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Facebook and EFL Academic Writing: Students' Perspectives in a Saudi College

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استخدام الفيسبوك لتعليم الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية: آراء الطلاب في إحدى الكليات السعودية

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ABSTRACT

A research problem was identified that warranted the initiation of this study. A mixed pattern for results regarding Facebook usage in EFL writing outside the classroom exists in the literature. As the researchers believed in student-centered and autonomous learning, they intended to delineate students' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of using Facebook in EFL academic writing. The researchers conducted this study with their students at a Saudi college. Ten students participated in this study while they were studying the English Writing course. The researchers collected data through a questionnaire, interviews and participant observations. The findings showed six benefits of Facebook usage in academic writing: (1) greater motivation to write, (2) increased collaboration among students, (3) improvements in writing, (4) having a good medium to practise writing outside the classroom, (5) providing an environment with less pressure on writing and (6) greater ease of use and being able to write anytime, anywhere. Two drawbacks were identified: (1) distractions regarding chat invitations and (2) use of impolite language. The researchers provided suggestions for maximising the benefits and minimising the drawbacks in EFL teaching and learning. They also linked the use of Facebook to some learning theories.

المخلص

تشير الدراسات البحثية السابقة إلى وجود نتائج متباينة حول استخدام الفيسبوك في تعليم الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية خارج الصف الدراسي، لذلك حرص الباحثان على الحصول على تفاصيل شاملة حول وجهات نظر الطلاب في استخدام الفيسبوك لتعليم الكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية خارج الصف الدراسي. تكون مجتمع الدراسة من طلاب مادة الكتابة الأكاديمية في إحدى الكليات السعودية، أثناء قيام الباحثين بتدريس هذه المادة التي ركزت على كتابة المقالات الأكاديمية، حيث وافق عشرة طلاب على المشاركة في الدراسة، تم جمع بيانات الدراسة من خلال الاستبيان والمقابلات الشخصية والملاحظات البحثية أثناء تدريس المقرر. توصلت الدراسة إلى ست نتائج إيجابية لاستخدام الفيسبوك لتعليم الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية وهي: (1) التحفيز على الكتابة، (2) التعاون بين الطلاب، (3) تطور مهارات الكتابة، (4) جودة التدريب على الكتابة خارج الصف الدراسي، (5) تكوين بيئة مساعدة للكتابة، (6) تسهيل الكتابة في أي موقع وأي وقت. كما كشفت الدراسة عن وجود نتيجتين سلبيتين لاستخدام الفيسبوك في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية وهي: (1) تشتيت الطلاب عن الكتابة من خلال دعوات المحادثة، (2) استخدام مفردات غير مهذبة من بعض الجمهور. اختتمت الدراسة ببعض التوصيات التي تساهم في زيادة الإيجابيات وتعزز استخدام الفيسبوك لتعليم الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية، وتساهم في الحد من السلبيات المحتملة، وربط تلك الاستخدامات بنظريات التعلم.

1. Introduction

Facebook is an online Social Networking Site (SNS) that allows its users to interact, collaborate and engage in useful social dialogues. Features that promote interaction and collaboration make Facebook suitable for educational applications and language learning (Espinosa 2015). Maloney (2007) contends that SNSs provide suitable learning platforms as they promote collaboration and active participation of all users. Moreover, Lemeul (2006) subscribes to the view that SNSs give educators a great opportunity to easily and usefully network with their students.

Mazman and Usluel (2010) recommend Facebook as both an instructional and social means of communication because it promotes thinking and writing skills in personalised and convenient environments. Certain features of Facebook make it beneficial for academic writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). EFL students can practise academic writing in a less threatening atmosphere compared to the classroom where they must write under time limits. They can also create their own groups of interest. They can use the comment, like and share features to write their own words, share views and engage in discussions either synchronously or asynchronously.

Furthermore, the 'My Note' application is a Facebook page that has many features of Microsoft Word, and processes document for users to write extended text and possibly add photos or video links. This

page enables students to write about any topic of interest and easily get feedback from classmates and other Facebook users when publishing it publicly or sharing it with classmates. These features enable students to write and collaborate by exchanging ideas and views and promote self-expression through writing topics. These features also facilitate both instant and delayed feedback on students' writing from their instructor, classmates and Facebook users. As EFL students engage in writing, commenting, receiving feedback and reading their classmates' or Facebook users' writings; their writing skills will improve, and they will become autonomous writers (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008).

