, to socialize and interact with peers in the comfort of their own homes. The use of social networks has been considered as collective social action [11]. The youth have also found an audience of peers who are able to communicate and provide feedback to the content posted on these sites. Simply put, one of the main reasons why the use of SNSs has increased rapidly is because individuals yearn to find others who share similar interests whether it is for social or romantic purposes [19]. Researchers have also proposed that interactions over SNSs may actually result in stronger bonds of relationships compared to those face-to-face [19] [20]. This is because these sites have a tendency to produce more self-disclosures and personal self-expressions from its users and thus forge deeper relationships between the user and his or her friends. Users also seem to feel more secure in revealing more private information which they normally would not do in a face-to-face interaction. This also implies that users are more confident in sharing details about themselves by asking and responding to more personal questions over these SNSs.

With the emergence of advanced ICT, much investment has been made into incorporating these technologies into the existing learning environments as an attempt to revolutionize the teaching and learning process. Yet, not much evidence has been shown to prove significant changes and outcomes in the teaching and learning process as a result of that. In fact, research has found that learners complain instead of the lack of authentic communication in content as in, for instance, podcast lectures [21]. Alexander argues that the gains from interactive activities in class are irreplaceable by recorded lectures, stating that "any teacher that can be replaced by a podcast should be" [22]. This highlights the importance of the interactive quality of any activity in the teaching and learning process, regardless of how advanced the technology may be.

The researchers believe that the highly-interactive chat feature of FB groups contributes to the setting of an almost instantaneous feedback environment, in which students are able to receive comments or responses to what they have posted at a fast pace. Students want to get instant communication and connection with their friends [11]. Stern studied the expressions of identity that adolescents do online and found that the authors, the adolescents themselves, seem to signal their desire for an audience through their writing [23]. She also argues that the youth desire responses to the

content posted, perhaps for self-validation or the formation of relationships. More importantly, would be the feedback received from their peers, and not just the teacher. The researchers believe that 'FB Groups' has the potential to give the youth what they desire, so to speak, with its interactive, easy-feedback features, and thus, create a positive environment that is encouraging and conducive for aiding the writing process for the young people of the Y-generation of today. A dynamic sense of community is formed from the solidarity of belonging to the same group, as well as unity because each member shares one common learning goal or purpose.

FB and social networking sites in general, are seen as forms of self-disclosure for adolescents. They offer clues to the thoughts, feelings, concerns and worldviews of this group of people. Consistent with Burhmester & Prager's Model of Self-Disclosure and Individual Development, peer feedback could certainly influence self-esteem, both negatively and positively [24]. Similarly, with FB groups, this notion applies. Response to a user's comment could be offered whether the author wants it or not. If the feedback received is positive, the student's self-esteem could be boosted, further motivating the child to learn and write; however, if the feedback is negative, the student's sense of self could be affected, de-motivating him from writing again. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that FB and FB groups may have an effect on students' self-esteem.

Students have also lamented the lack of opportunities for authentic communication where the content is always personalized and relatable in language learning. This is precisely why researchers thought it important to somehow integrate social networks into the teaching and learning practices, which is to provide students with authentic learning experiences [12]. FB provides learners with a space to dictate the content of learning, which is then both authentic and personalized. This will boost a learner's sense of self by being able to be the source of the content, and also motivate learners in language learning due to the link between their social and personal life, and the educational setting.

Kabilan et al. conducted a research investigating if FB can be a useful and meaningful learning environment that could support or enhance language learning in English [13]. Their findings show that, in terms of affective factors, students' confidence, motivation and attitudes improved significantly. Students claim that using FB has boosted their confidence as well as made them more daring to use the language especially in terms of writing. Majority of the learners also concurred that FB motivated them to read and write in English, since everything is in English, while 74.1% of the students say that participation in FB has inculcated a more positive attitude towards learning English. Overall, FB has been shown to boost confidence, motivate and foster a positive attitude towards English language learning.

