



IMPACT AND CAPABILITY OF FACEBOOK AS A TEACHING AID IN SOCIAL SCIENCE SUBJECT AT UNITEN

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ABSTRACT

The use of Facebook, which is a popular communication device among students, is perceived to have the ability of bridging the gap between students and their lecturers, which this in turn gives rise to some positive effect on the teaching and learning process. With the availability of various electronic devices that can connect to the internet, communication between students and their lecturers is just a finger click away. The present study focuses on the use of Facebook as a teaching tool in a Higher Education Institution, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN). Facebook as a social networking site provides the opportunity to users to interact with each other on the internet. With respect to what this study intends to discover, its objectives are (i) to assess the capability of Facebook as a teaching aid for Malaysian Studies Subject at UNITEN, (ii) to identify students' perceptions towards Facebook as a student-lecturer communication medium, and (iii) to investigate the impact of Facebook usage on students' performance in Social Science subject. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to students from two colleges in UNITEN, Putrajaya Campus, which this involved 210 participants from the College of Engineering, and 90 participants from the College of Information Technology. The results showed that most of the students agreed that Facebook was able to produce a positive effect on teaching and learning of a Social Science subject, Malaysian Studies.

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Keywords: Facebook, Teaching and learning, Malaysian studies, Higher education institution, Lecturer, Student, Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

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Communication between students and lecturers is the key to success in teaching and learning (T&L). Studying at higher learning institutions, which normally involves students aged 20s requires a student-lecturer relationship that occurs in a systematic and proper way. Since students at such ages are very sensitive and susceptible to a variety of emotional problems, lecturers should not restrict their role to only in the classroom but also outside the classroom.

Recent developments have indicated that the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the main device for disseminating and storing information which as a consequence assisting students in obtaining new knowledge. The development and availability of technology in the field of education demand lecturers nowadays to be more creative in order to achieve the ultimate goal of T&L. Internet-based information technology for instance, is fast growing and challenging. Students are often attracted and attached to the internet in their learning process. The internet is not only the prominent source of their educational knowledge, but it is also the major source of their daily information as well as the one related to their social lives.

One of the popular social networking sites among students today is Facebook. This site provides an opportunity for users to interact with each other via the internet. Communication is made easier with the internet connection nowadays that can be obtained from various electronic devices. For example, with a cell phone, students can get access to the internet at a very minimal cost. This new communication medium is widely utilized by students today. The availability of technology convenience has given students and lecturers the opportunity to communicate with each other. Generally, students who have a Facebook account can interact with the other Facebook users on any topics including the ones related to their studies. Simultaneously, lecturers can also participate in the communication if they have a Facebook account.

This study examines the scenario where Facebook is used as a new tool in T&L, particularly as a teaching aid. This study also investigates the effectiveness of using virtual media (Facebook) in the learning of one of the main Social Science subjects, Malaysian Studies in UNITEN.

1.1. Research Problem

Rossafri and Shariff. (2011) explain in their study that the T&L of History Subject in schools has frequently encountered many problems that cause students' performance in this subject to be not as outstanding as the other subjects. Based on the results of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) released in 2008, the performance of the students in History was not consistent and not excellent as there were 64.0% (2004), 52.4% (2005), 59.6% (2006), 58.0% (2007) and 59.8% (2008) students who passed the subject. It is expected that this will affect the focus and interest of students in subjects associated with history and nationhood at tertiary level.

Lack of interest in factual and descriptive subjects like History at schools will influence the students to experience the same condition when they have to take similar subjects again at tertiary level. For example, students at Private Higher Learning Institutions must take Malaysian Studies subject to complete their course. In contrast, students at Public Higher Learning Institutions are required to take Islamic Civilization and Asian Civilization or Ethnic Relations subject. These

subjects contain a large amount of historical information which consequently will affect the overall performance of the students in the subjects.

Therefore, the instructors of such subjects should review the techniques and methods that have been practiced in the T&L of the subjects. Conventional approach that centers on teachers/instructors is perhaps no longer effective at tertiary level. Students should be given more opportunities to express their opinions through many channels, not only in the classroom or lecture hall. New channels such as social media on the internet should be involved in this. The use of social networking site, Facebook as a teaching aid offers a medium for discussion and interaction between students and lecturers which in turn can develop the students' interest in the subject they are learning.