1.1. Problem Statement:

There has been a pattern of mixed results in the literature concerning the use of Facebook in EFL academic writing. Some studies found advantages, while other studies found limitations. Both benefits and drawbacks will be discussed below in detail in the literature review section. Such a mix of benefits and drawbacks warranted performing this study to deeply investigate this issue in a Saudi context. The research focused on the perspectives of Saudi students learning in EFL and how Facebook impacted their learning.

1.2. Purpose of the Study:

This mixed results of using Facebook in academic writing promoted

this study to have a close look at the students' perceptions of using Facebook in EFL academic writing outside of the classroom in a Saudi college. Therefore, this study adopted an exploratory qualitative design; the researchers intended to gain rich information to answer their research questions about the students' perceptions. They purposely chose an intact sample of one classes that had 20 students because there was no intention to generalise the results to any larger population (Perry, 2011).

1.3. The Importance of the Study:

Delineating Saudi students' perceptions about the use of Facebook in EFL academic writing was important, as these perspectives can reflect the advantages of using Facebook in academic writing, bear witness to its limitations or reflect both benefits and drawbacks. Their perceptions are important also because the researchers believe in the learner-centred education, where students take responsibility for their learning, interact with the teachers and collaborate with each other (Oinam, 2017). Moreover, Facebook provides interactive interface, two-way communication and discussion between students and teachers and among students. These features enhance social learning and collaboration where students support each other and the teachers scaffold students via feedback (Vygotsky, 1978).

2. Literature Review

Being a Web 2.0 platform, Facebook enables interaction and collaboration, thus assisting students to use it for academic purposes and to communicate with their classmates and teachers (Espinosa, 2015). As previously mentioned, a pattern of mixed results regarding Facebook usage in EFL academic writing outside the classroom exists in the literature.

2.1. Advantages:

The effectiveness of using Facebook to teach EFL writing was reported by Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) in their study of 83 EFL students at a university in Thailand. The students' ages ranged from 18 to 22. Their English proficiency level was lower-intermediate, and they were placed in an English level 1 course. The teaching instruments used were Facebook, pre- and post-grammar and writing tests and interviews.

The results showed that the participants' EFL grammar and writing improved. There was a significant statistical difference between the mean scores of the pre- and post-tests ($t = 6.65$ and $p = 0.000$). Furthermore, the writing content improved, the students wrote better ideas and more organised paragraphs, they used punctuation more appropriately, utilised other features of grammar in better ways and stated that Facebook is an effective means for grammar and writing discussions.

Such results can be attributed to Facebook's potential to offer social learning where students support each other and teachers scaffold students (Hartshorne & Ajjan, 2009). Shukor and Noordin (2014) studied the effects of using Facebook in collaborative writing groups on the writing performance. Thirty-three undergraduate EFL students at University Putra in Malaysia were randomly divided into two groups (control and experimental). The control group was chosen for face-to-face collaborative writing, while the experimental group was chosen for Facebook collaborative writing. The two groups were given a pre- and a post-test to write an argumentative essay. The grading rubric considered content, organisation, vocabulary, language use and mechanics.

The study found that the experimental group scored slightly higher than the control group. The comparison was made using independent and paired t-tests. The use of Facebook improved students' writing in

the experimental group and provided a convenient educational environment suitable for collaboration through enabling comment and feedback, both synchronously and asynchronously. In addition, Students reported that they found it more fun to use Facebook for writing than conventional methods.

The interactive features, two-way communication and discussion between students and teachers and among students provide appropriate scaffolding and allow for productive feedback (Hartshorne & Ajjan, 2009). Proof of this was demonstrated by the study of Abdul Majid, Stapa and Keong (2012), who focused on how to improve the writing process and performance of students by using Facebook for scaffolding and blended instruction. The participants were EFL secondary school students in Malaysia. A control and an experimental group were formed, with 45 participants in each. The control group received only classroom instruction, while the experimental group received blended instruction and scaffolding using Facebook.

Each group was given a pre- and a post-test, both of which involved writing an essay. In addition, interviews were performed with selected participants. The results showed that the participants preferred blended instruction to traditional classroom instruction. They believed that Facebook helped them with the writing process—specifically finding ideas, re-writing, editing, getting feedback and improving their writing performance.

The ability of Facebook to facilitate the writing process was also confirmed by Yunus, Salehi, Sun, Yen and Li (2011), who investigated the use of Facebook groups to teach writing. The participants were 43 EFL students (26 females and 17 males) in Malaysia. The researchers wanted to delineate the students' perceptions of using Facebook groups in the writing process. To this end, they had the students participate in a Facebook group called 'Write Out Loud' and they administered a 10-item questionnaire to them to capture their perceptions.