#### *D. Facebook and Writing*

Students are engaged in a good deal of writing even in

this era of ICT – in blogs, Twitter, text messages and, of course, FB. Strangely, students considered these types of informal writing as “communication” and not likened to the “writing” tasks that are given in schools [25]. This shows that students are still unable to see the connection between the writing learned in the classroom and the meaningful communicative use outside of the classroom. Yancey then proposes the use of FB in helping students make that link in order to make them better writers. The researcher then also believes that FB, and specifically FB groups, has the potential to improve students’ writing skills by being the link between academic “writing” and outside “communication”, providing learners with an authentic and personalized context in which to aid their writing [25].

‘FB groups’ provides a space where ideas are posted in view of all, to be open to criticism as well as praise. Higher order thinking skills are put into play in organizing, synthesizing and analyzing these ideas both by oneself and peers in constructing knowledge. This makes up for meaningful learning when the members of the group are able to generate ideas that are shared by, and built upon through the response and feedback given by peers. A student may also gain confidence in writing through the fact that his or her ideas are supported and agreed upon by peers, made known through the feedback received in the group. While sharing views, exchanging messages and comments on FB, students certainly develop a confidence in writing in English as a byproduct of their online socialization [13].

‘FB groups’ provides ample opportunities for students to practice and improve their writing skills. Studies show that students feel obliged to respond to their peers’ comments or opinions posted, thus are actively “posting” and “commenting” on the application. They take every opportunity to practice their writing skills. Students also discover new sentence or writing structures by reading the comments and posts from their peers [13]. These show that writing skills are very much emphasized in FB group participation and thus has a high potential of enhancing and improving students’ writing skills.

#### *E. Challenges of Integrating ICT and Facebook Groups*

Despite the advantages and recommendation of integrating ICT and FB group into teaching, there are some distinguishable challenges that must be taken into account before applying it into actual teaching. FB, a type of Computer Mediated Communication, enables communication to occur by the means of computer technology [26] [27]. One of the disadvantages for this type of ICT is the absence of face-to-face communication and immediate feedback. Walther & Bunz elaborated that by the exchanging of ideas and opinions via Internet and computer, it is difficult for FB users to convey some complex and abstract ideas [28]. This might lead to misunderstandings or misleading of ideas which is not beneficial for students’ learning. Furthermore, media such as newspapers and television news had also reported on the risk and dangers of FB based on the negative issues that arose.

Issues highlighted are the existence of predators, disclosing of personal details and also the sharing of obscene or illegal activities. And yet, millions of users are still active in FB for the attractive features that are available on the site.

Selwyn has brought up that the introduction of Web 2.0 and ICT for learners’ educational purpose has generated an issue regarding users’ safety on the networks [15]. By promoting learning via ICT tools, the learners are also exposed to the risk of inappropriate action and behaviors that people can do freely on the World Wide Web without much restriction. By showing their information and details online, their details will be revealed openly and can be viewed by people all around the world [29].

Similarly, Berson & Berson have also shared that many young girls are reported to be involved in risky online activities such as disclosing personal details, sending their photos to online peers and even agreeing to face-to-face meetings with the newly-known strangers [39]. Therefore, they are exposed to the risks of threatening behaviors such as stalking, spamming, and verbal assault. This shows that youngsters nowadays are not aware of the risks that all these behaviors entail, and unintentionally put their lives in danger.

Correspondingly, Murray proposed the fact that more than a third of children nowadays have personal accounts on a social networking site [31]. This is again, mentioned by White in his research on the use of FB to improve students’ motivation and academic writing [32]. This significant number of social networking site users also indicate concerns to issues of lacking privacy of information that may contribute to cases such as identity theft, bullying, online stalking, embarrassment and even blackmailing as pointed out by Gross & Acquisti [33].

While there is immense hype on the benefits of incorporating Web 2.0 and popular SNSs like FB into the education scene, these potential learning benefits are not exactly clear-cut. Selwyn’s findings imply that educational learning on FB may be too informal [15]. This gives rise to the issue whereby the onus is completely on the teacher to somehow cater to and ensure that students’ educational needs are met, and that the specific learning objectives are achieved when using FB in ESL learning. Even more worrying, Selwyn states that students’ FB use is often at a tangent with the official learning aims of educators, which means that students’ learning on FB may go off in opposite directions to the designated learning aims [15].

