



## THE POTENTIAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MALAYSIAN PRIMARY STUDENTS TO IMPROVE WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

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English has always been the second language taught in both primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Students need to master English for communication, job requirements, advancement in science and technology and many other reasons. One of the most difficult components to master is the writing skill. As it requires knowledge in grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary to produce a good piece of writing, students must be fully equipped with all the essential abilities. Henceforth, this study aims to investigate the potential use of social media in improving the writing skill among primary students. The respondents of this research comprised of 47 ESL primary school students from a rural area in one of the states in Malaysia. The students' perceptions were measured through a questionnaire comprising a survey and open-ended questions. The finding of this study indicated that most respondents have access to social media and that they perceived social media as beneficial for the ESL educators to incorporate ICT into their teaching repertoire. It is concluded that incorporating social media in the classroom breaks the barriers in learning and converts it into a constructive learning environment.

**Contribution/Originality:** The study has investigated the use of social media in improving the writing skill. Much has been said about its potential but limited studies have examined the perspective of young students at the age of ten in a rural area. Therefore, this adds to the current existing literature on this issue.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The roadmap of language teaching and learning has experienced major changes in the era of deployment of new technologies worldwide (Azlan *et al.*, 2019). Nowadays the 21st century world, mobile technology with the integration of interactive Web 2.0 Internet based-applications better known as online social media is becoming more apparent and vibrant in our lifestyles. The world is moving towards using latest technological implementation via the fourth industrial revolution (IR 4.0). Hence, education is currently instilling the progressing technologies to generate new styles of teaching and learning mediums, thus providing knowledge and even preparing and equipping students with all the necessary and essential skills to survive in the machine age (Schwab, 2017).

It is no doubt that the use of online social media is contributing towards aspirations, which is in line with MOE Malaysia (2013) whereby the approaches of blended learning and the flipped classroom are also introduced. The methods of teaching and learning are applied with the integration of face interaction and technology-facilitated instructional approaches and in the form of online lectures or e-learning lessons, where students complete their tasks at home. The lesson period in the classroom is for peer-group activity, project-based learning, assignments,

and discussions. Additionally, the role of the teacher therefore evolves from a lecturer to that of a facilitator and coach (MOEM, 2013).

In 2016, a new KSSR aligned Common European Framework of Reference or better known as CEFR for English language was introduced to all English teachers teaching pre-school level up to secondary level. The new KSSR aligned curriculum has gradually influenced the learning and teaching methods in understanding English context to a more viable and fun learning. Nonetheless, in all four aspects of language development in learning English as a second language in school, writing is the most challenging part in acquiring the second language (Dar and Khan, 2015).

Although English is taught to students since pre-school, the proficiency level especially in the writing skills such as the use and application of correct tenses, writing sentence structure, punctuation, vocabulary usage and other grammar forms among ESL primary pupils in rural areas are still significantly low (Azlan *et al.*, 2019). Thus, to accommodate the weak students in their writing ability, it is necessary for the teachers to acquire the skill of integrating technological platforms such as social media with the writing task to be used both inside and outside classroom learning. However, there are very few studies conducted on the preferences and readiness of integrating social media and writing skills among ESL Malay primary students in the rural area in Malaysia. Hence, this study aims to discover the potential use of social media and students' perceptions towards improving writing skills using online platforms.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Mobile Learning and Social Networking

The appearance and magnification of the use of internet gave rise to the advancement of social media, an area that has entirely altered the realm of communication. As technology evolves, many innovators and educators join in searching for more solutions to close the gap of knowledge and skills beyond region, time space and boundaries (Tandale and Raman, 2016).

Classroom learning has never been the same since the previous introduction of ICT in teaching and learning English. ICT includes a variety of technologies used to communicate, create, disseminate and manage information effectively (Yunus and Salehi, 2012). Today, an integration of mobile and technology into language education has become an everyday phenomenon (Zaki and Yunus, 2015). There are various definitions of mobile learning from different scholars (Darmi and Albion, 2017).

Mobile learning is a method of attaining information from the broad interaction across various contexts amid people and personal interactive, social collaborating and technologies (Sharples *et al.*, 2009). It is also can be applied as the use of small and portable devices to achieve part of the e-Learning process (Brown, 2005).

