THE USE OF FACEBOOK TO IMPROVE WRITING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

Nur Solehah Hanafiah ¹ and Melor Md Yunus ²

¹ Sekolah Kebangsaan Ramuan China Besar, 78300 Masjid Tanah, Melaka, Malaysia
E-mail: hannu2701@gmail.com

² Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.
E-mail: melor@ukm.edu.my

ABSTRACT
Facebook nowadays has become a trend not merely a social medium, but likewise can be a platform for a virtual learning classroom. The study discussed in this paper aimed to investigate the use of Facebook in improving primary school pupils' writing in English. 20 pupils from year 5 in a suburban school in Masjid Tanah, Melaka participated in this study. The participants were joined in the FB closed group called ‘SKRCB Virtual Classroom’ (https://www.facebook.com/groups/923817381035253/). This study employed a survey design method which the participants needed to answer an online questionnaire consist of three parts: demographic data, pupils’ sentence construction process, and the impact of FB towards their writing skills. The data were analyzed using polldaddy.com that providing the descriptive statistics data. The finding of this study revealed that the use of Facebook does assist pupils in improving their writing skills. The study also showed most of the participants strongly agreed that learning English via Facebook gave positive impact towards the participants’ writing skills. However, the disadvantage of using Facebook in learning was pupils easily distracted by the other Facebook features like notification, chat box, and games. It is suggested that the further researches can focus more on the importance of punctuation and capital or small letters while constructing sentences in the FB group in order to improve the pupils’ writing skills.

Keywords: Facebook, FB group, writing skills, primary school pupils

INTRODUCTION

English language is an essential language that everyone needs to be proficient. English language can be considered as a lingua franca that widely used by many countries in the world. In the Malaysian constitution, English language is perceived as a second language after the Malay language. It shows that English language is secondary importance in the ranking of language of Malaysia (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2014).

The Malaysian Government has concerned with English language teaching and learning in this country. There are many initiatives have done by the Malaysian government in order to improve the students’ English language proficiency. One of them is the education transformation, the government has transformed the previous curriculum syllabus, Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) to the new curriculum syllabus, Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR). In the new Malaysia education blueprint (2013-2025), ‘bilingual proficiency’ has identified as the second shift in eleven shifts to transform the education system. This second shift is to ensure every child is proficient in Malay language as the national language and language of unity while, in English language as the international language of communication (MOE, 2013). The transformation aims the students to be able to master both languages at the end of the schooling year. Thus, it shows that English language has been one of the important subjects taught in the schools.

Moreover, in Malaysia, English language is a compulsory subject that students from the pre-school to the secondary school need to learn. They have been taught formally four essential skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing to enable them to master English language as their second language. This is in line with Brown (2000) highlighted that a sufficient exposure of the four basic skills in learning the language would permit the learners to be proficient in the language. Apart from listening, speaking, and reading skills have been taught in the classroom, nonetheless, writing seems to be considered as the most important skill required especially in fulfilling the summative assessment. In the
primary school level, the pupils need to sit an important examination, Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR) after six years of schooling.

In 2015, the Malaysian Examination Board Director, Datin Nawal Salleh has announced that there are changes in the UPSR examination format especially for English language subject (MOE, 2015). The English language UPSR examination paper will be split into two papers: Comprehension and Writing that make the UPSR candidates for national schools (SK) will have six grades while, the candidates from national type (SJK) will have eight grades. The changes of the new examination formats may be tougher for the low achiever pupils to score since it requires a good writing skill. Therefore, writing is a vital skill for students to master in order to have good grades in both new UPSR format examination papers.