The results showed that more than 80% of the participants viewed Facebook groups as helpful in the writing process, especially for brainstorming, finding ideas, reducing spelling errors and acquiring new vocabulary. More than 90% of the participants read materials before sharing them. This also can improve their vocabulary and writing, as the more they read, the better their writing becomes. However, using Facebook was not without challenges—the main one being, as stated by more than 83% of the participants, the "distraction" of games and instant chat.

In Jordan, Bani-Hani, Al-Sobh and Abu-Melhim (2014) conducted a study on the use of Facebook groups in teaching writing. The researchers aimed to examine the perceptions of Jordanian EFL students concerning using Facebook groups in writing. The participants were 42 female freshman students at Irbid University College. The students, aged 19 to 25, were required to participate in a Facebook group where they were asked to brainstorm ideas, summarise texts and give feedback on each other's writing. A survey was provided in order to learn about the participants' perceptions of this experience. The survey indicated that more than 80% of the participants felt that Facebook groups helped with the process of writing—in particular, with brainstorming, getting better ideas and completing essays more easily.

Khan and Ivy (2014) studied the use of Facebook for large writing classes at Dhaka University. They asserted that the instructors of these classes had a hard time teaching writing to such a large number of students as they could not give detailed feedback to each student; furthermore, the students did not have sufficient time to practise writing due to the semester lasting only 12 weeks.

As a potential solution, the researchers introduced Facebook as a

platform for collaborative writing to compensate for the lack of writing practice and the insufficient feedback. Within the first two weeks of the online Facebook course starting, 182 students joined the writing group. They were asked to write descriptive essays about pictures taken from their writing textbook. They were then asked to comment on and modify some mistakes in each other's posts.

The results showed that the students had a positive attitude towards integrating Facebook in the writing class and enjoyed correcting each other's mistakes. Moreover, they built a community where they helped each other. Overall, integrating Facebook into writing classes helped to overcome the problem the large number of students and the short duration of the semester.

2.2. Limitations:

Some drawbacks of using Facebook in teaching writing have been reported. For example, Yunus et al. (2011) reported in their study that some Facebook features distracted students from focusing on their writing. More than 83% of the participants stated that they were distracted by games, instant chat and other applications. The same was also reported by 85% of the participants in the study of Bani-Hani et al. (2014). This minor drawback could be mitigated by advising students how to spend their time wisely. We will suggest more ways below to maximise the benefits and reduce the drawbacks of using Facebook for this purpose.

Another drawback was discussed by Baran (2010), who noted that some students had negative feelings about teachers sharing photos and personal information about themselves on Facebook. One student wrote that "teachers should be unapproachable and formal." Furthermore, Shih (2011) stated that combining Facebook with the traditional face-to-face teaching class would add an extra work for the teacher, noting the need for "a great deal of time and effort in evaluating, correcting, examining, and responding to the students' comments, feedback, and assessments, which required a great workload and time commitment" (p. 841).

To deal with such drawbacks, it has been suggested that teachers should encourage students to become autonomous learners and bear responsibility for their own learning (Oinam, 2017). It could also be proposed that teachers should be committed to exerting more effort and accepting the extra work involved in using Facebook because it is a useful teaching platform.

3. Research Questions

As this exploratory, qualitative study is focused on the advantages and disadvantages of using Facebook to teach EFL academic writing, the research questions were:

- What are the students' perceptions of the use of Facebook in EFL academic writing outside class in this college?
- What are students' perspectives of the advantages of using Facebook?
- What are students' views of the limitations of using Facebook?

4. Research Context

4.1. Setting:

The researchers chose an entire class, as a sample of convenience, to conduct this study at a Saudi college. The course was called English III, ELC 103, which focused on academic writing. The textbook used was *Effective Academic Writing*, level 2 that is written by Savage, A., and Mayer, P. It focuses on descriptive, narrative, compare/contrast essays, opinion and cause-effect essays.

The prerequisite for this course is what is known as the Preparatory Year Program (PYP), where all students are expected to study English

general courses ranging from level A1 (starter) to B1+ (intermediate) as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) for one year. The students study all four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (along with grammar) for 25 contact hours per week. The PYP follows a quarter system, which lasts for eight weeks. The students' assessment comprises two quizzes, a mid-term and a final exam.

Upon successful completion of the PYP, students may join the mechanical, electrical, chemical, computers or instrumentation department to earn a bachelor's degree. They continue to study English as an advanced course, where they focus on academic writing. They follow the normal semester system of 16 weeks. The students' assessment comprises four quizzes, a mid-term exam and a final exam. The quizzes account for 40% of the final mark (10% for each quiz), the mid-term exam for 20% and the final exam for the remaining 40%. The assessment evaluates students' abilities to write different types of academic essays.

