

# The Impacts and Efficacy of Social Networks as Part of eLearning in English Department, Petra Christian University

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**Abstract** – In association with teaching profession, in this digital world, the use of internet as the part of teaching process as well as classroom activities has been extremely used in many majors and universities. The use of internet can give many benefits especially in language learning. Here internet provides supplemental language activities which can provide students with additional practice in specific areas of language learning. These include reading tests and comprehension questions, grammar exercises, cloze tests, vocabulary exercises, and so forth. This is known well as eLearning. Along with this fast changing world, English Department, Petra Christian University, tries to follow this changing world especially on the teaching process with using eLearning in its class activities. Lecturers who have had orientation in using internet tools give web based projects or assignments on different topics which necessitate students holding online discussions with their peers through Blogs created by their teachers or in most famous social networking, *facebook*. This paper particularly wants to explore the impacts of the discussion application in *facebook* to support students' class activities in the writing classes. It particularly wants to explore

whether the use of social networks gives

them some benefits, and whether it is effective.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

**Keywords** – efficacy, eLearning, impact, internet, social networks.

Petra Christian University as the university which goes global has facilitated the students and lecturers with the Wi-Fi connection which can help the students and lecturers to access the Internet in the surrounding of university. The computerized and online worlds have obviously given various advantages in term of ease, speed, and wide access.

Nearly all students and lecturers in English Department, Petra Christian University have used internet to support their activities, work, and assignments. Discussing about internet, people cannot separate it with social networks. Most people all over the world have their account in social networks. One of the famous social networks is *facebook*. According to Global Monitor in November 2009, the users of *facebook* have reached the number of four hundred million users from all over the world. Not to mention in Indonesia, especially English Department, Petra Christian University, most of students and lecturers have an account in *facebook*. Through *facebook*, lecturers and students can share assignment and announcement easily,

and students will know the information faster rather than from the announcement board.

Knowing that the students love to browse *facebook* rather than other information media, some lecturers especially in writing subjects try to make classroom activities using *facebook*. This activity requires students to create a discussion in the *facebook* group discussion. The topic deals with the common problems that happen in the world. Therefore, the use of group discussion in *facebook* should offer some strong points and advantages to the students. This research aims to explore the students' opinion about this class activity, whether it gives them some benefits and whether they feel that it is more efficient rather than offline group discussion.

## II. THEORIES

### *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet as a Teaching and Learning Tool*

In addition to the communication benefits of the Internet, the Internet can also be used to retrieve and access information. The World Wide Web is therefore a virtual library at one's fingertips; it is a readily available world of information for the language learner. While the Internet offers numerous benefits to the language learner, a few such possibilities in the context of language learning are examined here.

The Internet serves as a medium for experiencing and presenting creative works. While students can peruse the information on the Net, they can also use it as a platform for their own work such as essays, poetry, or stories. Numerous public schools, for example, are making use of the World Wide Web for publishing students' work which can be accessed by other web users. Students therefore become not only consumers of content, but in fact generate the content [1].

As reference [2] describes, the use of the Internet has also been shown to promote higher order thinking skills. A language teacher, for example, may instruct learners to search for specific information. Searching

the Web requires logic skills. Once information has been obtained, the results must be reviewed by using scanning, discarding, and evaluative judgment on part of the learner. The information must be put together to make a complete and coherent whole which entails the synthesis process. Such endeavor permits students to practice reading skills and strategies. The Internet also promotes literacy for authentic purposes, as stated previously. In addition to being a supplement to reading materials which provide current information, the Internet gives students opportunities to explore the real world. Such browsing or exploration can also lead to incidental learning as students encounter a variety of information in this way. Communication with native speakers furthers literacy development for authentic purposes, enables language learners to compare student perspectives on an issue and allows them to practice specific skills such as negotiating, persuading, clarifying meaning, requesting information, and engaging in true-life, authentic discussions. Promotion of literacy also occurs within a social context. The interaction that results from the above situations can lead to cooperative projects and increase communication between students from all over the world, in turn leading to the development of social skills.

Additionally, the Internet promotes higher thinking skills. It increases the participation when it is used in classroom environment [3], [4]. For instance, it was found that the ESL learners produced more sentences when it was compared to the situation in classroom environment [5]. It is also useful not only for the quantity but also the quality of language: Learners have a great variety of speech discourse [3] and use more complex language [4]. According to the research activities, the internet changes the interaction between learners and teachers [5]: There is less teacher and more learner talking in computer classes. Furthermore, it changes teacher and students' roles [6] and makes learning more student-centered.

While the Internet and its various facets offer a great deal to the language learner, it is not without its problems. The nature of the Internet itself can be a disadvantage at times. When lines are busy due to many users, it may take time to access information or browse the Net and technical glitches themselves can lead to frustration [1].

