

# THE USE OF ENGLISH IN FACEBOOK WALL (FBW) BY PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**ABSTRACT--***The benefit and harm of social networking sites had been disputed among communicationists and educationists for years, but a solid conclusion was never surfaced. In rural Malaysia, social networking sites such as Facebook (FB) gradually embraced into the contemporary lesson system as one of the main approaches to support the students' educational communications of written English language. Relevantly, many of the previous studies claimed that rural children frequently discovered with poor performance in the English language communications, in particular of written form (Nor Shafiah, 2010). However, it is evident throughout the studies that most of the related assessment were conducted in school structured environment which highly triggered to the increase of anxiety level among the students subsequently led to the decrease of motivation toward written English communication (WEC). Furthermore, the connectedness of rural students to technology and the penetration to social network were proven to increase (Alias et al. 2010; Hazura et al., 2012), further helped the researcher to disclose interesting discovery of the current English usage for communication purposes among them. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the extent of written English for communication by FELDA primary school students through their interaction (posts and comments) on Facebook wall (FBW), followed by how far the communication is developed. Data for the study obtained from upper primary level students between 10 and 12 years. The collected data were further processed and transformed into several meaningful information based on the structured variables and objectives. The findings revealed that some of the unexpected results were drawn, further enhanced the existence of relationship between FB application (daily, weekly, monthly) and use of written English for communication among FELDA primary school students was absolutely undeniable. Ultimately, the students proposed their desire for the integration of FB application into formal English Lesson to make English communication more fun, effective, and motivating. The findings of the current study will definitely enrich the corpus of work conducted on the influence of social networking sites toward present children's English language development and encourage further detailed research in this area.*

**Keywords--** *Virtual Interaction and Communication, Facebook wall, written English communication*

## I INTRODUCTION

Technology has globally affected every aspect of human lives and has essentially altered the how the world works and the various roles that are played by various actors. Throughout the past decades, the development of

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technology has improved the communication between people which resulted in the advanced discoveries of efficient real-time interaction among people. Furthermore, smoother communications involving person-to-machine and person-to-person achieved through machines is important in the modern communication environment in which information and communications technology (ICT) systems have become an essential platform in fulfilling the requirement.

The integration of technology in the education system has created opportunities for the present-day children, including children from rural areas, to personalise their learning and acquire knowledge faster, for example, the mastery of foreign languages such as English language for effective communication with people across the world (Thurairaj et al., 2015; Hassel and Dean, 2015). In rural Malaysia, technology is gradually infused into the lesson and social networking sites as one of the most highlighted approaches, mainly to develop English language communication skills and restructure traditional classroom setting that has served to cope and limit access to knowledge. Social networking sites can be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to: (1) create a public or semi-public profile in a delimited system; (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share their connection with; and (3) view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others in the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

Among the multiple communication-based virtual social networking platforms, Facebook (FB) remains the most popular with more than 500 million active users. Aside from its ranking, FB has led to the contention among communicationists and educationists when it comes to how far it may possibly impact children's communication skills and language learning, especially in the context of English as Second Language (ESL) writing. For example, Graham (2012) conveyed that FB improves ESL students' social communication skills of initiating and reciprocating and enhance face-to-face interaction with peers and teachers at the same time. In a classroom milieu, Milfroy (1980) and Keller (2013) stated FB reduces ESL students' creative writing skills as they tend to use slang terms or shorten the form of root words while communicating. Other studies, in contrast, support the use of FB in evoking ESL students' motivation to write in English, simultaneously fostering better learning engagement through meaningful communication and language exchange (Brick, 2012; Srirat, 2014; Siti and Noreen, 2014).

These occurrences, however, could not be segregated from the manipulation of its provision features such as FB Messenger which enable users to send undisclosed messages to any of his or her virtual contacts and FB Groups, which serves as a platform for collaboration and discussion in an "open", "closed", or "secret" manner (Rojas, 2012). Nevertheless, a study by Rutledge and Joshi (2011) indicated that Facebook Wall (FBW) is the most "likeable" feature as a way to communicate – users are able to create discussion on any topic they desire by providing comments and inviting others to join in through private invitations or by posting a public link.

