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An informal Facebook Group for English language Interaction

A study of Malaysian university students' perspectives, experiences and behaviours

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Abstract— The fundamental design of social networking sites (SNSs) to ease social interactions has generally been viewed as valuable in second language learning. This study set out to examine Malaysian university students' perceptions, experiences and behaviours when presented with an informal English language interaction group on Facebook. Three methods of data collection were employed in stages: an initial questionnaire, the postings on a Facebook interaction group, and subsequent semi-structured interviews. The findings show a discrepancy between the students' perceptions and behaviours when they used Facebook for English language learning (ELL) and interaction. While a majority of the participants expressed high interest in using Facebook for ELL, in the actual group they generally acted very passively and did not contribute to any content development. The reasons cited for this behaviour were that the group did not support their needs for ELL, they were too occupied with university work, and simply wanted to act as silent readers. The main type of posts shared by the group members were of a socio-academic nature such as advertisements for university-related events. The interaction threads in the group indicated the participants' interest in three topics; entertainment-based discussions, grammar quizzes and university-related inquiries. The passive members of the group reported small improvements in their English language skills from the interaction activity. On the contrary, the few active participants experienced a boost in their self-confidence to employ English language in a public space, but no improvement in their language skills. The students' experiences and behaviours in the LMT100 group are discussed from three levels of sociocultural influences; personal, societal and institutional. Their familiarity with the face-to-face teacher-centred classroom learning that privileged examinations might have hindered their active participation in the Facebook group. Due to the unsuccessful implementation of the informal English language interaction group on Facebook, several strategies that could improve students' participations when Facebook is used for ELL, are presented as implications.

Keywords-Facebook; English language interaction; active and passive students' participation; personal, societal and institutional sociocultural influences

I. INTRODUCTION

As the fastest growing type of social software [1], social networking sites (SNSs) are used for various purposes such as education, creative production, businesses, circulation of information, marketing, political debates and charitable acts [2]

[3] [4]. The educational field particularly appears to be generally positive about the integration of SNSs for academic activities [5] [6] [7] [8]. SNSs develop the new paradigm of learning or new literacy [9] [10] by connecting users to one another, improving interaction and easing collaborative processes [11] [12] [13] [14] [15]. SNSs allow “*unprecedented learning opportunities*” where students collaboratively develop “*the wisdoms of the crowds*” content and community-based inquiries [16] [17]. The emergence of the social media has also re-conceptualized the word *literacy* to include wider social practices instead of being restricted to reading and writing abilities [18].

SNSs were designed to mediate interaction and communication among users. This ability serves as an advantage in the second language learning field where students can be connected to a wider community of students as well as to native speakers. The emphasis on an authentic second language environment, meaning making and language production are in line with the basic principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT has been widely adopted in many English as a Second or Foreign Language classrooms (ESL/EFL) [19] [20] [21] [22], but has been criticised due to its disregard for non-English, local classroom contexts and its idealistic view of the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students, and neglect of the grammatical and linguistic systems of the second language [23] [24] [25].

Progressively, the current theory of second language learning language literacy suggests socially-mediated practices where learning occurs through participation, social interaction, collaborative discussion, identity and community development, sociocultural integration and meaningful interaction [18] [26] [27] [28] [29] [30]. These theories suggest that classrooms should be treated as an integral part of larger society, rather than as isolated [31]. However, [32] observed that non-school literacy practices are marginalized and there is no link between students' academic and recreational language activities. As such, the popularity and convenience of SNSs could be effective in bridging students' formal and informal learning providing a continuity in their literacy practices, instead of these ceasing after the examination [6] [8] [30] [33] [34] [35] [36] [32]. In line with this, it has been argued by [5] [(37) and [38] that informal learning on participatory media such as Facebook has the ability

to increase students' engagement in formal learning environments. Furthermore, 21st century literacy practices requires that teachers and students work together as co-authors and co-producers [39] [40]. Dialogue sessions between teachers-students would better inform students' wants and needs for educational use of SNSs [41].

II. THE CHALLENGES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING (ELL) IN MALAYSIA

As an official second language of Malaysia, English language mastery is given high emphasis. However, a recent educational report [42] shows a decline in English language achievement at two levels in national examinations. News about the decrease in English language acquisition especially among university graduates has often made the headlines, emphasizing national concern over this matter [43] [44]. There are several challenges to ELL in Malaysia that might have influenced low English language achievement among students.