### III. METHODS

In doing the research, the writers spread questionnaires. The questionnaires were spread in the *facebook* discussion board of the *Research Paper Writing Class*. There are forty members in that discussion board. The members of group discussion in the *facebook* answered the questionnaire by replying the topic.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Efficacy of Facebook Discussion Board

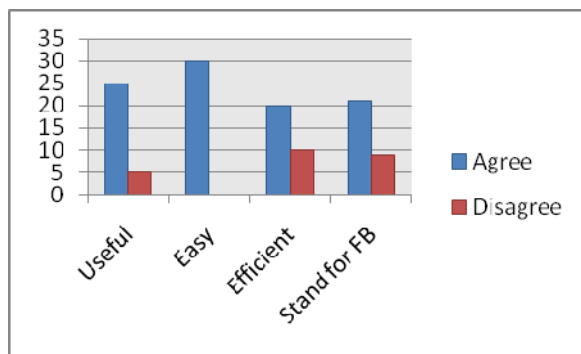


Fig. 1 Efficacy of Facebook Discussion Board

From the figure above, it can be seen that most students thought that the use of the discussion board in *facebook* is very useful, easy and efficient. Mostly it is because they thought that by joining the discussion board they can share their ideas easily without having to meet each others. Moreover, what is being discussed is not so difficult and makes them able to follow easily. Besides, most of them always open their *facebook* everyday; thus, they can keep updating their opinions. This discussion board can save their time since they can join the discussion in many places. It is because they can open *facebook* anywhere and anytime. Since most students thought that checking *facebook* has been their daily needs, they felt it is efficient

to give opinions in the discussion board while browsing their *facebook*.

Compared to group discussion in class, students will stand more on *facebook*. The students prefer a discussion in *facebook* because they feel more comfortable if they do not meet the interlocutors. They will have more time to think what they would write. Moreover, they have more time to find more sources to make their opinion stronger. In summary, most students found it easier to comprehend and follow others' ideas in written forms than oral.

#### B. Benefits and Difficulties from Facebook Discussion Board

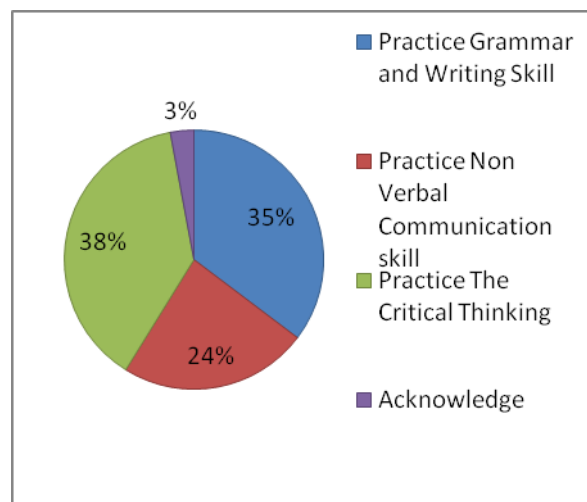


Fig. 2 Benefits from Facebook Discussion Board

From figure 2, it can be seen that 38% of the students thought that from the discussion board they learn to think more critically. It is because what is being discussed is related to common issues in the world and they have to share their opinion toward the topic. This finding supports the idea that Internet promotes higher thinking skills [3], [4] and promotes higher order thinking skills [2]. *Facebook* discussion board helps students to think more critically, since they can gather more sources in the internet to support their opinion.

The next advantage of this discussion board is that students can practice their grammar and writing skills. Creating a writing to be discussed is not easy because

what is to be written must be interesting to attract other people to join in that discussion. Furthermore, a good writing needs a good grammar indeed. Thus, here students become not only consumers of content, but in fact generate the content [1].

Another advantage is that students can practice their non verbal communication skill. Discussing some topics without seeing the interlocutor is not easy though, since it might lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, the students here learned to think again before they write in order to make the readers understand well what they are trying to say.

Finally, this discussion board also helps to acknowledge the students. They can share what they think and feel about what is being discussed in the board such as about Tsunami in Mentawai, Volcano in Merapi, and many current issues that happened not only in Indonesia but also in the world. This discussion board can make them feel appreciated.

Despite the benefits that the students can get from the *facebook* discussion board, they still found some obstacles that make them difficult to join the discussion board.

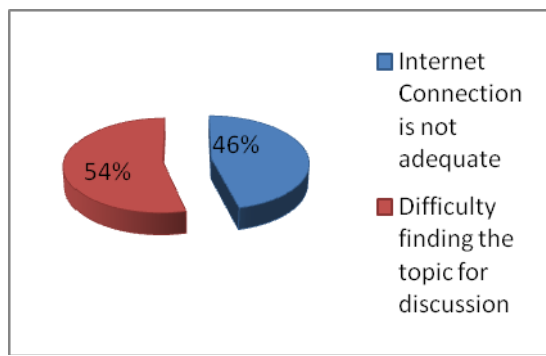


Fig. 3 Difficulties in Facebook Discussion Board

The figure above shows that students faced two main difficulties in the *facebook* discussion board namely internet connection which is not adequate and the difficulty to find a topic to be discussed.

Even though the university has facilitated students with Wi-Fi connection, it is

undeniable that the connection is very poor in several times, especially in the busy time when many students access the Internet at the same time. This situation can lead students to frustration [1]. Thus, this problem becomes a big obstacle in the use of the discussion board.

The other difficulty is that students get difficulty to find a good topic to be discussed since the topic that they should raise must be interesting; otherwise, nobody will respond to their topic. However, it should not be taken as a problem but a challenge for students, because from this difficulty they can learn to be more critical and improve their writing skill.

## V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From the research that has been done, it can be seen that the *facebook* discussion board gives some benefits to the students namely practicing their critical thinking, practicing their grammar and writing skills, practicing their non verbal communication, and also acknowledging them. Even though students have to face some difficulties in finding the topic and the internet connection which is not adequate, most of them still prefer to do the discussion in *facebook* rather than in class. Moreover, they thought that it is easy and efficient to be done because it can save their time in browsing the Internet. They can join the discussion while opening their *facebook*.

For this reason alone, the *facebook* discussion board is a technology that will, without a doubt, have significant implications for both teaching and learning. So what does this imply for language teachers and learners? Teachers must familiarize themselves with *facebook* and its various functions such as the discussion board as a way to integrate technology in their language classrooms.

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