As this area can be further researched, particularly in the Malaysian context, this study will draw attention by providing some intensive substantiations pertaining to ESL primary students' English usage for communication skills on a particular FB feature at a rural school when the interaction occurred. To be precise, the use of English language in *Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA)* primary students' writing for communication; their

posts on FBW will be examined to explore the extent of its usage and how the written language is used in their communication.

## **II SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

The Ministry of Education (MoE) keeps propelling the integration of communication technologies in teaching-learning processes in schools to enhance Malaysian students' proficiency in various skills including English language communication. Hence, from the written communication standpoint, the notion of FBW being highlighted can be viewed as a positive landmark for better English language communication practices for Malaysian ESL students that come from different places, especially in a writing facet to develop effective real-world communication skills. The positive findings of the study hopefully attest that the idea of well-integrated technologies of social networking in educational processes to develop Malaysian students' English proficiency in literacy can be successfully executed if it actively encourages students' social participation and involves natural communication in an anxiety-free environment.

The study will also provide information regarding the role of virtual social communities, natural communication, and real environment via FBW that contribute to FELDA Kota Tinggi Johor children's English use in their writing for communication. Last but not least, the study will also be helpful for the FELDA management to come up with some initiatives that could help to boost use of FB to empower FELDA children's English literacy and literally apply it for real communication.

## **III Theoretical Framework**

Social Constructivism (SC) or Vygotsky's constructivist theory stated children experience effective development in socially situated environment, and knowledge is constructed by interacting with others. This provides greater enlightenment where technology advancements in this field of study is very applicable to connect the children in fulfilling the requisite condition; virtual interaction on FBW creates meaningful opportunities to immerse in natural and stress-free communications and lead to effective knowledge construction of written English communication (WEC). This discussion further detailed SC theory in several related perspectives in view of knowledge construction, virtual environment, and motivation.

Vygotsky explained that in order for knowledge to be constructed, learners need to be infused into knowledge through community interactions process, not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by individuals. Vygotsky also added that human knowledge construction is interconnected with crucial role played by language and culture. They are the fundamental platforms that enable humans to experience, communicate, and

understand real human interactions (Berkeley Graduate Division, 2018). This framework directly alluded to target students' capability of using diverse linguistic abilities of English such as written English language form in communication, analysis language in meaning, and language in context as a process of adaptation of oneself into a specific virtual reality both in social structures and social functions. In a similar manner, the target students' experiences of using written English in different communication contexts through technological applications and social interactions in a virtual system (e.g.: FBW posting, commenting, and feedback on intersubjectivity) potentially developed the students' English language writing for communication over time. These activities have led to the positioning of new knowledge of English writing as the end result of communication and ultimately pinpoint three specific premises embraced in the study; reality, comprehensible knowledge, and natural learning (Andrews, 2012).

In view of virtual environment, as mentioned, the basic assumptions that underlie SC theory are reality, intersubjectivity of social interactions, and knowledge constructions. Web 2.0 social software provided the tools for various online communication and information sharing among students within the social networks. Social networking of FB as a Web 2.0 tool has advocated these basic assumptions being highlighted in SC theory, and the researcher likewise posited that this Web 2.0 tool continuously supports knowledge construction and expands the students' written English through online communication in specific virtual environment. Through conversational language used in a social context of FB setting, the emerging knowledge patterns are negotiated into meaning and deeper understanding of individual is bridged via virtual social consensus. In connection with the WEC in virtual environment of FB, it is believed that the active online communication and knowledge sharing processes increases the quantity and quality of written English dialogue among target students via FBW application as a Web 2.0 tool to construct knowledge (Dougiamas, 2000). Throughout the discussion, the researcher inferred that by sharing information and then socially conversing the topic of interest by engaging in real conversational interaction via virtual environment of FBW, students of this study have expanded the quantity and use of written English, while simultaneously constructing effective knowledge acquirement. Hence, they own their learning process which, again according to Stacey (2002), is the key to active and effective knowledge construction of individuals.