Firstly, policy changes relating to the medium of instruction might have caused confusion to teachers, students and the public alike [45]. Before independence in 1957, English was the medium of instruction in schools. After independence, the spirit of nationalism among political leaders led to the introduction of Bahasa Malaysia to replace English. In 2003, the medium of instruction in schools was reverted to English in a program called the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English (PPSMI), to catch up with science, international trade, commerce and technological development [45] [46] [47]. This change received mixed reactions from teachers, students, parents, and policymakers. While many agreed that the change was for the better, others questioned whether teachers and students had the ability to adopt an English medium teaching-learning process [48]. After much deliberation and pressure, the PPSMI policy was reversed in 2012 and Bahasa Malaysia was re-introduced as the medium of instruction in schools. This back-and-forth process in language policy might have disrupted students' learning progress and jeopardized their English language mastery.

Secondly, studies of English learning strategies have revealed the scarceness of authentic platforms and activities for students to practice their language skills. The plurality of ethnicities with high competencies in their own native languages resulted in awkwardness in using English continuously in daily interactions [49] [50] [51]. Even when studying overseas, surrounded by native English speakers (NS), Malaysian students still seem to face difficulties in practicing English language skills. In addition, students from rural areas rarely received the same opportunities and exposure to English as their peers from urban areas and higher socio-economic status families [52]. Studies reported that these secondary school students faced difficulty and disliked reading English books [53], lacked critical and analytical skills, were unable to master grammar and had problems in English language writing [54] [55] [56] [57].

Thirdly, in many settings, English language practice is constrained and often neglected once students leave their English language classrooms. Exam-oriented learning

strategies have alleviated students' needs to master all aspects of English language competence and only focus on assessed skills such as reading comprehension, writing and grammar [58]. A group of non-native English speakers (NNS) in a Canadian university reported difficulties in ELL but maintained a good academic performance, compared to their NS friends. Communication and listening skills were viewed as unimportant, as they did not directly affect students' grades [30] [39] [58]. However, due to their incompetence and lack of confidence, students suffered in oral presentations and networking that jeopardized their opportunities to secure good jobs [59] [60].

Finally, when students try to use English in daily conversations, they tend to receive criticisms instead of support and encouragement, especially from their own ethnic peers as they are deemed as "arrogant" and "showing-off" [49]. It has been argued [61] that the lack of exposure to English language and its association with Westernization and Christianity might have instilled fear among certain communities in Malaysia, who in return have resisted ELL. Therefore, there has been a growing movement that argues for second language learning to be situated within students' sociocultural values, instead of being fitted within the world view of the target language to ensure students' comprehension and ease meaning making [60] [62] [63] [64] [65].

These challenges could be addressed by integrating SNSs into formal and informal second language learning. SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter promote interaction and situate students among the specific social communities they associate themselves with.

III. SNSs AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Although limited, there are several studies that have examined the relationship and impact of SNSs in second language learning in the following areas; writing [38] [66] [67], advantages and disadvantages of SNSs for ELL [67] [68], critical literacy [14], identity establishment [69], blended learning [70] [71] [72] and construction of knowledge on Facebook [73]. SNSs are used to mediate formal and informal learning due to the central roles they play in teachers and students' lives in countries such as United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Malaysia and Nepal [74] [75] [76] [67] [68] [73] [77]. Facebook has been employed in classrooms and its impact studied. Other SNSs used for formal and informal learning include Ning, Twitter, LiveMocha, and Eggl. It appears [78] that Facebook is used greatly by the college and university students between the ages of 18-35 years old. Students have reported daily access as well as familiarity and comfort with Facebook for both educational and social activities [68]. However, it has also been found [79] that SNSs have yet to fully penetrate Malaysian university settings as not all higher institution students use Facebook or other SNSs.

Facebook has great potential in research and practice in a higher education environment although it is new to the academic field [80]. Online interaction [68] has been linked with incidental learning (81) of ELL, where casual interactions on Facebook and blogs as forums seem able to develop

vocabulary, strengthen confidence, boost motivation and develop positive attitudes [82]. Other studies [38] [66] and [83] have shown that SNSs are effective in improving students' critical literacy and writing ability, as well as strengthening students-teachers' interactions and relationship. It has also been found [83] [84] that Facebook promoted lifelong learning as students continued their discussions and shared information on the platforms even after their courses ended. Studies have also indicated that interactions mediated by SNSs such as Twitter and Facebook enhanced students' communicative, cultural and socio-pragmatic competence [19] [85].