4.2. Participants:

There were 20 male engineering students in the English III class, academic writing. Their ages ranged from 19 to 21, with the mean age being 20. Their level of English proficiency was beyond the B1+, as per the CEFR. Therefore, it can be said that they were at the upper-intermediate level of English proficiency. The researchers intended to gain in-depth information to answer their research questions about the EFL students' perceptions of the use of Facebook in academic writing. Thus, a class of 10–20 students was enough, as there was no intention to generalise the results to a larger population (Perry, 2011).

4.3. Task:

The researchers held a lab training session for the students to familiarise them with how to use Facebook, write on the 'my notes' application, use Facebook timeline, join a Facebook group and exchange ideas and relevant expressions among themselves and through using the chat feature. The students were already familiar with Facebook and used it for social purposes, but the aim was to familiarise them with it primarily for academic writing.

After the training session, the students were asked to write a 250-word essay outside of the classroom once a week for eight weeks on a Facebook public group called 'ELC 103 Writing' created by the researchers (available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/613275272397930/>). The task prompted the students to write about one of three possible topics. They were allowed to collaborate in pairs or groups to exchange ideas and relevant expressions before and while writing on Facebook. While each student eventually wrote the essay individually, he was encouraged to interact and collaborate with his classmates outside of class, either face-to-face or via Facebook chat.

The task also prompted the students to write on topics related to the themes of their textbook, such as the themes of environment, health, sports and discoveries. For example, they were asked to write descriptive, narrative, opinion and compare/contrast essays. Appendix A presents the weekly writing prompt.

5. Data Collection Methods

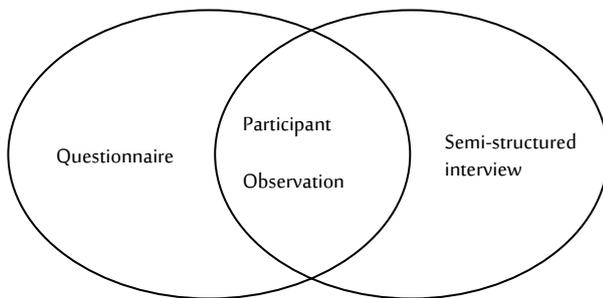
The study focused on answering the research questions from the participants' perceptions and views. Doing so required various methods to collect data: a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and participant observations (Figure 1). We used these collection methods to ensure the triangulation strategy, which led to a consistent understanding of the study (Perry 2011).

5.1. Questionnaire:

The researchers administered the questionnaire in their classroom after the students completed the weekly writing tasks. The questionnaire included ten items to answer and comment on in detail. Moreover, these ten items were self-devised, and the questionnaire contained four main sections: (a) students' general perceptions of Facebook in academic writing, (b) students' perceptions of the benefits of Facebook, (c) students' perceptions of the drawbacks of Facebook and (d) future use of Facebook.

The questionnaire answers were anonymous with a number assigned for each participant. Three students refused to participate in the study. Three responses were excluded because they were too concise and did not provide useful details. Four other responses were also excluded from the data for only answering four out of ten questions. Thus, only ten responses were used as one source of data as they were complete and detailed answers.

Figure 1. A Diagram of Data Collection Method



The questionnaire items (Appendix B) were written in English and Arabic, and participants were encouraged to use their native language. Researchers usually adopt this practice to give their research participants a chance to fully articulate their perspectives about the research questions. For example, Koc and Koc (2016) translated their adapted questionnaire into Turkish so that their Turkish participants could understand the questions and answer them without any misunderstanding.

5.2. Semi-Structured Interview:

The researchers utilised individual semi-structured interviews, including specific questions and one open-ended question, in class one week after completion of the questionnaire. The interviews contained five questions, four corresponding to the four main sections of the questionnaire: (a) general perceptions of Facebook in academic writing, (b) perceptions of benefits of Facebook, (c) perceptions of drawbacks of Facebook and (d) future use of Facebook. The fifth question was an open-ended prompt for the participants to add anything else they found relevant to the usage of Facebook in academic writing outside of class.

The individual interviews were audio-recorded for accurate data analysis and revision of such analysis by other researchers for reliability issues. The ten students who completed the questionnaire satisfactorily were the ones who did the interview successfully. Thus, the data for the interviews and questionnaire came from the same ten participants.

5.3. Participant Observations:

Dewalt and Dewalt (2011) defined participant observation as a method used in qualitative research by researchers who observe and/or participate in the activities of people under study to collect data in a natural setting. The observations are recorded and analysed (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011). Therefore, the researchers kept an open eye

on the students' perceptions regarding using Facebook for EFL academic writing outside the classroom since the training session. They recorded these observations as notes on a Microsoft Word document and discussed these with each other. Later, they analysed these observation notes as a source of data.