The popular internet sites are Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram and many others. The social media websites and social sharing platforms are used as a mean of communication directly with other people socially and educationally in a way of sharing files, documents, songs, videos, real-time conversations and many others. It is undisputable that these social media corporations are playing a huge and influential role providing decision-making in the events of the international arena economically, politically, socially and educationally (Pempek *et al.*, 2013).

As social media is more viable in today's technological world, the technologies that come with it enhance learning, increase demand for learning, and promote flexible timeless delivery, space less and others. The demand for innovation and invention, creativity, collaboration and competitiveness are highly essential for the success in the interactive collaboration age of today (Suswati *et al.*, 2019). Educators, students and communities constantly search and demand for information and knowledge to improve their skills.

Online social media continues to be the mediator of lifetime learning, be it formal or informal virtual bridge to close the gap in education (Suswati *et al.*, 2019). By positively manipulating the role of social media, the learning

process would be more fun, engaging, meaningful and connecting. It is important for a student to be given authority to check and opt for the use of tools they feel comfortable and acquainted with so that it is viable for them to accomplish the academic task (Allen and Tay, 2012). In addition to that, students are to be given ample time testing out and get familiarize with same tasks using several types of social technologies (Shiva *et al.*, 2016).

## 2.2. Writing Skill

Writing skill is always the most challenging part of learning in the classroom. When it comes to writing, teachers would have many opinions about their students' writing tasks. The poor standard of writing skill amid both first and second language learners are often due to the difficulty of writing steps in the directed paragraph writing (Majid and Stapa, 2017). To remedy this many studies have shown that there are positive impacts by collaborating through social media platforms that produce digitally kept information like discussions that students can update, catalogue and share with others (Bailey *et al.*, 2017).

A study using Facebook as scaffolding revealed that secondary students in rural area favored the use of social media as it enabled them to learn better and improve their writing process and writing performance. The content analysis on the written essays by participants also showed an increase improvement among the target group (Majid and Stapa, 2017). A study found that there are numerous writing tasks happening among teachers and students on social media; the teaching and learning is in the continuous approach where the teaching pedagogy are either teacher or student-centered when using social networking tools (Kimmerle *et al.*, 2015).

The introduction of social media in learning contexts often has its own disagreement in aligning to the constructivist learning theories (Kimmerle *et al.*, 2015). In this particular type of learning condition, collaboration and intercommunication between students are highly significant, because knowledge is about sharing, negotiating and acquiring between students and teachers, rather than being spoon-fed from the teacher. Thus, this makes English writing as a vital existing skill as claimed by Sweeny (2010) as writing is an integral part of students' lives due to their use of texting and social networking sites, but most students do not recognize this type of communication as writing.

## 2.3. ESL Students' Perceptions towards Social Media as a Learning Method

In the constructivist learning situation, communication between students is seen to aid cognitive processes and therefore improve learning. The course of online interaction allows students to create their own perspectives enthusiastically, in which they can connect to a small group. Students are involved in active, productive, purposeful, reliable, and collaborative learning. Allowing groups to build knowledge via collaborating and cooperating with others is a significant component of constructivist-based online teaching and learning (Meyer, 2002) as cited in Aksal (2009).

Many studies on the use of Facebook in L2 education environments have reported positive influences on student motivation, engagement, and attitudes. In an investigation on L2 tertiary students' perceptions towards the use of Facebook groups for improving their writing ability as they immersed in different writing tasks such as brainstorming and summarizing, found that students felt their motivation and confidence improve through participating in activities on the Facebook platform (Yunus and Salehi, 2012). Particularly, the majority of students described that instantaneous interaction and prompt feedback increased their motivation, while casual or informal interactions such as when their fellow friends "liked" comments helped to boost their confidence (Yunus and Salehi, 2012).

However, there are not many studies available for Malaysian rural primary school students. Although, this may involve any potential threats such as cybercrime, gaming addictions, unintentional diversion to unauthorized illegal sites or even online predators, with close supervision and positive parents or guardians it is possible to reduce the

risks and danger from online content (Yusuf *et al.*, 2014). Thus, this study probed further on the potential use of social media and students' perceptions on using these online platforms to improve their writing skills.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

The research design for this study is survey research. The first five sections in the questionnaire aimed to identify respondents' demographic profile, accessibility to ICT tools, social media preferences, social media competency and factors affecting their use of social media. Then, section F which comprised open-ended questions explored respondents' perceptions on how social media can be used in helping students improve their writing skills in terms of the overall impact of social media groups.