A number of studies have employed SNSs as part of formal activities and tasks that assessed and graded students' participation [36] [70], or as a strategy to improve interests and participations [86]. By detailing the assessment rubrics, the aim was for students to feel in control of their learning, raising their awareness of the importance of their contributions, and creating links between their formal and informal writing activities [86] [87]. It has been argued [33] [36] that raising students' awareness of the link between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices could enhance language skills. The emphasis on both online and offline activities gave rise to the blended learning environment.

In the blended learning environment that combined physical and virtual activities, 23 Taiwanese ESL students, were divided into groups and instructed to submit their writing products in the Facebook environment to be assessed by their peers [70]. These writings were then discussed in the classroom. It was observed that the activity did not only improved the students' writing skills in organization, grammar and structure, spelling, and content and vocabulary, but also enhanced their relationships, communication and a sense of trust with each other [70]. To this effect, the findings supported the social constructivist theory that students need to reflect, learn from each other and develop knowledge and skills through interaction and collaboration [70]. Notably, students with more advanced English writing abilities had higher degrees of interaction and might have benefitted more from the peer assessment activity [70]. However, this activity required the course instructor to be actively involved in correcting students' writings for both assignments and online comments [70].

Teachers may well have to play very active roles in planning, monitoring and assessing students' activity in an interaction-driven blended learning environment [27]. One questionnaire study [68] found that Malaysian university students preferred structured online learning with pre-determined objectives with teachers' high involvement and guidance in the activity. Other findings [88] have been that students preferred the language learning tool on a less interactive Web 1.0 platform rather than on three SNSs of LiveMocha, Palabea and Babel. In line with this, a blended learning environment involving 120 Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design students [72] showed improved interactions especially among the 20 international students. The asynchronous online interaction activity allowed the students to ponder over comments and critiques rather than being put on the spot [72]. This eliminated possible language barriers and social

inhibitions that often seem to have restrained international students' development [51]. The students praised the lecturer's ability to link theory and practice through modern ways of interaction and communication on Facebook. The activity also contributed to enhanced conversations among students that evolved into friendships [72]. Both studies [70] [72] attributed the popularity and convenience of Facebook as the motivating factor for the positive and high students' participations and engagement in the online activities. However, the students' were more active in the online environment in the early weeks of the semesters, and their participation waned as the weeks progressed, due to assignments, revision and other commitments [72].

IV. CURRENT STUDY

There are three research gaps from the previous studies that formed the basis of the current research. These research gaps are presented from the view of methods of data collection, design of the Facebook group and the lack of study of this field in the Malaysian setting.

Previous studies that have examined the effect of SNSs on second language learning have usually employed formally constructed tasks (with a multiple methods approach) or a single method. Many studies have emphasized the need for pre-determined learning objectives in online activities [68] [89] [90] [86], but one [5] found that students were often exhausted and inattentive when they had to achieve specific learning objectives in a restricted period of time. To follow Krashen's affective filter hypothesis [91], negative feelings such as anxiety, self-doubt and boredom should be eliminated or decreased to give students more enjoyable and relaxed learning experiences. Besides a few studies [33] [36] [70] that employed multiple methods including surveys, pre-test and post-test, activity materials, journal entries, recording, class discussions, interviews, SNS tracking and classroom interaction observation, many other studies in this field have either been more theoretical or used single method such as surveys, content analysis and statistical testing of correlations with Facebook interaction. The studies that employed content analysis looked into students' constructions of English language knowledge, critical literacy, as well as communicative and cultural competence [19]. The single method studies, although highly insightful only managed to capture the students' perceptions about rather than their behaviours on the Facebook platform. As such, these studies have suffered from methodological limitations [92]. For example, one study [73] looked at the construction of English language knowledge on Facebook, but explored participants' personal Facebook pages, instead of examining English language students' interactions. These studies prepared the ground for more in-depth, multi-methods research to corroborate and triangulate data to examine students' experiences, thoughts and behaviours in using Facebook for ELL.