6. Data Analysis

The researchers adopted the constant comparative method for analysing qualitative data to investigate the data from the questionnaire answers, interview answers and participant observations. This method allowed maximum flexibility in creating initial themes and categories, as well as changing or modifying the themes and categories upon more perusal and analysis of the verbal data. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) described it as:

A method of analysing qualitative data which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. As each unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped-categorised and coded—with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed. In this process, there is room for continuous refinement; initial categories are changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered (p. 134).

In other words, the verbal data from the students' questionnaire answers, the transcribed individual interviews and the participant observations notes were examined many times and then coded into themes according to their content. Following this, the themes were listed under two broad categories: (a) positive perceptions and benefits of Facebook in EFL academic writing and (b) negative perceptions and drawbacks of Facebook in EFL academic writing. Similar answers were listed under the same category. Depending on the content of the students' answers, different themes were found in each broad category. Table 1 shows the emerging themes.

Table 1: Categories and codes of the students' perceptions of Facebook in EFL academic writing.

Students' perceptions	
Positive views of Facebook category	Negative views of Facebook category.
Facebook motivates writing.	Distraction by chat invitations.
Facebook fosters collaboration among students.	Use of impolite language by some Facebook users.
Facebook improves writing.	
Facebook is a good medium to practise writing outside class.	
Facebook is less formal and provides a less pressured atmosphere than in class.	
Facebook is easy to use and can be used anytime anywhere.	

These themes were shared with professors of Applied and Computational Linguistics at the same college, who went through the data recursively and confirmed these themes.

7. Findings

7.1. Students' Perceptions:

This section answers the first research question: what are the students' perceptions of the use of Facebook in EFL academic writing outside class in this college? The students' perceptions were collected via the first question of both the questionnaire and the interviews.

The ten participants of the study expressed favourable perceptions regarding the use of Facebook for EFL academic writing outside the classroom. Such perceptions were recurrent in both the questionnaire and interviews. They were also supported by the participant observation notes. For example, student #1 stated in the questionnaire that "I believe Facebook writing is an innovative and

excellent medium for writing. It was useful for me; however, it needs to be more controlled by the instructor." In other words, this student believed that Facebook was helpful for him and was a very good and inventive writing medium. He hoped that the teacher would supervise Facebook writing more closely. This student expressed a similar idea in the interview, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Quotes of two students' answers of questionnaire and interview perceptions question 1

Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Student #1	believe Facebook writing is an innovative and excellent medium for writing. It was useful for me; however, it needs to be more organised/controlled by the instructor.	Facebook writing is an excellent medium for writing. It was beneficial for me.
Student #10	In my point of view, Facebook writing is a new and innovative medium for writing. Moreover, it helps develop writing and English in general.	Facebook helped me develop and improve my writing as I read and learned from my classmates' essays. As I read those essays, I realised and corrected the mistakes in my writing.

Moreover, student #10 stated in the questionnaire that "In my point of view, Facebook writing is a new and innovative medium for writing. Moreover, it helps develop writing and English in general." This student believed that Facebook writing is a novel method of writing that helped him improve not only his writing but also his English proficiency. He expressed a similar perspective in the interview, where he reiterated that "Facebook helped me develop and improve my writing as I read and learned from my classmates' essays. As I read those essays, I realised and corrected the mistakes in my writing." Table 2 presents the answers to the first interview question: what are your perceptions of the use of Facebook for out-of-class academic writing?

Appendices D and F provide a detailed record of the ten students' perceptions of Facebook in academic writing as expressed in the questionnaire and interviews. The students expressed the following positive attitudes and had favourable perceptions of using Facebook in writing:

- Facebook motivates writing as it is a break from the routine of class.
- Facebook fosters collaboration among students outside the class by exchanging ideas and expressions relevant to the writing topic.
- Facebook improves the writing by reading other classmates' essays and learning more ideas, expressions and how to organise writing from them.
- Facebook is a good medium to practise writing outside class.
- Facebook is less formal and provides a less pressured atmosphere for writing than in class (no time limits).
- Facebook is easy to use and can be used for writing anytime and anywhere.

The researchers' participant observation notes attested to these students' perceptions. For example, one note recorded on 28 January, 2019 indicated that the students were familiar with Facebook and motivated to use it outside of class. Another note recorded on 7 February, 2019 showed that the students considered Facebook to be a good medium to practise writing outside of the classroom because it, compared to the classroom, provides an environment for writing with less pressure.