From the aspect of motivation, where behavioural motivation form is extrinsic and a response to positive and negative reinforcements, cognitive motivation in contrast is seen as essentially intrinsic, and originates from a person's internal drive. Vygotsky claimed that children must be motivated to experience effective knowledge construction. Instead of teaching the children different techniques to be motivated, Vygotsky argues that children should learn what there is to learn, and motivation will come naturally to them. Hence, use of FBW for interaction is seen as a powerful tool because it is a social exercise platform – interactions and communications on FBW occur simply by the presence of other users who are able to motivate the students through channelling and receiving extra amount of support and converse of mutual interests for some rewarding interaction purposes.

## **IV LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Communication via Facebook***

Communication is the process of delivering, receiving, or exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc. (Ćorić and Perger, 2012). In the virtual world, social network of FB is widely accepted as a major platform in the field of communications. To satisfy the need to exchange information, FB links the users' accounts together through several communication forms; one-to-many where one user can deliver information to many users at once; many-to-one where many users can deliver information to one account; or many-to-many where many users can deliver plenty of information to many accounts at once, and in return, many users can send that account information to others (White, 2012). Concomitantly, this establishes free communication and a learning environment where best practices for individuals' development can be informally shared between those with mutual interests and needs.

A number of studies have amassed evidence implying that FB is being used to extend students' social communications in various living scopes. For example, Barkhuus and Tashiro (2010) found the students were heavily dependent on FB communication as it was essential for their academic activities through several means such as course discussion forums, email, and both voice and text communications. Additionally, FB is seen as another means of communication in many ways. In Barkhuus and Tashiro's study, some students proclaimed they used the wall to get a quick response or as a public informer to other online users. The more they use status updates on the wall, the more they felt connected to other users in the social network.

Furthermore, Drussel (2012) surprisingly found that a majority of his study's respondents stated that use of FB strengthens their interpersonal relationship and disagreed about feeling out of touch with other people. This finding may embody the findings by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) which stated social network can be used to empower the established relationships and strengthen the feeling of closeness to each other.

For those who inhabit different locations and have different backgrounds, FB is a communication tool that provides opportunities for intercultural dialogue among different people. It is a common platform that promotes the exchange of messages through virtual community interaction and people around the globe can use it to communicate and collaborate to learn and understand the existing diverse cultural backgrounds.

### ***2.2 Virtual Social Interaction via Facebook in Culturally Environment – Study's Context***

Aside from the fact that FB is a feature of Web 2.0 with maximum user population, it is one of the most prominent types of online interaction platform for virtual communities. For this study, virtual social interaction is directed to online users/communities interaction in the form of a computer-based simulated environment via FB as a sensational medium of communication and information which connects FELDA primary school students with other users. The interaction between users is mostly expected to range from communication via written text messages (posts and comments) and balance senses which are assumed to contribute to the study's participants' use of English language and development. Beyond listed communication forms, it is also plausible that the students utilise graphical icons (emoticons) to depict the real emotions and messages while communicating. This form of

communication indicates that the students are experimenting and innovating with the language to develop new patterns of written communication whilst interacting.

Although the interaction between the students with other users might take the form of real-time, some can also often be done in offline mode. They are drawn to each other and normally are motivated to commence a social contact, primarily out of an innate need for a rewarding relationship (Ahmed, Philaretou, and Theocharous, 2008). Two kinds of rewards had been considered which strongly influenced dynamics of target students' social relationship via FB: (1) direct rewards – e.g. emotional and psychological support, knowledge, attention, cultural needs, and other beneficial commodities; and (b) indirect rewards – e.g. feel great and motivated by connecting with others who are fulfilling and gratifying.

Moreover, the different forms of interactions and communications among the students are influenced by their practices on a daily basis which refer to the application of technological advances that turned as part of social culture within their environment. A cultural environment encompasses a set of practices, beliefs, human behaviours, and activities within the surrounding on the basis of a certain population (National Board of Antiquities, 2015). The fact that there is the Community Broadband Centre in the neighbourhood made it possible for them to establish a virtual social relationship due to easy access to ICT, thus, it became a complement routine for their social activities. This means that the ease of access to technological advances can fulfil the generation's instinctive needs since the researcher believes that virtual social interaction is actively and culturally practised within their environment due to the provision of such facility.