The present study proposed an informal English language interaction platform on Facebook without any pre-determined objectives or tasks to be solved collaboratively. Instead, the students were encouraged to voluntarily use the group for both

social and informal academic interaction, discussion and circulation of information. By retaining the function of Facebook as an informal social platform, students would hopefully not feel burdened by the activity and continue to access Facebook daily. The informal design was also intended to reduce students' anxiety when practicing English language, and simultaneously improve their interest in sustaining interaction in both online and offline settings. The Facebook group might solve the Malaysian students' problems in ELL by providing them with a constantly accessible, safe and stable platform for practice within a community of learners. Three research questions guided this study were;

1. How do university students view the use of Facebook for ELL?
2. How do university students use the Facebook group for English language interaction?
3. What types of interaction threads and topics emerge from university students' interactions on the Facebook group for English language interaction?
4. How do university students perceive the changes in relation to their English language skills after using the Facebook group for English language interaction?

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research instruments, research process and participants of study

Three methods of data collection were conducted in stages. Firstly, a questionnaire was distributed to $n=604$ first and second year students at a university in the Northern part of Malaysia. This sample was selected based on convenience sampling and the process took two weeks. All of these students were enrolled in an English proficiency course, LMT100, for the semester. The course was compulsory due to their limited to poor English language abilities, which was determined by the Malaysian University English Test - MUET).

At the second stage, these students were invited to voluntarily join the informal LMT100 Facebook group that was created to assist their English language interaction and discussion. After becoming members of the LMT100 group, the students were generally instructed to interact, discuss, share information and express their opinions on any topics of their interests. There was no posting requirements or interaction guidelines outlined for the group. After six weeks, the data in the form of interaction threads were gathered and analysed.

At the third stage, the students were divided into four categories based on their participation on the LMT100 group. The categories were; *active*, *average*, *passive* and *very passive*. Four to nine students were randomly selected from each category to be interviewed. Other students were also openly invited through the LMT100 group to participate in the interview session, but only one student agreed to this. In total, there were 25 interviewees in this study with the distribution of; 7 *active*, 9 *average*, 5 *passive* and 4 *very passive* members of the LMT100 group.

The questionnaire data were analysed quantitatively using SPSS. On the other hand, the LMT100 interaction data and the

interview data were analysed qualitatively using a combination of an inductive and deductive approach.

VI. FINDINGS

The findings are presented based on the methods of data collection.

A. Questionnaire

A majority of the students (70 – 94 percent) were positive that their self-confidence, attitudes, motivations and English language skills improved slightly, moderately or a lot after using Facebook. They reported acquisition of new vocabulary and sentence structures, as well as boosted confidence to read, write and speak in English. They used English more often in their daily lives after using Facebook and were not worried about making mistakes in their language productions. In terms of attitudes, the students reported that they liked learning English as a second language as it became more interesting and easier. Due to this, they were motivated to use English for communication in both online and offline environments with their lecturers. The high improvement in these aspects might be related to their higher employment of Facebook for social purposes (i.e. interact with family and friends, and read and share useful information) rather than for more academic purposes (e.g. read and share academic matters, and create networks of friends for educational purposes). Therefore, similar to previous studies [38] [66] [93] [94] [95] [96], the students in the current study reported that they used Facebook for more social purposes, and that it improved their English language acquisition, attitudes, motivation and confidence in learning English.

On the contrary, there were about 6 to 30 percent of the students who reported negatively about improvement in their English language skills, self-confidence, attitudes and motivations after using Facebook. Perhaps, these negative views were related to their familiarity with the face-to-face teacher-guided classroom learning, instead of independent online learning on Facebook. They might not be aware of the potential that online interaction activity could have in their English language acquisition due to the implicitness of the learning activity.

B. LMT100 Facebook interaction activity

During the first week of the interaction activity, approximately 300 members joined the LMT100 group. They showed interest by sharing multimedia elements such as videos and photos, circulating academic-related information and self-expressing their thoughts. Over time, however, their attention waned and they did not contribute as much to the group. By the end of the sixth week period, there were approximately 600 members of the LMT100 group but very limited information sharing and interaction activity occurred. Overall, only about 20 percent of students made their participation on the LMT100 group visible. Most of the times, these students demonstrated their presence by simply clicking the button 'like'. Although there were several members who tried to initiate conversations,

the majority of the group members were very passive and reluctant to respond.