In terms of integrating FB group into teaching, a problem with regards to time management and self-discipline needs to be addressed. Selwyn has mentioned that other than security problems, FB is also widely used by students in order to ‘hang out’ [15]. In addition, students waste a lot of their time learning about their friends with the aim of improving their relationships on FB. Pempek et al. have also shared ideas on FB being used for online lurking [34]. Majority of the users’ time is spent on FB to read and view others’ information without interacting directly in any way. This shows that they log on to FB solely for the main purpose of

updating themselves with what their friends are doing most of the time. They place the importance of using FB for socialization far more than other educational purposes.

Furthermore, Kabilan et al. have also written similar ideas on the challenges of the online environment for the learning of English [13]. Some of the negative impacts mentioned are wasting or overspending of time [35], promoting negative attitudes among students, and last but not least, affecting students' development destructively [36]. In incidental learning, the focus of students should be on the learning process instead of the social process on the FB site. Therefore, it is very important to draw students' awareness and attention on the aspects of learning on FB so that learners will be clear of their learning goal and will be working towards it.

Faudree conducted a survey on how Manchester College students used the social networking site, FB [37]. A similar idea of FB as a way that users do to waste time is being proposed. According to the study, students procrastinate and waste their time over Internet network and activities done on FB. As an example, Schiesel stated that instead of doing other more important works, students were found to be stuck in features offered by FB such as the various free games offered [38]. Some of the free popular games offered are 'Sorority Life' and 'Mafia Wars'. Most of the games do not end in a single session and this requires and traps the users to keep coming back and continue playing. If this phenomenon happens for a long duration, it will cause "FB addiction" [39]. Users will then end up spending most of their time in a day updating their profile, extending their social network and looking at other users' information and photos. This distraction, which is a form of negative impact, needs to be considered by educators as one of the major problems expected to be faced by students, if FB were to be incorporated into the teaching and learning process.

Stern & Taylor added that one factor that contributes to the distraction and procrastination is due to the accessibility of FB [26]. Nowadays, students can easily get instant access to FB by using their cell phones. With the aid of technology, the unhealthy habit of constantly checking their FB for new updates and notifications becomes an inevitable routine, and in extreme cases, an obsession.

For the integration of FB group in particular, its integration into the teaching and learning process also has its obstacles. The group membership is one of the problems to be focused on. Pempek et al. proposed that joining FB group does not guarantee active participation in the group [34]. Students may join due to demands, but they do not perform and participate in the group discussion to enhance their learning as the researchers expected. From the study, over half of the students (52.17%) did not participate during the week in the FB group prior to completing the survey. Their interaction in the group is reported to be less than one day per week. Moreover, students involved did not use the group as the researchers had expected, such as using the group to discuss serious topics, interact with people with the same interests,

express their ideas or to connect with other people from a real world group. This too can be seen from a study done by White [32]. Although the discussion group on FB was created for the students to promote interaction, it was found that most of the students were reluctant in giving participation and comments to their friends in the group.

### III. METHOD

#### *A. Participants*

This study was carried out in University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in January 2011. A quantitative and qualitative (mixed method) survey study exploring the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of FB groups for teaching and improving writing would be beneficial in identifying the fundamental issues that are of concern to the students using FB and FB groups for learning. For this purpose, 43 Year 3 students from the Faculty of Education, UKM who are completing their Bachelor's degree in Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) were selected as participants to this survey. The respondents were added in a FB group created for this research called 'Write Out Loud'. They were required to participate and be involved in the tasks prepared by the researchers including summary writing and brainstorming. Participants were also encouraged to take part in contributing ideas and giving opinions actively. All this was done to create a conducive learning environment, and thus, enable participants to experience how FB groups can be used to improve writing skills, particularly in a Malaysian ESL context. In the final stage, they were each required to respond to a 13-item questionnaire distributed after one month of participation in the FB group created.