## **V METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS**

This study was explanatory in nature and examined the association between FBW use and its impact on FELDA primary school student WEC. Five multi-level students from the upper primary level (Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6) participated as research participants. Qualitative method were used in this study as empirical assessments due to their responsiveness towards participant data through naturalistic approaches: Qualitative methods study things in a participants' natural surroundings (real life communications and virtual FB environment) to retain ecological validity in the decision-making process and to dismantle event that brings meaning to an individual's life (Lawrence, Carl, and Gary, 1999). Data collection was employed to acquire participants' insights and thoughts that might connect to research inquiries through:(1) in-depth interviews, (2) questionnaires, and (3) wall postings. Raw data analyses were performed through textual and document analysis. The results ultimately stand as this study's findings.

### **3.1 Interview**

The researcher employed strategies to consistently interact between the participants and research tools, which involved processes of: (1) transcription, the recording of participant feedback, including nonverbal or unusual nonverbal cues such as coughing or sighing and a quick browse through all written transcripts; (2) reading, which

involves looking for significant concepts, perspectives, and analogies in respondent responses by highlighting salient phrases for FBW communication; (3) proofreading, the development of possible tables, figures, or diagrams after compiling a tally of responses from all participants that relevant to the research topic; and (4) labelling, the determination of the pertinent codes, created categories, and description of how they intertwine with each other through objective analysis. The researcher applied the textual analysis method which aims to describe the content, functions, and structure of the messages contained in a text. A content analysis was considered as a complementary approach for this method to identify, enumerate, and analyse the occurrence of specific messages and the message characteristics embedded in the written transcript.

### **3.2 Questionnaires**

Data from the questionnaires was manually analysed. Step-by-step guidelines were used to analyse obtainable responses to reach certain conclusions: (1) attentive reading of responses, probing for common concepts, perspectives, or analogies (target student perceptions of using FBW for WEC and how the notion of FBW usage influences certain outcomes in WEC compared to regular classroom environment); (2) coding categories, which bind identified codes into several families (situational, real life practices, and factors that trigger WEC use); (3) labelling identified coding with one more category (interpreting the language patterns used for communication and highlighting any salient issues that might raise); (4) writing up analysis in the form of descriptive and narrative texts to reinterpret student experiences on using language practices for communication on FBW.

The researcher similarly applied the textual analysis method. Comparable procedures were initiated as described in the interview data analysis section which involved appropriate written text selection (inductive *meaning unit* analysis), shortened meaning unit without altering the meaning (condensed meaning unit), derived pertinent code, built abstractions, developed content categories (nominal measurement procedures), and final data analysis by determined category further augmenting data reliability and validity from a single data collection method, which can sometimes be questionable, biased, and weak (Zohrabi, 2013). The purpose was not to attain the same result, but rather to agree that based on the data collection processes the findings and results from both instruments were consistent, dependable, and represent factual perceptions of target students toward the investigating phenomena.

### **3.3 Wall Postings**

Data from wall postings required the researcher to collect participants written messages on FBW for analysis in a relatively straight forward manner with no relation to English proficiency components. The researcher read all written posts and comments within three months of interaction to gain an overall understanding of the data. Then, data was further analysed to produce open coding data to form basic units of analysis until theoretical saturation based on researcher judgment. The data then selectively coded according to the respective categories which directly related to the outlined research questions. To analyse data from the wall postings, a document analysis method was applied. The reason the researcher used this method to analyse student postings on FBW was because document

analysis is a method that tracks the extent of English use by students in an online system while identifying significant changes in their use of their English writing for communication in previous, current, and/or future posts.

## VI RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data of the extent of English use in written communication on FBW, followed by how far the communication is developed was classified in several identified communication contexts, which were posted and shared in participant FBW writing. These results are presented in table below.