The group was only kept alive by the sharing of socio-academic posts, *i.e. the posts that were social in nature but linked to the academic setting of the university*. Some examples of the socio-academic posts were the advertisement and promotion of university-related events such as food bazaars organized by the societies, a manifesto to become representatives of the student body, a car wash service that operated at one of the students' halls and a business selling mobile phone cases for the Entrepreneurship course.

As a participant observer, I shared some academic and social information in the group to solicit the students' interaction with the content and with each other. Some of the content shared include news articles, reading comprehension web links, grammar quizzes, music video clips and university-related inquiries. Based on the pattern of participation, the students demonstrated selective interest where they only engaged with certain topics of interaction that they liked. The students showed high interest in the grammar quizzes, entertainment-based posts including discussions of music and movies as well as university-based inquiries. The students' interest was evident from the high response rate to these topics in the interaction threads rather than others such as political discussions, academic-related multimedia sharing, journal-like updates and simple conversation. This study thus supports the findings of previous research [97] [98] [99] and [100] that entertainment, personal income factors, social support from existing relationships, information, enjoyment and usefulness are factors that determined students' continued use of SNSs, although they differed among gender and culture. More specifically, it has been found [101] [102] that Malaysian youths indeed preferred entertainment-based topics rather than more serious discussions on social media.

Accordingly, the students' interest in university-based inquiry was perhaps due to the simplicity of the discussions which were centred on students' experiences as students of the university. One of the question shared on the LMT100 group was "*What do you think could be improved or changed by/at the university?*" In line with this, other studies [101] [102] [103] have concurred that simple topics such as music and sports could be employed in an online environment to get students' attention.

On a different note, the participants' high interest in grammar quizzes might be due to the sociocultural influence they received and their previous ELL experience. Perhaps, they felt that the main way to learn English language was through grammar practice, and that grammar quizzes were the most direct way that English language could be learned on the platform. As most of the students received their education at public schools in Malaysia, they might have been accustomed to face-to-face classroom learning, where grammar learning was prioritized. Therefore, in an environment where they had to initiate learning through interaction, the students might have felt lost, confused and misguided, hence distanced themselves from actively participating in the group.

To reiterate, the LMT100 Facebook interaction failed to get students' active participation, content contribution, and lively interaction. There were only about five percent of active members who made repeated content contribution to the group in the forms of posting updates and comments. The lack of participation from the majority of group members might possibly be due to their non-familiarity with independent online learning that is based on social-construction and interaction.

C. Interview

There were no distinct variances in the responses of the *active, average, passive* and *very passive* interviewees. In general, they reported that they became members of the LMT100 group to improve their English language, make new friends and share and receive information. The reasons for their non-active participation were that they only wanted to get useful information shared in the group (silent readers), shyness, uncertainty about the types of information to be shared, and were too busy with assignments. These reasons were similarly reported in other studies [104] [105]. The students in this study, however, did not face severe infrastructure or lack of ICT skills. Instead they expressed satisfaction for the powerful Internet connection at the university. Another reason for the students' lack of content contribution was the fear of being judged negatively by other members who might misinterpret the information. Added to this, three interviewees mentioned that they were criticized by their friends when they tried to use English in conversations. This might have further destroyed their self-confidence to practice their English language skills. On the other hand, several other interviewees reported that they felt quite confident to post updates and share information in the group, but chose not to as they did not see the benefits of doing so. Four interviewees reported that they constantly accessed the LMT100 group when notified by Facebook to get new information. However, they rarely responded to any of the interaction threads as they only intended to become recipients of information.

In terms of the group design, the voluntary nature and no posting requirements of the LMT100 Facebook group, was preferable to the students who wanted to relax and not be burdened by academic matters in the online environment. However, to solicit more participation from the majority of the group members, the students suggested minimal posting requirements, tutor-initiated interaction threads and ELL activities (e.g. grammar and vocabulary). This is because the interviewees complained that it was always the same 10 to 15 active members who posted, shared information and commented in the group, even though the group had about 600 other members.

As for English language development, the passive participants reported improved English language skills in the forms of sentence structure and strategic competence. On the other hand, besides feeling a boost in their self-confidence to employ English language in a public domain, the active participants stated that the LMT100 group failed to develop their English language skills. This finding could thus be viewed in relation to Krashen's input hypothesis ($i+1$) [91], which hypothesizes that

students will acquire knowledge that is slightly beyond their ability. In the case of the LMT100 group, the input (i.e. content shared in the LMT100 group), *i*, presented to the passive students might be higher than that of their initial language ability, *+I*, which resulted in acquisition. On the contrary, the content of the LMT100 group might have been at a similar or lower level than the active students' language ability, hence did not add value to their language repertoire.