#### *B. Instrument and Data Analysis*

The research design for this study is mixed method survey. The 13 questions in the questionnaire aim to explore respondents' perceptions of how FB groups can be used in enhancing their writing skills in terms of the overall impact of FB groups in all stages of the writing process. The questionnaire was done by the respondents in hard copies. The questionnaire that researchers have constructed consisted of four parts. Part one solicited demographic information of the students while Part two on their usage of FB and FB groups. The demographic information collected were age, gender and students' language proficiency via their band acquired for the Malaysian University Entrance Test (MUET). Part two solicited whether or not each participant has a FB account, how often they log on to FB, whether or not they are familiar with FB groups and if they were part of any other FB groups other than the one created for the purpose of this study.

The next two parts were labeled Section A and Section B. Section A comprised 10 open-ended items with a 4-level Likert Scale of 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree'. The option of 'Unsure' is not included so as to ensure all participants have a stand whether to agree or disagree to a statement. Section B comprised 3 open-ended questions to allow participants to give their opinions on how

FB groups help them in the writing process the most, the main challenge of using FB groups for writing and whether or not 'FB groups' increases their motivation or confidence to write, and their justifications.

For the analysis of the demographic data, frequency and percentages were used; whereas for the description of items in the construct, mean scores, frequency and percentages were employed to describe the students' views on FB groups as a means for teaching and improving writing. As for the 3 open-ended items, the students' views were categorized into emerging domain themes and analyzed accordingly. The qualitative data were used to support and give meaning to the quantitative data analysis, and for systematic analysis and presentation of each student's excerpts, each student was coded R001, R002, R003...R043, respectively. The comments from the respondents were cited as they were expressed or stated by the students in the space provided for each open-ended question in Section B.

### *C. Construction of Questionnaire Items*

The 13 items in the questionnaire were constructed based on the research questions for this study. The research questions are:

1. How does FB group help students in their writing process?
2. What are some of the challenges teachers might face in integrating FB group into the teaching of writing?
3. How does FB group influence the affective domain of the students in terms of writing?

The items in the questionnaire have been grouped in such a way so as to address the 3 areas of the writing process, the predicted challenges and the affective domain of participants:

#### *Section A*

##### *A. Writing Process*

1. Brainstorming on FB group helps organize my thoughts before the actual writing.
2. I learn new vocabulary from reading the comments of others on the FB group.
3. The spell-check feature helps me reduce spelling errors.
4. Ideas or opinions posted by my peers on FB group help me in getting a better idea before writing.
5. I find it easier to complete my essays after participating in FB group discussion.

Items 1-3 in this section investigate certain aspects of the writing process, including the organization of ideas, vocabulary building and spelling. The next two items explore if FB group provides students with the content knowledge for writing tasks.

##### *B. Challenges*

6. I will read the articles or materials before I share them on the FB group.
7. While on FB group, I tend to be distracted by other features of FB.

This section provides insights to the challenges that the researchers predict educators might face implementing FB

group in the teaching of writing.

##### *C. Affective Domain*

8. I feel comfortable posting my ideas or opinions on FB group.
9. I feel encouraged by my friends "liking" my ideas or comments.
10. I prefer discussing issues or topics on FB group instead of in a classroom session.

The researchers also looked into the socio-emotional atmosphere in a FB group and if it influences their motivation for writing.

#### *Section B*

In Section B, these questions were posed to solicit respondents' views and ideas in further detail:

1. In what way do FB groups help you in the writing process the most? How?
2. What is the main challenge of using FB groups for writing?
3. After participating in the FB group, does it increase you motivation or confidence to write? If yes, how? If no, why?

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented in five sections. First, the demographic data are presented, which is then followed by the respondents' usage of FB and FB groups. In the next three sections, the findings are grouped according to the domains which we have identified to group the 10 close-ended items mentioned earlier: the writing process, challenges and the affective domain. The findings of each open-ended item in the questionnaire are integrated in the domain each is grouped under.