Moreover, one of the observational notes recorded stated that the students were enthusiastic about writing on Facebook because they could write whenever and wherever they liked. One student said that he preferred to write in a Starbucks café. In addition, another note expressed that students reported that they felt their writing improved as they exchanged ideas and vocabulary expressions with each other and read each other's essays. Appendix G has more participant observation notes.

7.2. Benefits of Using Facebook:

The second research question concerned the benefits of Facebook in academic writing outside the classroom: what are their perspectives of the advantages of using Facebook?

The students confirmed there were many benefits of using Facebook for academic writing outside the classroom. For example, student #2 stated in the questionnaire that "Facebook provides an opportunity and a space to practise writing outside class. It has features, such as ease of editing and correcting your writing." This student believed that Facebook writing was a useful writing practice outside of the classroom. He liked having auto-correction features to easily revise the text. In the interview, he claimed that "Facebook writing gave me a chance to compare myself to my classmates and evaluate my writing in relation to theirs. This made my writing improve. Moreover, Facebook features enabled editing and correcting my writing."

Table 3: Quotes of two students' answers to questionnaire and interview benefits question 2

Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Student #2	Facebook provides an opportunity and a space to practise writing outside class. It has features such as ease of editing and correcting your text (writing).	Facebook writing gave me a chance to compare myself to my classmates and evaluate my writing in relation to theirs. This made my writing improve. Moreover, Facebook features enabled editing and correcting my writing.
Student #9	Facebook has many benefits for writing such as collaborating and sharing ideas and information with classmates. It helps a lot to see my classmates' essays as examples for me before I write; this developed my writing and made it better and more organised.	Facebook made me collaborate with classmates to share ideas about the writing topics. By reading their essays, my writing improved and became more organised. Moreover, Facebook writing is more comfortable and poses no pressures for me, no time limits for writing as in class.

As can be seen in Table 3, student #2 thought that Facebook writing enabled him to compare his essays with his classmates' essays. Thus, he could rate his essays compared to theirs, which improved his writing. In addition, Facebook helped in editing and correcting mistakes in his essays. Another participant, student #9, stated in the questionnaire:

Facebook has many benefits for writing such as collaborating and sharing ideas and information with classmates. It helps a lot to see my classmates' essays as examples for me before I write; this developed my writing and made it better and more organised.

This means that Facebook enabled him to collaborate with his classmates by exchanging views and data. In addition, he learnt from reading his classmates' essays. Thus, his writing improved. Table 3 displays what this student commented in the interview. He stated that Facebook facilitated collaboration and the exchanging of perspectives between him and his classmates. He also perused their writings on Facebook. Thus, his own writing became better. Table 3 provides two students' answers to question 2 in the interview and questionnaire: what are your perceptions of the benefits and advantages of Facebook in writing? Appendices D and F include all students' answers to this question.

In addition to question 2 of the questionnaire, which was a general question about the benefits of using Facebook, questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 asked about specific benefits of using Facebook in writing that were reported by previous studies (Appendix B). The researchers decided to provide a summary of the students' answers to each of these questions, as the answers to these specific questions had little or no variations among students.

Moreover, these specific questions were not repeated in the interviews. This allows for a more reliable comparison between students' answers to the questionnaire's four main questions (1, 2, 7 and 10) and interview four main questions (1, 2, 3 and 4), which were

essentially the same aside from the answers to the interview questions providing more explanations or details. While Table 4 notes the students' answers to questions 3 and 4, Appendix E presents the answers to questions 5, 6, 8 and 9.

Table 4: Summary of students' answers to questionnaire items 3 and 4.

Questionnaire item	Summary of students' answers
3- Why does Facebook motivate you to write? If you do not think so, why not?	Facebook motivate me to write more because it is easier than using paper and pencil and is a social media app that is more fun than the class.
4- How does Facebook make you collaborate with your colleagues outside the classroom? If you do not think so, why not?	Facebook encourages me to collaborate and interact with my classmates to exchange ideas and vocabulary expressions related to the writing topic.

Furthermore, the participant observation notes reflected the students' views of the benefits of using Facebook for academic writing. One of the notes stated that Facebook was an interesting writing medium and did not pose any pressures similar to writing in the class. Another note recorded indicated that Facebook was a good solution for shy students who did not participate in class because they were afraid of losing face before their classmates and instructor. Facebook offered such students a good opportunity to write and participate without having to worry about their shyness. More participant observation notes are available in Appendix G.

7.3. Drawbacks of Using Facebook:

The third research question concerned the drawbacks of using Facebook in academic writing outside of the classroom. The students perceived only two drawbacks: (a) distraction due to chat, games or other applications and (b) the use of impolite language. Each drawback was expressed by one student only out of the ten participants of the study. The students' answers regarding the drawbacks are listed in Appendices D and F.