#### 3.2. Population and Sample of Study

This study was carried out in a primary rural school in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. A quantitative and qualitative (mixed method) survey study was applied to explore the potential use of social media and students' perceptions for assisting writing using online networking for learning. For this purpose, purposive sampling was used where 47 ESL Primary 4 students were selected as respondents. They were asked to complete a survey about social media competency and preferences and responded to seven open-ended questions particularly about their perceptions in improving writing skill using social media.

#### 3.3. Instrument

There were six sections (A to F) in the questionnaire. Section A was on respondents' demographic profile. The demographic information collected were age, the locality of the school area, and the duration usage of social media. The next section solicited whether or not each participant has a social media account and access to ICT tools that consisted of five close-ended questions of 'Yes or No' answers. Section C comprised ten items on the frequency of using social media. Participants would simply opt for either 'Never', 'Seldom', 'Sometimes', or 'Always' to determine their frequent usage. Section D also was comprised of ten questions identifying students' competency in social media that consisted of 'Not applicable', 'Weak', 'Moderate', 'Good', to 'Very Good'. Then, Section E was comprised of ten questions using the Likert-Scale of 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Agree', to 'strongly Agree' to determine which factors affected their use of social media.

#### 3.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

For Section F, there were six open-ended items, where the respondents' views were categorized into content analysis and analyzed accordingly. The six open ended items gathered were used to support and give meaning to the quantitative data analysis and the other three items were for systematic analysis and presentation of each student's selection and each respondent was coded S01, S02, and S03...S047 respectively. The comments were extracted from the respondents as they expressed their thoughts and opinions through written text in the space provided for each open-ended question. The latter part of the open-ended items was purposely conducted to investigate students' thoughts and perceptions about using social media to improve writing ability.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were presented in six sections. The first one was on the demographic data followed by the respondents' accessibility, usage, competency and intended factors on the use of social media. These data were then analyzed using frequencies and percentages. In section F, the findings were analyzed using content analysis. The statements quoted were based on the responses extracted from the open ended questions where they were familiar with and used social media but had never been exposed to it during teaching and learning in the classroom.

Table-1. Demographic analysis.

Item	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	51.1 %
	Female	48.9 %
Primary	Four	100 %
	Five	0 %
Duration of use	1-3 years	2.1 %
	4-6 years	4.3 %
	7-9 years	93.6 %

In terms of gender distributions as presented in Table 1, most participants (51.1%) were male and 48.9% were female. All respondents were in Primary 4 (100%) and the locality was rural (100%). A majority of the respondents were introduced to social media during the age of seven to nine years old (93.6%), followed by four to six years old (4.3%) and even at the tender age of one to three years old (2.1%).

Table-2. Accessibility to ICT.

No.	Access	Yes	No
1	Computer	70.2%	29.8%
2	Smartphone	83%	17%
3	IPAD	61.7%	38.3%
4	Internet	78.7%	21.3%
5	Using social media	63.8%	36.2%

It was apparent that students nowadays even in rural area do have easy access to ICT tools whether at home, school or within their district Internet Community Centre. Table 2 shows that of all respondents, the most accessible ICT tools were the Smartphone (83%), followed by Internet access (78.7%), and computer access (70.2%). Since the opening of the Internet Community Centre last year, the accessibility to computer and Internet access have been gaining in popularity. This was then followed by social media (63.8%) and IPAD (61.7%).

Table-3. Social media usage preference.

No.	Social media	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Always
1	Facebook	42.6%	23.4%	21.3%	12.8%
2	Twitter	87.2%	6.4%	2.1%	4.3%
3	Wechat	70.2%	8.5%	17%	4.3%
4	LINE	68.1%	14.9%	4.3%	12.8%
5	Instagram	34%	21.3%	17%	27.7%
6	YouTube	8.5%	8.5%	8.5%	74.5%
7	Whatsapp	21.3%	8.5%	23.4%	46.8%
8	Telegram	70.2%	8.5%	6.4%	14.9%
9	Tik Tok	53.2%	10.6%	14.9%	21.3%
10	Snapchat	61.7%	17%	8.5%	12.8%

When it comes to social media preference and usage frequency (in Table 3), the most preferred one was YouTube that had the highest frequency of usage (74.5 %). That is probably due to the YouTube platform being easy to use; it is among the most favorite one for primary students that have Internet access (Sahak *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, with thousands of children's videos, cartoons, and children songs to download and choose from, it has made it the highest percentage of preference and usage among all social media.