VII. DISCUSSION

A. Silent readers

The finding of this study suggested a discrepancy between the students' perceptions and their experiences on the Facebook group. From the questionnaire, they stated their interest in participating on an online platform to assist their ELL. However, when presented with the LMT100 Facebook group, a majority of the students acted as silent readers who only went on the platform to gather information shared by other members, instead of actively constructing knowledge and interacting with each other. This might be due to the students' unfamiliarity with the new theories of ELL that emphasize interaction and socially-mediated literacy practices. In line with this, an interviewee, K, stated that she was excited to join the LMT100 group after hearing of the ELL opportunities. However, she felt disappointed that the group did not provide sufficient English language information that could improve her learning, which deterred her from being an active member of the group.

In support of this, previous studies have suggested that silent readers or pedagogical lurkers make up the largest number of the social media population [106] [107]. Although passive, the silent readers often engaged with learning-related tasks, dialogue and interaction, and played important roles as social glue to online and offline communities [108] [109] [110]. Notably, active students often performed better than the silent readers who were generally less optimistic and positive in learning [108] [111]. However, this study did not employ any specific means to determine silent readers in the Facebook group. The discussion of the silent readers is only based on the participants' observed behaviour. As such, future studies might want to look specifically at silent readers' needs in ELL to ensure that they do not feel neglected.

B. Sociocultural influences – personal, societal and institutional

The discrepancy in the students' perceptions of and behaviours in the LMT100 Facebook group was perhaps due to the sociocultural influences in ELL they received at three levels; personal, societal and institutional. At the personal level, the students' family background could have impacted the way they viewed ELL. One of the interview participants, A, specifically mentioned that her father encouraged her to constantly practice English language at the university. Added to this, an interviewee, B, elaborated that she and her parents were strong supporters of a political party in Malaysia, while another interviewee, C, only felt the need to talk to her family on Facebook. These responses indicated the strong relationship

that the students have with their families, which is common to the Asian culture [112]. Therefore, the students' non-active participation on the LMT100 group might be a reflection of how their families viewed ELL. If English was not commonly practiced at home, students might feel awkward employing it in a public domain. It has been argued [52] that students with low English language proficiency might not get the privileged learning that is often enjoyed by their friends who came from more socio-economically stable families.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic nation as a result of the British policy during the colonization period. Although subtle, there is a constant divide among the races who each want to secure better lives. At the societal level, students can easily be influenced by the racial, political and religious issues that have often resulted in the stereotyping of behaviour. From the interviews, I gathered two types of racial stereotypes. One was the stereotyping of one's own race based on self-experience or observation. An interviewee, D, who came from a state called Kelantan stated that from her experience, many students and people from Kelantan and Terengganu condemned those who used English language in general. This attitude was perhaps influenced by their ancestors who viewed English as a means to promote Westernization and Christianity [61], as both states uphold strong Islamic values. Interviewees E and F, similarly experienced being criticized by peers of their own races for opting to use English instead of their native languages of Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese. On a different note, interviewee B generalized that the Malay students were always left behind the Chinese students in ELL, as the Chinese students were more hardworking, supportive of each other's learning and not embarrassed to practice English language openly. Another form of stereotyping was that of other races' behaviours and characteristics, which might have been a result of racial divide. Two interviewees, D and G, admitted to having a secret academic Facebook group that was only accessible by students of one race. This was because they assumed that the other races also kept secret Facebook groups to circulate academic information and exam papers that would advance them in learning. These sentiments and stereotypical mindsets perhaps contributed to the lack of participation on the LMT100 group. This Facebook group included only the students enrolled in the LMT100 course for the semester, regardless of their races, genders, religions and political affiliations. The existence of these sentiments in the students' minds might hinder a holistic learning experience and jeopardize the opportunity to learn from one another. Notably however, the interaction threads in the group received the attention of students from various races and ethnicities, who interacted and joked with one another on the platform. This implies some rather more harmonious relationship between the students at the university.