Table 5 presents the answers of two participants for the question: what are your perceptions of the drawbacks and disadvantages of using Facebook in EFL academic writing? Student #2 believed that some users might use impolite language with other users while on Facebook. He also thought that some users of Facebook sometimes use impolite language to offend and disturb other users. Student #4 stated that chat invitations sent by friends and family distracted him while he was writing on Facebook. He also believed that Twitter was more commonly used than Facebook.

The participant observation notes also recorded the drawback of distractions regarding chat invitations. For example, a note recorded on 6 March, 2019 indicated that one student wanted to finish his writing assignment in one hour but spent three hours without finishing due to his friends sending him chat invitations that distracted him and took up his time and attention.

Table 5: Quotes of two students' answers to questionnaire item #7 and interview question #3

Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Student # 2	Facebook may be used sometimes by some users to offend/flare others with impolite language or comments.	Some users of Facebook may use provocative or impolite language without write provocative and personally offensive comments on your writing.
Student #4	There are no disadvantages in Facebook writing. I think some chat invitations may distract me sometimes. Also, twitter became more widespread (in Z) than Facebook.	Generally, there are no disadvantages but sometimes some users send invitations for chat, upload videos and other similar things that may distract me.

7.4. Future Use of Facebook for EFL Academic Writing:

In response to the tenth item of the questionnaire and the fourth question of the interview, all ten students expressed their preference to use Facebook for academic writing in the future. They also provided different reasons, such as that it motivated them, made

them collaborate with each other and improved their writing. For instance, student #1 would use Facebook for academic writing as it enabled collaboration and allowed him to read his classmates' essays and share his own. Another participant, student #5, would use Facebook as it made his writing better. Appendices D and F have all of the students' answers to questionnaire item #10 and interview question 4: would you prefer to use Facebook for writing outside class in the future? Why/why not?

Furthermore, the participant observation notes attested to the students' preference for future use of Facebook for EFL academic writing. For example, the note recorded on 22 March, 2019 indicated that one student maintained he would use Facebook for writing after the writing course was over because it enabled him to read his classmates' essays and helped improve his writing. More participant observation notes are available in Appendix G.

Finally, the interview included one open-ended question, which was the fifth question of the interview. Three students out of ten answered it. Student #2 stated that "Facebook is used for writing and can be used to discuss other beneficial topics and subjects as well." He believed that Facebook was suitable for writing and discussing various topics. Student #7 maintained that "Facebook will continue to be used for writing, but I think other platforms may be created for writing with more collaboration/interaction features." In other words, this student subscribed to the view that people will use Facebook for writing in the future along with other applications that foster interaction among users. Appendix F presents the answers of the three students to the interview's open-ended prompt.

8. Discussion

As the researchers relied on student-centred education, they valued students' perceptions and designed the whole exploratory study to delineate students' perspectives of using Facebook in EFL academic writing outside of the classroom. The findings revealed that the students perceived these six benefits of using Facebook: (a) Facebook motivated them to write, (b) it fostered collaboration among classmates, (c) it improved their writing, (d) it was a good medium for practising academic writing, (e) it was less formal by providing less pressure than writing in class did and (f) it was an easy-to-use medium for writing that could be used anytime and anywhere.

Two drawbacks of using Facebook in EFL academic writing outside the classroom were perceived: (a) getting distracted by chat invitations and (b) using impolite language by some Facebook users to offend other users.

This study found benefits that are supported by previous studies. For instance, Yunus et al. (2011) and Bani-Hani et al. (2014) reported that Facebook motivated their participants to write. Moreover, Shukor and Noordin, (2014) and Khan and Ivy (2014) reported that Facebook fostered collaboration among participants. Abdul Majid et al. (2012) reported that Facebook usage improved their participants' writing. The participants believed that Facebook helped them with the writing process in terms of finding ideas, re-writing, editing and getting feedback. Furthermore, Shukor and Noordin (2014) reported that Facebook provided a convenient and fun educational environment for writing which is analogous to the current study's participants' perception of Facebook as being less formal and thus providing a relaxed atmosphere for writing.

The drawbacks of this study were also found in previous studies. Bani-Hani et al. (2014) and Yunus et al. (2011) claimed that participants using Facebook were distracted by chat invitations and games. Similar distractions were reported by other studies. Nepomuceno (2011) reported the use of impolite language by some student bloggers and users of blogs at a university in the Philippines. Furthermore, Abrams (2003)

reported on flaming, including impolite or sexually explicit language, as a possible outcome especially in cases of synchronous writing via computers. Table 6 relates the findings of our study to previous studies' findings.