This study is relevant to the current situation where there is a need for an effective solution to the problem of students' lack of interest in subjects that involve historical elements. Thus, this study takes the initiative of searching for the solution by examining the effectiveness of Facebook usage in the interaction between students and lecturers and in attracting students to learn subjects related to historical facts.

1.2. Research Objectives

As stated earlier, this study focuses on the effectiveness of using a social networking site, Facebook as one of the teaching aids for Malaysian Studies at UNITEN, Putrajaya Campus. To be more specific, there are three main objectives of the study: i) to assess the capability of Facebook as a teaching aid for a Social Science subject, namely Malaysian Studies at UNITEN, ii) to identify students' perceptions towards Facebook as a student-lecturer communication medium, and iii) to investigate the impact of Facebook usage on students' performance in Social Science subject (Malaysian Studies).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions of Terms

2.1.1. Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site developed by Mark Zuckerberg as a medium of communication among students at Harvard University where he was studying at that time. This site allows individuals to communicate with one another and exchange information. First established on February 4 2004, it was later expanded to the rest of the world with the number of users exceeding 400 million people. With some simple requirements where a user should be at least 13 years old and own an email account, he or she is qualified enough to register for a Facebook account.

Facebook is unique in the sense that it permits a group communication and links inserted which this is very convenient to users. There is so much personal information uploaded on Facebook by users that researchers and social scientists are prone to using the advertising tools on the site for determining their target groups with scientific accuracy, as this is what basically practiced by most marketing companies nowadays.

2.1.2. Teaching Aids

According to [Abd. Aziz \(2000\)](#), teaching aids can be categorized as any materials, tools, apparatus either concrete or abstract (audio clips, videos, audio-visual tools) used or exploited by someone systematically in facilitating T&L. The device can be any equipment or material used during the process of learning in the classroom which may be printed or non-printed that can cause teaching to occur and assist teachers in the T&L process.

[Kamarudin \(1991\)](#) on the other hand defines teaching aids as all the equipment used by teachers to help them deliver their teaching in the classroom. Teaching aids also include materials employed in the teaching process that can be seen, heard, felt, smelled, read, told and used.

According to [Mok Soon \(2001\)](#), teaching aids are tools or equipment used by instructors while teaching and these can include chalks and blackboards, charts, apparatus, specimens, real entities, pictures, maps and globes, video and cassette recordings, transparencies, and projectors.

In the context of this study, teaching aids are defined as any materials used by the instructors for the purpose of improving T&L. The materials may be anything that can facilitate students' understanding of a lesson which can be in the form of printed or electronic ones.

2.1.3. UNITEN

Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) is a private higher education institution owned by Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), the leading energy supplier company in Malaysia which is also one of the government-linked companies (GLCs). With the funds from TNB, UNITEN manages to operate almost equivalent to public higher education institutions in Malaysia. UNITEN has two campuses: one in Putrajaya, and another in Muadzam Shah City, Pahang.

UNITEN offers courses for some levels of study such as Doctor of Philosophy, Master, Bachelor, Diploma and Foundation. All these levels are available for courses in Engineering (Mechanical, Electrical and Electronics, Electrical Power, Civil), Information Technology, Computer Science, Accounting, Business, and Finance. These courses are offered by four colleges, namely the College of Engineering, College of Information Technology, College of Business and Accountancy, and College of Foundation and General Studies.

2.1.4. Malaysian Studies Subject

At UNITEN, students need to complete Malaysian Studies course as required by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA). The subject is taught in Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia), the official language of Malaysia. Besides, it is also compulsory for students to take some courses such as Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Moral Education (for non-Muslim students), and Corporate Malay. These subjects involve Malay as their medium of teaching and learning. On the other hand, there are also other Social Science courses that are however elective in nature, such as Leadership and Entrepreneurship, Sports Management and Health Science, Creative Thinking and so on. These subjects are taught and delivered in Malay and they are the courses involving College of Foundation and General Studies. College of Foundation and General Studies offers a few

courses in some fields such as Social Science, Language, Basic Engineering, Basic Information Technology, Basic Accounting, and Sports Science and Co-Curriculum.