The second highest usage of social media was WhatsApp (46.8%) which was also known to be the most viable media of communication among students. Other than being easy to use, it is also a popular means of group chat or communication between family and friends (Hashim *et al.*, 2018).

Although Instagram (27.7%) came in third place after You Tube and WhatsApp, the use of Instagram was also quite popular among students. Thus, based on the response retrieved from one of the open-ended questions, "Why

do you prefer Instagram?” it implied that Instagram has many features as compared to other social media (Tse and Yau, 2014). Most of the respondents claimed that in Instagram, they can follow their favorite artist and upload pictures easily and many others. As quoted from some respondents:

“Instagram is easy to use and I can follow my favorite artist”. (S037).

“I can always post my photos on Instagram”. (S036).

On the other hand, after Instagram, there were respondents who were likely to use Tik Tok (21.3%). Tik Tok has different unique features that attract students to use it on social media. Another respondent also stated:

“I can watch my friends’ action in Tik Tok”. (S024).

Tik Tok is another type of social media that is one of the most downloaded applications among teenagers. In contrasting to other video platforms, Tik Tok has a unique social infrastructure (Citarella, 2018). It is accessible in a short-form of fifteen seconds of ‘duet’ mobile videos (Citarella, 2018). However, there is no study done to relate the potential use of Tik Tok to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, both Twitter and WeChat had the least usage percentage (4.3%).

**Table-4.** The social media competency.

No.	Social media	Not applicable	Weak	Moderate	Good	Very good
1	Facebook	23.4%	10.6%	14.9%	23.4%	27.7%
2	Twitter	61.7%	17%	6.4%	10.6%	4.3%
3	Wechat	46.8%	25.5%	10.6%	4.3%	12.8%
4	LINE	63.8%	14.9%	6.4%	4.3%	10.6%
5	Instagram	23.4%	14.9%	19.1%	12.8%	29.8%
6	YouTube	2.1%	6.4%	14.9%	10.6%	66%
7	Whatsapp	10.6%	12.8%	8.5%	8.5%	59.6%
8	Telegram	63.8%	8.5%	4.3%	4.3%	19.1%
9	Tik Tok	46.8%	8.5%	2.1%	14.9%	27.7%
10	Snapchat	42.6%	23.4%	6.4%	12.8%	14.9%

From Table 4, most of the respondents were ‘very good’ at using You Tube (66%) as the respondents were able to make videos, upload and download videos, share them, comment and others, and then WhatsApp (59.6%), followed by Instagram (29.8%) and Tik Tok (27.7%). Other respondents rated themselves as ‘good’ users of Facebook (23.4%). However, many respondents rated themselves as the least competent or ‘weak’ in using WeChat (25.5%), and Snapchat (23.4%). For Telegram and WeChat (63.8%) and Twitter (61.7%) the respondents confirmed that these apps and platforms were not applicable to them or that they never used them.

**Table-5.** Reasons for using social media.

No.	Item	S.D	D	A	S.A	Mean
1	I use SM to communicate with my friends	8.5%	0%	21.3%	70.2%	3.00
2	I use SM to communicate with my family	8.5%	0%	21.3%	70.2%	3.53
3	I use SM to learn new things	2.1%	14.9%	44.7%	38.3%	3.19
4	I use SM to follow my favourite artiste	21.3%	10.6%	25.5%	42.6%	2.89
5	I use SM to learn English	8.5%	10.6%	51.1%	29.8%	3.02
6	I use SM to fill my free time	8.5%	19.1%	42.6%	29.8%	2.94
7	I use SM to gain knowledge	8.5%	12.8%	36.2%	42.6%	3.13
8	I use SM to follow the current trend (fashion, movie, music)	17%	12.8%	29.8%	40.4%	2.94
9	I use SM because my friends use it	38.3%	34%	17%	10.6%	2.00
10	I use SM to do business	19.1%	29.8%	40.4%	10.6%	2.43
11	I use SM because it is easy to use	27.7%	23.4%	25.5%	23.4%	2.45
12	I use SM because it is useful to me	8.5%	2.1%	34%	55.3%	3.36

Based on Table 5, most respondents stated that the reason they used social media was to ‘communicate with their family and friends’ (70.2%). Some of the responses are:

“I can talk and socialise with my family and friends in my own group chat”. (S042).