**Table 1:** English use in Facebook wall postings

Contexts	Frequency					Total	Average
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5		
1. Greeting expressions	17	7	2	-	2	28	7
2. Good wishes expression	-	1	-	-	1	2	1
3. Self-motivation	-	-	2	-	-	2	2
4. Language structures							
- Compound sentences	-	-	1	-	-		
- Simple sentences	1	1	2	-	-	23	4.6
- Phrases	-	3	1	4	8		
- Contractions	-	-	2	-	-		

Note Dash (-) represents none

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of several diverse contexts used by this study's participants in their written communications on FBW over three months. There were: greeting expression, good wishes expression, self-motivation, and language structures. In this study, both formal and informal greetings were utilised to greet any of a participants online friends regardless of social class and age for casual (informal) communication purposes. Furthermore, these communication patterns frequently appeared as an introduction in their writing to start conversation on the site. P1 and P2 seem to be the only participants that used formal greetings in informal situations in their written posts. Nonetheless, it is also noticeable P2 was the one that used both types of greetings in her postings in three months. The reasons behind such occurrences can be found through participant feedback; P1: "My teacher taught me to write it like that in classroom Sir. So, I'm used to it." and

P2: "Some of my Facebook friends sometimes used different writing styles to greet people on Facebook. Even sometimes Sir, I hadn't given much thought about things I wanted to write and share with others. (Smile broadly)". P3 and P5 used only short informal greetings, for example, "Hye", "Hai", and "Hi" occurred equally often in their



posts (2 posts). In general, formal and informal greetings can be used interchangeably, depending on context. Some informal greetings were used in informal situations with formal language and vice versa, suggests that both the formal and informal greetings used by the participants were reciprocal and flexible depending upon contextual factors, as long as the message was delivered and understandable by the other party.

In the second context, good wish expressions were used by P1, P2, P4, and P5 in their written communication. The following analysis centres around two specific events.

**Table 2:** Primary events for analysis

Name of event	Description
1. Birthdays	It was identified that P1, P4, and P5's FB friends celebrated their birthdays during the data collection period. At the same time, individual names were tagged, and birthdays wishes were expressed in English language or mixed-language.
2. Night-time sleep	This was a time-bound event where P2 generally expressed positive wishes to all her online friends on FB to have good rest throughout the night.

During the data collection period, birthdays were developed as a FB specific tradition among participants in virtual world. P5 was the only user who was wished a happy birthday in complete English form, "*happy birtday Faiqa Yusra aka ucha*". However, a few grammatical errors were made as, "*birthday*" was spelled as "*birtday*" due to mother tongue influence (native spoken language of Malay). Meanwhile, P1 and P4 expressed their wishes mix of English and Malay as shown in "*Selamat hari lahir my mother*". The act of expressing one's wishes in virtual world such FB mirrors face-to-face birthday expression and communication in the real world in that one will often say 'Happy Birthday' to friends and casual acquaintances alike. For the night-time sleep event, P2 posted "*Good night Sweet dreams!*" on her FBW. P2 mentioned it was the right thing needed to say to her FB friends during that hour. It was taught to her both at schools and home to express good wishes to others at any time, including to someone who is heading to bed. Furthermore, P2 mentioned is a communicative act embedded in her family, though it is not habitually practised. It is not surprising that some students made mistakes and used different communication styles in their written communications on FBW than in formal setting. However, as evident throughout this discussion, the informal use of good wish expressions in the two above-mentioned events generated a solid foundation in which a relationship could be built upon, eventually contributing to the profit-maximisation of interactant interactions.

As for self-motivation context, P3 was the only one to use self-motivational quotes over three months in her written communication. For examples: (1) "*IF YOUR DREAMS DON'T SCARE YOU THEY AREN'T BIG ENOUGH....*" and (2) "*I AM NOT PERFECT BUT I AM A LIMITED EDITION*". These sentences are clearly from

extensive collections of quotations by well-known authors. However, some sentence-boundary errors were made such as quotation marks. In addition, quotes that resonate with other online users usually get more feedback response rates (Myers, 2017). Thus, they can definitely generate engagement and reward two-way communication. In fact, some of the responses provided by P3 in regard to the real purpose of quotes use were aligned with this study. P3: *“Actually Sir, I don’t have any specific reason when I posted and shared the quote, except for the second one. Ummm... I had a slight misunderstanding with my friend at school at that time. But it was posted after several days we had the fight. But we have made up now. (Smiling)”*. This response proves that P3 was able to relate use of quotes in her writing in a virtual environment with real life events in her surroundings. The use of the post types in written communications was meant for self-motivation. It was not a mere coincidence or blunted action.