Finally, at the institutional level, the students demonstrated preference for teacher-guided learning in a physical classroom. One of the active participants in the LMT100 group, H, stated that for her, classroom learning was still the best way to learn English language. In support of this, another interviewee who was a very passive member of the group, J, asked me to list the nearest English language tuition centres that she could attend to

improve her language skills. Both students showed different attitudes when presented with the Facebook interaction group, but they were in agreement that face-to-face, teacher-guided classroom learning was more effective than online learning. In line with this, several interviewees mentioned that to improve students' participation in the LMT100 group, I as the group admin should have provided them with tips or bonus marks for examinations and past year papers to help their learning. They also repeatedly asked me to provide them with grammar and reading comprehension exercises to improve their vocabulary and sentence structure acquisition. The students' behaviours emphasised the exam-oriented culture, which might have occurred as a result of the institutional sociocultural influence they received at schools [39] [58]. The mastery of grammar and writing was viewed as the mastery of English language and was sufficient to gain good grades in examinations [18]. The culture of privileging examinations has often resulted in neglect for communicative competence and listening skills [18] [58]. Consequently, although students often obtained very good grades on papers, they lacked the ability to communicate in English, which jeopardized their chances of presenting themselves confidently and securing excellent jobs.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The findings suggested that there was a discrepancy in the way the students perceived ELL on Facebook and their action when presented with an actual English interaction group on Facebook. The informal, voluntary-based Facebook interaction group was not attractive to these Malaysian university students. Apart from their wavering interest after the first week, the interaction activity never peaked as a very limited number of students (approximately 20 percent) made their participation and contribution visible on the group, once or repeatedly. As such, the majority of the students could be considered as silent readers who joined the group to get English language information, but chose not to contribute to the development of knowledge. This could be due to a number of reasons such as introvert personality, receptive style of learning, poor English language ability, and non-familiarity with online-based learning.

The students' preferences for entertainment-related information such as music and movies are comprehensible as they wanted to engage with recreational topics after a long day of studying. On the other hand, the emphasis on grammar learning in the forms of structure and vocabulary, demonstrated the students' interest to improve their English language ability. As they were already accustomed to face-to-face classroom-based and exam-oriented learning, communicative English language practice on Facebook might seem to be neither effective nor helpful to improving their skills and grades. With the advancement of technology in the 21st century, it is thus necessary to raise students' awareness that ELL (or second language learning) is not only restricted to grammar mastery and writing. Instead it involves many other skills that are specific to certain contexts such as reading for academic research, presenting for international trading, and writing for a

travel blog. Accordingly, these types of practical and available content on the Internet, could be employed as ELL material in any future iteration of the Facebook group. Perhaps, when students recognize that ELL is so much more than the mastery of theoretical grammar knowledge, they might be more interested to play active roles in online learning on SNSs.

Notably, the students' attitude that English language needed to be learnt to pass the exams might be a result of personal, societal and institutional sociocultural exposures. These sociocultural influences (in)directly impacted the students' mind-sets and behaviours in their learning pursuit. In order to create a more supportive environment for ELL, it is perhaps necessary that the curriculum is revamped to go hand-in-hand with the progression of Web 2.0. This is because the Internet has currently become the place where students spend most of their times on a daily basis for various purposes including academic, social, gaming, reading, writing, business and so forth. Therefore, by tailoring the curriculum to be closer to the students' common practice, they might feel more in control of their learning.

IX. IMPLICATIONS

Several implications can be drawn from the study. Firstly, students' learning characteristics differ from one another, and need to be understood by teachers to ensure effective learning. To take the current study as an example, I failed to take into consideration these students' learning background and their familiarity with the teacher-guided physical classroom learning. As such, when placed in an environment where they had to act as autonomous learners, the students were reluctant as they were not able to see the values of the activity. In line with this, the second implication suggests that there is a need to find a balance between teacher-instructed classroom learning and online learning. This is because, even though modern theories of ELL are more in line with technological progression, the formal teacher-instructed classroom is not without its merit [113], and is effective in students' knowledge development [23]. Therefore, the blended learning environment [70] [72] might be the way forward in present day English language teaching. Finally, to sustain students' selective interests in the Facebook environment, it might be necessary to present topics and materials drawn from their repertoire of interests. For example, the students in this study demonstrated interests in entertainment-based discussions, grammar quizzes and university-related inquiries. New topics could slowly be injected into learning as the activity progresses to maintain students' attention and participation in the online environment. Alternatively, instrumental aids such as bonus marks, food, merit points and small tokens could also be distributed at the start of the activity to solicit students' involvement in online learning.

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