“I can ask about homework whenever I feel stuck”. (S041).

The finding indicated that social media was an ‘easy and useful tools’ (55.3%) that can bridge the communication barrier by creating support and assistance socially and create the need for learning. Other respondents also felt ‘strongly agree’ to ‘following their favourite artist “and to gain knowledge’ (42.6%),’ follow the current trends’ like music, fashion or movies (40.4%) or even to ‘learn new things’ (38.3%). These percentages can be supported by some of the responses such as,

“I can look at other people’s life and know their activities”. (S038).

“Social media helps me to learn and gain new knowledge”. (S044).

In addition to that, most students felt that gaining new knowledge was as important as improving their writing skills. As claimed by a study conducted in Malaysia, social media had a positive impact on the performance of student’s writing skills where it allowed students to be a better writer, improve their communication skills through audio visual discussion, learn different languages and read model essays that were accessible online (Hashim *et al.*, 2018).

A few questions about writing were asked to identify the potential needs in improving writing skills using social media. The first open-ended question is, “In your opinion, can you improve writing using social media? About 33 (70%) respondents responded ‘Yes’ and most of the respondents claimed that playing online games such as Quizziz and Kahoot and listening to English songs through You Tube could help them improve their writing. As quoted by some of the respondents:

“Yes, I can. That is by creating and playing our own online Quizzis or Kahoot.” (S023 and S016).

“Yes, I can improve writing skills by listening to English song on You Tube” (S019).

“Yes. I can use Google Search to find tips and guide how to write correctly”. (S021).

The next open-ended question was to probe further on their understanding of grammar learning, “How can you avoid grammar mistake in writing?” Some respondents gave opinions and stated that they could use Google search or Google Translate. Others responded that by playing grammar Quizzis, they could reduce their grammar mistakes before pursuing any writing activities. Another respondent quoted differently stated that:

“I will use social media to practise writing about what I like and wait for others to comment”. (S014).

This implied that some students felt social media could give them enough support and confidence to write better. A previous study conducted by Yunus and Salehi (2012) pointed out that online social media platforms could assist pupils to improve and enhance their writing skill through peers’ feedback. Additionally, social media could be used as effective learning tools and to adjust students’ previous usage with these tools in designing, scaffolding, and interacting between students during the process where necessary (Al-Naibi *et al.*, 2018).

However, the last open-ended questions asked, “Would you prefer to write your homework essay using social media?” Surprisingly, most respondents agreed with the suggestion. They stated:

“It is easier to do homework online and help me to finish my homework faster”. (S004).

“I can add many ideas that I can’t think of by using Google search”. (S003).

Nonetheless, some respondents also felt the need ‘to learn English’ and ‘to fill free time’ (29.8%) as highly important in using social media. However, very few respondents used reasons like ‘other friends use it’ or ‘to do business’ as their preferences (10.6%).

It could be implied that students believed the use of social media aids would be useful in the teaching of ESL writing in schools. It also motivated students to engage, learn and at the same time had the tendency to improve their writing. Finally, the integration of social media in learning writing encouraged students to be independent and responsible for their own learning by intelligently searching for educational related materials online (Yunus *et al.*, 2018). Hence, it would probably benefit both educators and guardians to help their students to practise enjoyable and meaningful learning in writing (Yuk *et al.*, 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The social media platform has many potentials in assisting pupils in writing. Apart from social uses and interaction, social media could be enhanced as a form of integrating teaching into learning and engaging younger age group. This research is anticipated to be convenient and favorable to many parties. The study can also be useful in creating the online writing activities and authentic networking built among younger pupils, teachers and parents. The use of ICT and social media breaks the barriers in the learning classroom and converts it into a constructive learning environment. Other implications may include online threats, lack of accessibility and other factors. For further research, it would be useful to examine the actual impact of social media in enhancing writing skills among younger primary ESL students.

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