Language structures were divided into four distinct sub-categories by participants: compound sentences, simple sentences, phrases, and contractions. Throughout the analysis, P3 was the only user that used complete compound sentences in her written communication such as *“I AM NOT PERFECT BUT I AM A LIMITED EDITION”*. Although this sentence made extensive use of quotation and stood alone with no lead-in or/and lead-out idea, it consisted of two independent clauses that had related ideas connected by the coordinating conjunction *“AND”*. Simple sentence categories were identified as the second language structure most use by participants in their written posts: P1 (1 post), P2 (1 post), and P3 (2 posts). Each post consisted of a subject and a verb that appeared in its simplest form. P1 used a simple sentence in her writing through a combination of the English-Malay languages. P2 and P3 used quote posts on their FB walls despite blatant writing errors.

English phrase are another language structure that was commonly used by participants in written communication. P5 used the most English phrases (8 phrases), P4 the second most (4 phrases), followed by P2 (3 phrases), and P3 (1 phrase). Analysis in this section centred around several identified contexts with brief descriptions of each.

**Table 3:** Primary context of phrases for analysis

Contexts	Description
Hashtag (#)	Hashtags were quite popular in written posts during the data collection period. The use of English phrases in participant posts were preceded by the (#) symbol. The phrase-post did not pick up any punctuation and spaces in the writing.
Greetings	There were several times in which the participants used short greetings in their posts. Greetings were posted to imply the current period (time-bound) or situation (time-free) for greet and gain responses.
Mixing language	It was noticeable that phrases were used along with hashtags through a combination of the English-Malay languages. This was the least common phrase-post category.

Contraction, the last language structure, is very common in spoken English. In this study, P3 was the only user that used contractions (2 words) such as 'don't' and 'aren't'. 'don't' is a contraction meaning 'do not', while 'aren't' is a contraction meaning 'are not'. Although P3 stated that these negative-type shortcuts were something she basically copied from different online websites through the extensive use of quotations and are not something she normally uses for casual communication, including the written form, it is still a common topic at school. It was included in the analysis because the words were incorporated in participant written communication over three months of FB use. From researcher's viewpoint, the different styles of writing that ESL students learned at school did not necessarily result in different styles of written communication, even in virtual settings.

To summarise the above findings, as evident throughout this discussion, variations in English participant written communications suggests that English was gradually developed and embraced in virtual social spaces. This situation also shows how the use of written English in communication among FELDA primary students has evolved to include more creative words and phrases via FB. The researcher believed there was no right or wrong way for ESL students to use and write English because when it comes to natural communication, as long as native speakers are able to communicate interculturally (in and outside of Malaysia), it was not a problem.

## **VII Conclusion**

This study provided indispensable information on the use of written English by FELDA primary students through interactions with specific FB features such as FBW. This study is significant in that it examined social networking as a medium through which English was transferred and adopted (different styles of English writing) via written communication in an authentic discourse community (on FBW).

In this study, FBW was useful for knowledge sharing for the FELDA primary students. FBW was found by students to be enjoyable and allowed them to experiment with English on their own terms. FBW can be an effective platform for enhancing student English communications, particularly written communication through consistent usage. Based on student feedbacks, FBW was a valuable and effective platform for practicing English for specific purposes, such as sharing daily activities and providing up-to-date information. FBW was also a substantial platform among students in which ideas, feelings, and opinions were shared, reducing their anxiety about their English writing.

Other than being perceived as a fashionable technology tool and providing opportunities for FELDA students to engage in casual English communication, FBW can be viewed as a double-edged sword in education. Liu (2010) stated that tools can inhibit students from learning if used indecently. Thus, careful planning is essential to implementing tools for educational purposes as it can easily distract student from their main objective.

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