Malaysian Studies in UNITEN is taught based on the syllabus prepared by the MQA. Nevertheless, the guidelines provided by the MQA are merely basic and this means that other details such as the division of titles for topics taught and the number of hours allotted will be determined by the institution that offers the subject. At UNITEN, there are a total of six main titles of topics designed for this course: History and Politics, The Constitution of Malaysia, The Establishment of National Country, Malaysia in the Era of Globalization, Foreign Policies, The Environment and Current Issues.

The Malaysian Studies subject consists of two parts of student evaluations: 50% allotted for assignments, and another 50% for the final exam. Specifically, for the assignments, there are three of them: group assignment (20%), group tutorial (20%), and written test (10%). For the group assignment, the students are assigned to conduct a brief research (basic) on the topics provided which are about the current issues in Malaysia.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Instruments

The present study is a descriptive study that employed questionnaire survey as its research instrument. Descriptive study is one of the types of quantitative research. According to [Creswell \(2008\)](#), in quantitative research, the data collection basically involves collecting data using instruments with preset questions and responses, gathering quantifiable (numeric) data and collecting information from a large number of individuals. According to [Azizi and Karim. \(2003\)](#), a descriptive study is conducted to concisely describe and analyze the data from a large number of respondents. As for the present study, the questionnaires were administered to 300 participants to survey their perceptions towards Facebook as a student-lecturer medium of communication and its effect on their performance in Malaysian Studies subject they were taking. Besides, the distribution of the questionnaires was also aimed at obtaining the participants' responses on the ability of Facebook in attracting students towards learning Malaysian Studies subject.

The questionnaire consisted of four main sections:

- i) Demography (gender, race, age, faculty)
- ii) Questions related to general perceptions towards Facebook
- iii) The effectiveness of Facebook in T&L
- iv) The effect of using Facebook on Malaysian Studies subject

Apart from the administration of the questionnaires, this study also conducted some informal interviews with a few students who were randomly selected. This was done to get a more accurate data from the respondents.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 300 students from two faculties in UNITEN Putrajaya Campus as its respondents. 210 students were from the College of Engineering while 90 students were from the

College of Information Technology. In terms of gender, 184 participants were male, while the rest (116) were female. The students participated in this study were in their First Semester to Fourth Semester who were taking Malaysian Studies subject in Semester Two, 2011/2012 Session (the time when the study was conducted). The respondents were divided into four groups according to their semester, which each group comprised of 60 students.

3.3. Data Collection

The main objective of the study was to assess the capability of Facebook as one of the teaching aids for Malaysian Studies subject at UNITEN. In this case, the perception towards Facebook as a communication tool between students and their lecturer outside the classroom was obtained from the respondents who were completing their Malaysian Studies subject in the above mentioned semester. Each group of respondents created a specific group on their lecturer's Facebook account and all respondents joined the group. The members that joined the Facebook group were informed of various topics related to Malaysian Studies subject. In relation to the topics posted, discussions occurred on Facebook between the students and their lecturer as well as their fellow classmates. Besides, important notices about their class were also posted by their lecturer on this social media tool. Their lecturer also utilized Facebook as the channel for distributing additional notes via the links inserted on this social networking site.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Data Analysis

The results of this study, which were in the form of percentages are explained descriptively in this section. The data collected is presented according to the order of the research objectives addressed as the following:

4.1.1. To Assess the Capability of Facebook as a Teaching Aid for a Social Science Subject at UNITEN

In the questionnaires distributed, respondents were asked about their perception towards Facebook as a communication medium apart from the conventional communication medium which was the face-to-face and verbal interaction between the students and their lecturers in the classroom or in their lecturers' room. The questions involved for this purpose revolved around the students' convenience when using Facebook such as in the aspects related to conducting discussions, the internet access and communication limitations. One of the self-reporting items in the questionnaire is: I get fast and accurate information regarding Malaysian Studies class from Facebook (item 12). 294 respondents reported their agreement with this statement, which this carries the largest percentage of agreeing with a statement in the questionnaire. The results showed that 225 of the respondents (75%) agreed that communication through Facebook was more convenient especially when it came to receiving the notices released by their lecturer. For example, the postponement of class, change of class time or venue etc were informed in the notices. In terms of discussing the topics related to Malaysian Studies posted, the respondents in majority indicated that they

discovered that it was more comfortable to discuss them online rather than face to face. This was because online discussion gave them more opportunities to ask questions and it also saved much of their time. Nevertheless, there were some respondents who expressed their negative views regarding the slight technical constraint and limitation of conducting this type of discussion, in terms of accessing to the internet. Even though in fact, wifi is available almost everywhere at UNITEN, this facility often encounters some problems during peak hours. Overall, the communication that occurred on Facebook in relation to learning Malaysian Studies was accepted by most of the students at UNITEN. A large number of respondents (75%) indicated that they felt comfortable and confident with the capability of virtual communication as an effective tool in the process of T&L, especially for Malaysian Studies course.

4.1.2. To Identify Students' Perceptions towards Facebook as a Student-Lecturer Communication Medium

To achieve this aim, the respondents were questioned on their convenience in communicating with their lecturer via the social networking site, Facebook. The communication investigated was the one involving the students' and their lecturer's discussions on some topics related to Malaysian Studies course. With Facebook, the students now had a new channel for interacting with their lecturer either individually or collectively. For example, there were 288 respondents who agreed with Item 8, I feel more confident to discuss topics concerning Malaysian Studies subject with my lecturer and classmates on Facebook rather than face to face. Clearly, the respondents in majority felt more comfortable expressing their views in their discussions related to the subject using virtual device rather than conventional one. The results showed that 82% of the respondents (246 participants) agreed that Facebook gave them the opportunity to be close to their lecturer teaching them Malaysian Studies subject. They also believed that a good relationship between students and their lecturer would affect their performance in a subject positively.

4.1.3. To Investigate the Impact of Facebook Usage on Students' Performance In A Social Science Subject

To achieve this objective, the examination results of the 300 respondents involved in this study were examined. Of the 300 students who completed Malaysian Studies subject in Semester 2, 2011/2012 Session, it was discovered that all of them (100%) passed the subject with C as the minimum passing grade managed to obtain. To break up the results, 35 students (12%) obtained an A, 42 students (14%) managed to get an A-, while 70 students (23%) acquired a B+, 75 students (25%) obtained a B, while 57 students (19%) managed to get a B-, 18 students (6%) acquired a C+, and finally three students (1%) obtained a C. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the usage of a new social media tool like Facebook had contributed to the improvement of the students' performance in Malaysian Studies subject at UNITEN. This conclusion is made by comparing the results of the students in the previous semester, which revealed the number of students who acquired an A in the subject was smaller compared to Semester 2, 2011/2012 Session. Even though

the improvement in the students' results was not totally because of the use of Facebook in the T&L process, the social networking site was still one of the contributing factors for the improvement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It was indicated in the results that in majority, the students in Semester 2, 2011/2012 Session at UNITEN agreed that the use of social networking site, Facebook as a teaching aid for Malaysian Studies subject had attracted them to discuss some topics related to the subject. Besides, this kind of virtual communication medium is viewed to have the ability to offer the students an opportunity to comfortably interact with their lecturer as by using Facebook, they can reserve their shyness and non-confidence while communicating face to face. As a result, the relationship between the students and their lecturers can be improved and this indirectly will influence the students' performance in the subject they are taking. Nevertheless, a detailed research should be conducted to obtain more data regarding this topic. The impact of virtual communication via social networking site such as Facebook in T&L needs to be investigated further by academicians. A wider-scaled study involving students from various universities in every state of the country as well as different subjects is necessary to be conducted in order to get a more comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of Facebook as a teaching aid in tertiary education. However, the insights presented in this research probably can give the instructors in UNITEN and perhaps other universities as well some ideas how to better use social networking sites for diversifying their teaching methods.

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