There are many studies on the use of ICT in improving participants’ writing skills in the secondary and tertiary level (Kabilan et. al, 2010; Yunus et. al, 2012; Sarkar, 2012, Raman & Mohamed, 2013; Mohamad, 2013; Amasha and Alkhalaf, 2014). According to Sarkar (2012) states the use ICT in 21st century higher education can enhance the learning opportunities and quality of education of the educators and learners since they could access all the information from the internet. A study by Raman & Mohamed (2013) on the issues of ICT usage among Malaysian Secondary school English teachers showed ICT gave a positive impact on the students’ achievements in learning English. Nevertheless, not many studies have been carried out in primary school level regarding the use of ICT in enhancing the pupils’ writing skills.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of Facebook in improving primary school pupils’ writing in English language by answering these questions “How does Facebook assist primary school pupils in improving their sentence structure?” and “What are the impacts of using Facebook towards pupils’ learning?”. More specifically this study has two research objectives:

1. To explore the use of Facebook in assisting the primary school pupils to improve their sentence structure.
2. To investigate the impacts of using Facebook towards pupils’ learning.

literature review

Basic Writing Problem among Primary School Pupils

In many countries worldwide, literacy skills are emphasized since early pre-school education. It goes the same with Malaysia which one of the crucial literacy skills that needed by children, are writing skills (Floyd et al., 2007; Jamian, 2011; Yunus et al., 2013). Chitravelu et al. (2005) defined writing as ‘a system for interpersonal communication using the visible sign or graphic symbols on a flat surface such as paper, cloth or even stone slabs.’ (p. 136). Moreover, Jamian (2011) stated that reading and writing skills are interconnected as readers able to decode the text, they also will able to encode the word which becoming the key of effective language learning. Therefore, writing is important for learners since they are able to share and express their thought and feeling in the written form.

There are previous studies discussed the issues of students’ low proficiency in English language. A study by Yunus and Mat (2014) on 62 FELDA primary school pupils revealed that writing skills in the examination are the toughest skills to be mastered and the challenges faced by the teacher in order to cater their English language proficiency needs before sit the UPSR examination. This can be seen in the newspaper report on the UPSR examination result. On 2014, the pupils need to re-sit the UPSR examination for four papers and the English language is one of them (NST, 2014). This issue exposed the English language subject is a killer subject for pupils to score in UPSR examination.

Meanwhile, the Director of Education, Datuk Seri Dr. Khair Mohamad Yusof stated there are five subjects for the last batch of KBSR syllabus have decreased in the GPMP which English language subject has affected the result for both the National School (SK) and National type School (SJK) (Awani, 2015). The decreasing of GPMP showed that primary school pupils still do not master the writing skills and have low proficiency in English language. This is an alarming for the education system.

The Use of Social Networking Services in the 21st Century Education

Today’s workforce is evolving, hence it is a must for educators to implement the technology-based lessons. The use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) nowadays has became part and parcel in everyone’s life. ICT has
changed one’s life to be easier as business, trade, education and other are available via online and seen everything now at the fingertips (Yunus et. al, 2009). ICT also has given tremendous impact towards education field nowadays. Since we are now in the digital era, it is relevant for teachers to make a transformation in the pedagogy. Prensky (2012) proposed the current methodology in teaching should be shifted from the traditional pedagogy as the students in these days are the digital natives (good with technology). Technology can offer limitless services and one of it is a Social Networking Service (SNS). SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, Friendster, and Tumblr are the platform for people to communicate and socialize through online. The users can share their profile information, photos and videos, update status, and online messaging.

Facebook is founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. It is one of the famous social networking site used by the students as a medium to socialize (Kabilan et al., 2010; Cheung et al., 2011; Yunus et al., 2012; Vikneswaran & Krish, 2014; Karal et al., 2015 & Mohamad, 2015). This is supported by Silverman (2015) showed that Facebook still in the first ranked in social networking trending 2015 since it has one billion registered active users.

Numerous studies have revealed the positive findings upon the use of ICT and Social Networking Services as the tool in teaching and learning. This is in line with the new Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the government has highlighted the use ICT in the education field which stated in number seven of the eleven education shifts: “leverage ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia” in order to transform the education system (MOE 2012).