Table 6: Current study findings related to previous studies findings.

Current study	Previous studies
Benefits	
Motivating students to write.	Yunus <i>et al.</i> (2011) and Bani-Hani <i>et al.</i> (2014).
Fostering collaboration among students.	Khan and Ivy (2014) and Shukor and Noordin (2014).
A good medium to write outside class.	Khan and Ivy (2014) and Shukor and Noordin (2014).
Less formal and less pressure for writing.	Shukor and Noordin (2014). Abdul Majid <i>et al.</i> (2012).
Easy to write anytime anywhere.	Abdul Majid <i>et al.</i> (2012), Bani-Hani <i>et al.</i> (2014).
Improving students' writing.	Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) and Yunus <i>et al.</i> (2011).
Drawbacks	
Distraction by chat invitations.	Yunus <i>et al.</i> (2011) and Bani-Hani <i>et al.</i> (2014).
Impolite language by some Facebook users.	Nepomuceno, (2011) and Abrams, (2003).

8.1. Facebook and Learning Theories:

The students' positive views of Facebook can be attributed to its features and interactive interface enabling two-way communication and allowing for social learning, where students can help each other and receive assistance from their teachers (Hartshorne & Ajjan, 2009). In addition, Facebook's synchronous and asynchronous features can support writing skills, enhance language learning and reinforce collaborative interaction. This corresponds with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, which holds that novice–master, peer–peer and student–student interactions lead to the scaffolding process. Facebook can also motivate students and lower their anxiety as a result of learning in a comfortable environment. This supports Krashen's (1981) affective filter hypothesis, which holds that low anxiety and high motivation improve language input to pass through the learners' affective filter and reach the language acquisition device (LAD).

8.2. Maximising the Benefits:

The findings of this study enable the researchers to provide some suggestions to maximise the benefits and minimise the drawbacks. First, instructors should hold an orientation session for students before asking them to write on Facebook. Second, instructors should choose topics that are related to the textbook and their students' level of English proficiency. Third, instructors should pair each unskilled student with a skilled student to collaboratively work together outside of the class. Fourth, instructors should focus on fluency in Facebook writing, rather than accuracy. Fifth, instructors should involve their students establishing a code of ethics for Facebook writing where they take a pledge to not use impolite language. Sixth, instructors should advise their students to spend their time wisely while on Facebook and not waste it on chats, games or similar distractions. Finally, instructors should prepare a useful rubric for evaluating students' Facebook writing and share it with them so that they know what is expected of them.

8.3. Limitations:

Our study was not longitudinal in nature and lasted only for eight weeks. Studies seeking participants' perceptions are recommended to be conducted over a whole academic year to allow for fully developed perceptions and to expose students to the treatment more deeply. Thus, students can articulately express their perceptions and state clear reasons. Another limitation of the current study is that the participants' perceptions were self-reported by the students and were not objectively and quantitatively measured. For example, the benefits of using Facebook that led to the improvement of students' writing were not quantitatively measured.

9. Future Research

A qualitative study on female students' perceptions regarding the use of Facebook in academic writing outside of the classroom needs to be performed. This will shed light on similarities and differences between male and female perceptions. Another study can focus on collaboration platforms in academic writing (e.g. wikis) aiming to explain the students' perceptions regarding student collaboration on this platform for academic writing purposes. Finally, a quantitative study on Facebook usage in academic writing outside of the classroom can also be conducted to see if a large sample of students would present similar views of the benefits of using Facebook for writing.

10. Conclusion

This study focused on the students' perceptions rather than the teachers' perceptions. This reflects the researchers' belief in student-centred learning. In this learning approach, students share responsibility for their learning with their teachers, interact with the teachers and collaborate as well as communicate with each other (Oinam, 2017). The students believed that using Facebook in EFL academic writing produced six benefits and presented two possible drawbacks. These six benefits and two drawbacks were reported by previous studies (Abdul Majid *et al.*, 2012; Bani-Hani *et al.*, 2014; Khan & Ivy, 2014; Nepomuceno, 2011; Shukor & Noordin, 2014; Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012; Yunus *et al.*, 2011).

These positive views of Facebook can be attributed to its interactive features, both synchronous and asynchronous, that enable two-way student–student and student–teacher communications. Such features enable students to help each other and to receive assistance from teachers through feedback (Hartshorne & Ajjan, 2009). These features encourage interactive scaffolding between novice and master (i.e., student and teacher) and between peers (i.e., students) (Vygotsky, 1978), thus improving their academic writing. Students also have a friendly relationship context, low anxiety and high motivation (Krashen, 1981) to write, collaborate and more profoundly learn language skill.

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