### *A. Demographic Data*

There are 26 female (60%) and 17 male (40%) respondents who participated in the FB group and responded to the questionnaire. All the respondents are in the age group of 21-28 years. The gender figures are almost representative of the ratio of the general population of university students in the TESL programme of UKM. In terms of their language proficiency, all respondents' MUET band are 4 and above. Bands 4, 5 and 6 constitute 'Competent User', 'Good User' and 'Very Good User' respectively. Therefore, all respondents have good command of the English Language, with 36 (83.7%) of them in Band 4, 4 (9.3%) in Band 5 while another 3 (7.0%) in Band 6.

### *B. Usage of Facebook and Facebook Groups*

The first item asked has confirmed that each respondent has a FB account. 31 out of 43 (72%) respondents log on to FB very frequently with the selection of options '2-3 hours a day' and 'more than 3 hours a day' whereas only 12 out of 43 (28%) selected the options of 'one or twice a week' and 'less than an hour daily' which showed that they log on to FB infrequently. All 43 of them are familiar with FB groups and are involved in more than one FB group other than 'Write Out

Loud'. This data is useful to give researchers an idea that all respondents are familiar with FB groups, which means that they are familiar with the features in FB groups, have spent some time either reading posts or dropping comments there, and are aware of the different ways of sharing on FB groups like posting a photo, sharing links to websites and posting documents. When the experience of the respondents are taken into account, the data collected based on their perspectives can be valid because they are responding based on the past experience of using FB groups.

### C. Facebook Groups and Writing

Items 1-5 in Section A of the questionnaire are posed to find out the respondents' perceptions of FB groups in improving writing. The findings are grouped into two large categories: Cumulative Disagree to represent the cumulative data percentage of respondents' selection of 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' and the other Cumulative Agree to represent the cumulative data percentage of 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Students' perceptions of FB groups in improving writing

No.	Item	Cumulative Disagree (%)	Cumulative Agree (%)
1	Brainstorming helps organize thoughts before writing.	14.0	86.0
2	Learning new vocabulary from comments.	18.6	81.4
3	Reduce spelling error through spell-check feature.	11.7	88.3
4	Getting a better idea before writing.	4.7	95.3
5	Easier to complete essays after participation.	14.0	86.0

From Table 1, it is inferred that more than 80% of respondents generally agree to the statements which lead to the point that the FB group does help in their writing process. The data in this table also gives answers to the first research question on how FB group helps students in their writing process. It is now shown that 'FB groups' helps in the brainstorming process, in organizing their thoughts before the actual writing, learning new vocabulary from reading comments of others in the group, reducing spelling errors via the spell-check feature, helping to get a better idea before writing from the ideas or opinions posted by friends, and students finding it easier to complete their essays after participating in the FB group discussion. The highest cumulative percentage is 95.3% who agree to the statement 'Ideas or opinions posted by my peers on FB group help me in getting a better idea before writing'. This shows the

importance of the flow of ideas and opinions by all members in the group discussion on FB.

The researchers acknowledge the fact that a teacher's role as facilitator in the group discussion is vital because if the ideas and opinions are not monitored closely in terms of their relevance to the topic discussed, it could very much affect the idea that students will have before the actual writing. It is also an advantage to teachers when they use FB groups because from the second highest cumulative percentage of 88.3% who agree and strongly agree, their spelling errors have reduced through the spell check feature in FB. When students are unsure of the spelling of a word, if they were to type it in the comment space, red lines would appear if the spelling is incorrect. From this feature, they could easily 'right-click' on the word to see the suggested spelling of words by the spell-check feature. This is something which 'paper and pen' writing lacks and if students were to encounter problems with the right spelling, it would be tedious for them to look them up in the dictionary too.

From the qualitative data gathered from the first open-ended question 'In what way do FB groups help you in the writing process the most? How?', it is found that all respondents have something to say on how FB group helps them in their writing process. Some of the high frequency comments given include FB groups helping in the brainstorming process, to organize thoughts and increase vocabulary.

One respondent responded "Facebook group helps me in the planning stage before the actual writing, in the brainstorming process and also to generate ideas for my writing" (R020) and another "From the FB group discussion, I can read different ideas and opinions and generate more ideas from there" (R031). Some other comments given include:

- 1) 'Helps in getting tips on the format of writing' (R007)
- 2) 'Activates prior knowledge before the actual writing' (R011)
- 3) 'Helps in terms of spelling, friends will give correction if there are mistakes in spelling' (R029)

It is seen from all the comments that there is a form of acknowledgment from the respondents that FB group really helps in their writing process, especially in the pre-writing stage which includes the process of brainstorming for ideas and the proper organization of thoughts, as well as spelling error checks from peers.