The ICT can assist educators in their teaching and learning activities with the learners as well as enhance new knowledge and wider perspectives via peer interaction in social networks. A study by Yunus, Lubis, and Lin (2009) discovered participants used ICT to acquire knowledge purposes. In term of the Social Networking Services such as Facebook, it revealed that the students are seldom used SNS for English learning purpose. However, they often conversed in English language while chatting in the instant messenger (Yunus et.al, 2012).

Apart from that, Karal, Kokoc, and Cakir (2015) found out that the use of Facebook group has given a positive impacts on the students’ English language proper usage development. The researchers claimed that the students have enhanced that writing abilities, communication and cooperation between teacher and students, as well as cooperation and communication among students. From the previous studies finding, in fact, it showed the participants learnt English language informally. Hence, SNS has provided a wide range of services (formal and informal) to assist learners in order to enhance their English proficiency level.

**Integrating Facebook into Writing Learning Activities**

Facebook could be served as a platform for writing learning activities. A study by Yunus et al. (2009) found out 74.3% learners agreed that ICT could enhance their writing skills. The students felt more confident in English writing while posting ideas or comments in the Facebook. They preferred to read and write in English while communicating among them (Kabilan et. al, 2010).

Furthermore, Shih’s study (2013) on the effect of integrating Facebook in the blended learning of 111 business students in Taiwanese University revealed that Facebook does improve the students’ English writing skills as well as their cooperative learning with the colleagues. Facebook also could enhance their motivation and interest in learning English language. Another important finding discovered by Shih is peer assessment of Facebook group could provide a useful way in enhancing the grammar skills and the other difficult professional courses.

The other benefits of social networking service towards ESL writing learning activities are: increasing educational communication between learners and educators; expanding learners’ prior knowledge as well as their vocabulary; boosting learners’ confidence and motivation through interactive online English learning activities; and helping learners’ writing skills via brainstorming session in the social networking (Yunus et al., 2012). This is similar to Amasha and Alkhalaf (2014) mentioned the students felt comfortable communicating in the Facebook group which allowed them to be independent in organizing their page, express their individuality and creativity.

In addition, a study has done by Vikneswaran and Krish (2014) on ten Chinese students in the private urban school revealed that peer influence motivated the students to write better in English on Facebook since they exchanged feedbacks and ideas through the social networking site. Thus, ICT particularly Social Networking Services offered assistance towards the students’ writing and creative thinking skills. They also claimed that they are more confident and motivated in using English language.
However, the use of Facebook in teaching and learning writing activities still has its shortcomings. The main shortcoming is learners are easily distracted by other features of Facebook such as notification, friend requesting, friend’s update, games and chat box while online learning. This is supported by Kabilan et al., 2010; Yunus et al., 2012; and Karal et al., 2015 revealed participants could not focus on learning while online. One of the gaps from previous studies identified that most of the studies were centralized on secondary and tertiary levels. There were not many studies on the use of Facebook in the primary level. Thus, this study intended to investigate the use of Facebook in the primary level.

METHOD

Research Methodology and Design
The study employed a survey design method, intended to explore the use of Facebook in enhancing pupils’ basic writing skills. This design used survey, where the data were collected by asking a group of participants to answer a set of questionnaires and participated in several tasks via the Facebook group.

Respondents
The study was employed a convenience sampling which involved the Year 5 Bestari (11 years old) pupils from the suburban school in Masjid Tanah, Melaka. The participants were chosen based on the several criteria. The first criterion is the participants should have a personal Facebook account. They also should be able to make choice and decision, and familiar with the survey format. Out of 30 pupils in the classroom, there are only 20 pupils who are full filled the criteria in selecting the participants.

Instrument
This study employed a questionnaire that was adapted from a survey by Yunus and Salehi (2012). The questionnaire was used four points Likert-scale and was divided into three parts. The four points Likert-scale has used emoticons in order to assist the participants in answering the questionnaire. Each part of the questionnaire had several items. The first section measured the demographic information of the participants: gender, duration time spent on Facebooking and final examination grade. The second section consisted of seven items for measuring participants’ sentence structures process. The last part of the questionnaire had five items in order to examine the impact of Facebook toward participants’ learning. The data were then analyzed using website polldaddy.com in order to find out the frequency and the percentage of each section. The participants answered the questionnaire after two weeks joining the Facebook group, “SKRCB Virtual English Classroom”. A Facebook group was used as a tool for virtual teaching and learning process. There were five tasks that participants were required to accomplish after the brainstorming, tips and examples of constructing sentences. All the tasks were based on pictures and participants need to construct sentences by referring to the picture.

Data Collection
Data collection was done online using the polldaddy.com website. The participants are required to answer the questionnaire through the link given to them in the Facebook group. They needed to select only one category from the Likert-scale of ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ that described participants’ sentence structures learning process and the impact of Facebook towards their writing learning. The ‘Unsure’ Likert scale was excluded to ensure participants have their own stand whether to agree or disagree towards the statement items. The data of the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics; the number of the participants and the frequency counts were tabulated.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Demographic data
There were three questions asked about the participants’ background. Out of 20 participants who answered the questionnaire, there were twelve males and eight females. Majority of the participants spent their times on Facebooking around 2-3 hour per day. Thus, it showed that the participants were active users in Facebooking.

The last question was asked about their final examination grade. Data has shown only one participant who scored A in the final exam, followed by five participants scored B, thirteen of the participants scored grade C and one participant has D in grade. Therefore, from the data, it indicated that most of the participants have an average level of proficiency and need assistance in constructing sentences.
Writing Skills
There were 7 items in the sentences construction process in this part. The findings were presented as below:

Table 1. Students’ sentence construction process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The brainstorming on FB group help me in organizing my thought before constructing the sentences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tips on constructing simple sentences in the FB group help me writing the sentences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The examples of constructing sentences in the FB group help me constructing the sentences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn new vocabulary from reading the comments of others on the FB group.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spell-check feature helps me reduce spelling errors.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The feedback by teacher help me improving my writing skills.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-assistances help me in writing the sentences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 20

Table 1. illustrated the number of participants who voted the items in the questionnaire. From the table, it was shown that most of the participants have voted in the ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ categories after two weeks experiencing online learning in the Facebook group. The data generally indicated that the use of Facebook does help participants in their writing process.

Furthermore, the data analysis was looking at the comparison between items in the ‘strongly agree’ category. The finding exposed the highest N, eighteen participants were ‘strongly agree’ at the statement ‘The examples of constructing sentences in the FB group help them constructing the sentences’. This was parallel to the participants’ works in the Facebook group. They used the examples of the sentence provided in the group as their guidance when they were constructing the sentences. For instance, figure 1 showed that the first participant only wrote ‘nabil.11.melaka’ for his self introduction. However, after the teacher gave example of self introduction sentences, he could write about himself in the correct sentences even though had minor spelling errors. By giving example and demonstrating on how to construct the correct sentences, it could assist the pupils to visualise the pattern of constructing correct sentences. This is in accordance with Yunus et. al (2012) mentioned that the students could improve their writing skills through teacher’s guidance in the learning activities and interaction between the learners and teacher. Consequently, it could expand their prior knowledge and boost their confidence in writing.
Furthermore, figure 2. also portrayed the other participants introduced about themselves using the example given. They used the same sentence structures like given in the example. Meanwhile, the statement ‘Peer-assistances help them in writing the sentences’ obtained the lowest N (ten participants) of ‘strongly agree’. The other nine participants only voted ‘agree’ and one participant chose ‘disagree’ categories. This was supported by Shih (2013) pointed out some of the students do not believe that cooperative learning could improve their writing more. This could be due to their low proficiency in English language since in the demographic data showed that there was one participant who scored an A. This could be seen in figure 3., a participant asked his friend the word ‘memakai’ in English but did not get any reply until the teacher responded to his question. Thus, it could be the reason why the statement has the lowest voted among the participants.
The pupils’ opinion regarding the use of Fb group as a platform in enhancing their writing as in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable posting my ideas or sentences in FB group.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel encouraged by my teacher or friends ‘like’ my sentences or give feedbacks.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now prefer learning writing in a FB group instead of in a classroom.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gain confidence in writing sentences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes, I feel distracted by other things in the FB features while learning through FB group.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. showed the N of each item in the third section of the questionnaire. The highest N, seventeen participants were ‘strongly agree’ on the item ‘feel encouraged by teacher or friends ‘like’ their sentences or give feedbacks’. It revealed the feedbacks and ‘like’ gave positive impact towards the students’ learning. This finding has a similar result with Yunus and Salehi’s (2012) study, which has 97.7% of participants agreed receiving ‘like’ or feedback from teacher and friends encouraged them in learning. The example of encouragement towards the participants as in figure 4. below:
The table 2. also portrayed the statement ‘prefer learning writing in a FB group instead of in a classroom’ obtained the lowest N of ‘strongly agree’. Ten of the participants were ‘strongly agree’ that they preferred to learn writing in a FB group instead of in a classroom. However, there were five participants chose to learn writing in an actual classroom. Lacking of ICT skills or could not concentrate while learning through the FB group might be the reason why they preferred actual classroom. This could be seen in the last item which nineteen participants (strongly agree and agree) that FB features such as notification and chat box sometimes could distract their online learning. Moreover, the participants needed more guidance from the teacher since they have average English proficiency and still young. This could be the reason why some participants preferred to learn in the actual classroom. The previous studies also showed that students might be distracted and could not focus while learning through online (Kabilan et al., 2010; Yunus et al., 2012; Karal et al., 2015). Thus, FB also could give negative impact towards participants’ learning.