### D. Challenges of Using Facebook Groups for Writing

Researchers have constructed item 6 and item 7 in Section A as the prediction of the challenges that respondents might face when they participate in FB groups for discussion on writing. First is whether or not the respondents will really read through the articles or materials before they share them on the FB group. Secondly, whether or not they tend to be distracted by other features on FB while on the FB group. Table 2 illustrates the cumulative percentage for those who

disagree and agree to the statement.

Table 2. Students' perceptions of challenges of using Facebook groups for writing

No.	Item	Cumulative Disagree (%)	Cumulative Agree (%)
6	Will read materials before sharing them.	9.3	90.7
7	Distracted by other features of Facebook.	16.3	83.7

Contrary to what the researchers have predicted, 90.7% of the respondents stated that they will read the articles and materials they found before sharing them on FB group. This is a very positive response and could strengthen the reason why FB groups should be incorporated by teachers in the teaching of writing in language classrooms. It is no longer a challenge predicted by researchers that most students might not read the materials before sharing them with their peers via FB groups. When students read before sharing, this could help the teacher in the monitoring process too because students will take charge of their own learning and be responsible for the materials or resources they share on the group. They will also share materials which they think are relevant to the context of the topic when they take time to read through what they are about to share with the group.

However, the main challenge that teachers would have to face is the distractions by the other features on FB which include FB chat, application, games, and et cetera. A high cumulative percentage of 83.7 agree to the statement 'While on FB group, I tend to be distracted by other features of FB'. Due to the distractions, respondents might end up spending more time on other features and not fully concentrating on their actual task on FB group for the purpose of writing. The researchers feel that it depends very much on the students themselves to be more disciplined so that they are not so easily distracted by other features while working on the writing task on the FB group. The role that teachers can play is that of a motivator, when it comes to motivating students to be more disciplined and manage their time on FB group and other features according to their priority.

The open-ended question for this domain requires respondents to give their opinions on the main challenge of using FB groups for writing. Two main challenges from their feedback are the slow internet connection and the distractions by other features of FB. The former was a challenge for students to get connected and stay connected, to be able to participate actively in the group discussion. This challenge is difficult to overcome because different students would have different speed of access for the internet at home or outside school. Therefore teachers must take note and make sure students are given more time to give their comments as the discussion and feedback might be slowed down by other

factors such as bad internet connection. The latter was of the similar result of item 9 in Section A where a very high percentage of them agree that they tend to be distracted by other features of FB. Some respondents added on to the challenges of using FB groups for writing:

- 1) 'The challenge is that there will be pressure on the students because they will have to use very good grammar, punctuation and content in their comments because everyone will read the comments posted' (R002)
- 2) 'It is hard to interrupt the flow of ideas when other people have already commented on what you wanted to comment' (R005)
- 3) 'It is very tedious, and a slower way of communication because we have to wait for the feedback from the others' (R018)
- 4) 'When are too many ideas given, it is difficult to sort out according to what we want to write' (R036)
- 5) 'There is limited space to write' (R042)
- 6) 'There will be redundancy in the comments when people just keep commenting on the same point' (R043)

#### E. Facebook Groups and Affective Domain

The last three close-ended items in Section A of the questionnaire seek answers to the third research question, to see how FB group influences the affective domain of the students in terms of writing. Item 8 investigates whether or not respondents feel comfortable posting their ideas or opinions on FB group. Item 9 seeks answers to whether the 'like' feature on FB would make respondents feel encouraged, when friends 'like' their comments. The last item is to see their preference, whether they prefer discussing on FB group or the classroom. Table 3 shows the data:

Table 3. Students' perceptions of FB group effects on their affective domain

No.	Item	Cumulative Disagree (%)	Cumulative Agree (%)
8	Feel comfortable posting ideas or opinions.	9.3	90.7
9	Feel encouraged when friends 'like' my comments.	2.3	97.7
10	Prefer discussing on FB group instead of classroom.	46.5	53.5

The cumulative percentages of respondents agreeing to item 8 and 9 are significantly higher as compared to item 10. In item 8, 90.7% of them agree that they feel comfortable posting ideas and opinions on FB group and 97.7% actually



feel encouraged when friends 'like' their comments. The students' positive views and responses regarding FB groups influencing the respondents' affective domain can be explained by the fact that students can really take their time to think about what they want to comment on the given topic, do it in the comfort of their own space, and the special 'like' feature which could further encourage respondents to comment more and feel appreciated by the group through their comments. However, in terms of preference, only 53.5% agree that they prefer discussing issues or topics on FB group instead of in a classroom. This gives insights to all that despite all the other features of how FB groups can help in improving writing, and the affective influences like those of items 8 and 9, just slightly over half of the respondents actually prefer having discussions on FB group. 46.5% of them prefer discussing in the actual classroom. This could be due to the asynchronous comments or feedback which slowed down the discussion as compared to the synchronous process in the classroom where the teacher can give her feedback directly and anyone else could just add on whatever they have in mind.

In the open-ended question, 38 respondents responded by stating that the participation in FB group does increase their motivation or confidence to write. Below are some of the comments for their justification:

- 1) 'Yes, I am motivated to write more by knowing that others will read my comments' (R006)
- 2) 'Yes, especially after getting good feedback from the others' (R013)
- 3) 'Yes, when others 'like' my comments' (R020).

From here, it is inferred that a high number of respondents agree that after participating in the FB group, they are more motivated and confident to write. The positive feedbacks from friends are valuable to keep them motivated to write even more. When their comments are 'liked' by friends, this will boost their confidence and further encourage them to participate actively in the group because their comments and presence are being appreciated. However, 5 respondents stated that the participation does not increase their motivation. They demonstrated:

- 1) 'No, I still feel the same' (R016)
- 2) 'No, have to type a long explanation to justify your point' (R029)
- 3) 'No, this is probably due to my dislike towards writing' (R032)
- 4) 'No, don't know if the facts given by friends in the comments are valid for writing' (R035)
- 5) 'No, I only use it for entertainment' (R041)

Here, the researchers feel that perhaps these five respondents prefer another way of learning and improving writing and this method of using FB group does not suit their taste. R035 seems to be unsure when it comes to factual ideas given by friends. Teachers can help by validating the resources, facts and figures given by the students when such incidences occur. At the same time, the students themselves can be further involved in the construction of knowledge and

validating of sources and facts by questioning each other to ensure that the information posted is valid and legitimate. R041 seems to see FB as a form of entertainment which cannot be applied to even an informal learning setting. Acknowledging the concept of learner diversity, the researchers agree that every student has his or her own style of learning and preferences. Perhaps certain students like to stick to the more conventional way of learning a language and improving their writing, such as the face-to-face communication and discussion with the teacher in the actual classroom, and not virtually in the FB group.

## V. CONCLUSION

From the perceptions of 43 students in this research, FB group does help in their writing, especially in the brainstorming process before the actual writing. Their responses have also showed that most respondents agree that they learn new vocabulary from reading the comments of others in the group, and the spell-check feature helps reduce their spelling errors. In addition, the ideas or opinions by peers help them in getting a better idea for writing and they also find it easier to complete their essays after participating in the FB group discussion. The main challenge that teachers need to take note of is the distractions by other features of FB such as FB chat, games, and other applications. It is also discovered that despite the positive affective influences FB groups have on the respondents, many still prefer the actual classroom discussion instead of that in the FB group. It is likely that though students like to learn independently, a teacher or a facilitator is still required to guide and direct the learning, especially over a virtual discussion space where students are left to their own devices. It is recommended that further researches could focus more on the challenges of integrating FB groups for teaching and improving writing, and look into the perception of teachers as well. Experimental studies regarding this research topic could also be done to see how the affective influences of FB and FB groups help in improving students' writing skills.

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