Generally, this study revealed that Facebook group could be a virtual learning platform for the teacher to assist the pupils in learning English language. The teacher and pupils could communicate interactively in this group. Consequently, this could boost up the pupils’ confidence and motivation in polishing and improving their writing skills. Furthermore, the pupils could learn and do the task in the flexible time.

However, this study also exposed that some of the pupils preferred to learn English language in traditional way which they learnt English in the actual classroom. This could be due to the primary school pupils are still young and needed more guidance from the teachers. Another reason is perhaps, some of the pupils liked to ask the teacher directly and get instant feedbacks rather than in the FB group. If they asked in the FB group probably to get instant feedback from the teacher or friend were less. This was because the teacher could reply or give feedback to the pupils when he or she was online. Therefore, this study suggested that Facebook group could be a supplementary virtual learning platform for the pupils.

**IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

From the survey made by 20 participants revealed the use of Facebook does assist them in constructing correct sentences in their writing process. With the Facebook features like uploaded photos and videos, shared website links could help learners to learn in a fun way as well as they could improve their basic writing skills. The participants strongly agreed that the examples or sentence patterns given by the teacher guided them in constructing sentences. Surprisingly, the item ‘peer-assistance help to improve the writing skills’ obtained the lowest voted in the ‘strongly agree’ categories. Since the participants has average English language proficiency, it might affect their cooperating learning.
Nevertheless, Facebook could also bring disadvantages to the learners as they easily distracted by the other features of Facebook like chat and games. Thus, teachers should play an important role to guide the learners in the virtual classroom.

In addition, the FB group could be beneficial for the teachers and the students indirectly. The teachers and students could communicate or learn in the flexible times. The teachers could also assist the students in order to enhance their writing skills from the virtual class.

Based on the observation in the FB group, the research has found another disadvantage of Facebook. The pupils tend to disregard the importance of punctuation and capital/small letters while constructing sentences in the FB group. Most of the participants wrote their sentences using the small letters including the proper noun. Most of the participants used smart phone while answering the task in the FB group. They are often texting in small letter when they reply their friends’ message. As a result, it might contribute to a bad habit in writing since they do not aware and used the punctuations properly. It is recommended the further research could focus more on the importance of punctuation and capital/small letters while constructing sentences in the FB group in order to improve the pupils’ writing skills.

REFERENCES


