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USING FACEBOOK FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE DIFFERENCES AMONG GENDER AND ETHNICITY

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates university students' perceptions of using Facebook for English language learning (ELL) based on gender and ethnicities. A survey was used for data collection, in which all 622 participants reported to having at least one Facebook account which they frequently accessed multiple times a day. The findings show that the students possessed positive attitudes, motivation, and self-confidence in using Facebook to learn English language. They reported to have acquired new English words and sentence structures from their engagement with Facebook. In terms of gender and ethnicities, it is the female students, and the Indian respondents who illustrated highly positive perceptions of English language acquisition, motivation, attitudes, and self-confidence, when engaging with Facebook. The awareness of these differences and strengths between gender and among ethnicities, may assist the creation of more suitable learning strategies especially with the integration of Facebook and other social media.

Keywords: Facebook, English language learning, gender, ethnicity, attitudes, motivation, self-confidence, acquisition

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The integration of social networking sites (SNS) into academia transforms the way people connect and communicate with each other, and creates a *new paradigm of learning* or *new literacy* (The New London Group, 1996).

In Malaysia, Facebook is the most popular SNS, used by internet users from all walks of life including students and professionals. Many studies have identified its potential for English language learning (ELL), particularly in search of new strategies to overcome the deterioration in students' achievement (Idris & Ghani, 2012; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Mahadi & Ubaidullah, 2010). There is, however, an absence in the link between students' classroom and informal learning (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016); and in some cases, a total marginalisation of non-school activities in homes and schools (Azman, 2000). The informal activities outside of school hours are keys to the development of formal skills (Manca & Ranieri, 2013; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008), but not many see its connection to learning (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

Students' religious use of SNS for social and educational purposes may bring about new learning opportunities that could address the issues. While many studies have argued the

advantages of Facebook to language learning, not much empirical research have been conducted (Milosevic, Zivkovic, Arsic, & Manasijevic, 2015). This study thus examines students' perceptions of Facebook and its effectiveness for ELL. As a progression of an earlier study by Kabilan et al. (2010), the students are categorised based on gender and ethnicity to explore the different ways that Facebook is experienced as a literacy tool. The research questions are:

1. How do university students view the use of Facebook for ELL?
    1.1 What are the differences between female and male students in their view of Facebook for ELL?
    1.2 What are the differences between students of different ethnicities in their view of Facebook for ELL?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 SNS and second language learning (L2)

A number of studies have examined the relationship between SNS and L2 in the following areas: using Facebook for reading, writing practices and critical literacy, the opportunities and benefits of Facebook as an online platform for ELL, the construction of knowledge on Facebook, blended learning experience, the use of microblogging for communicative and cultural competence, and SNS for community constructions and identity development.

SNS expose students to an extensive range of discourse functions and online writing, that enhances critical literacy and language skills, and launches creative deployment of language play (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). For instance, Twitter links both traditional and new literacies, i.e. Twitteracy, as well as formal and informal learning (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). SNS thus allow language teachers to extend learning beyond the classrooms, trigger reflective thinking, construct knowledge, and promote ELL, while simultaneously strengthen relationships with students (Idris & Ghani, 2012; Mahadi & Ubaidullah, 2010). A lifelong learning process happens when the developed literacy is transferred from one platform to another (Lee, 2010).

The social interaction practice on SNS allows students to be placed in a process of meaning-making with authentic content and people. The personalisation of SNS according to individuals' needs, facilitates students' participation in online discussions that could add to their language skills and knowledge. A group of Taiwanese EFL students who have experienced a peer-assessed writing activity on Facebook, improved their organisation, structures, and vocabulary skills, developed a stronger relationship with their peers through the use of emoticons, and felt more motivated to write when given *likes* on Facebook (Shih, 2011). Similarly, in their study of an existing Facebook group for French language, Blattner and Fiori (2009) identified Facebook's potential to develop socio-pragmatic competence and build community.

Essentially, the integration of SNS is to create new pedagogical strategies for language learning, rather than to replicate traditional classroom activities (e.g. exercises and drills) in online environment. Thus, educators are advised to develop new learning approaches rather than over-emphasise interactions and autonomy, as well as over-rely on the novelty of Web 2.0. In some instances, students who have had exposure to social media learning, demanded for more formal avenues of academic discourse on Facebook with teachers' guidance (Kabilan et al., 2010), showed higher interests in task completion than social interactions

(Dennen, 2008), and relied on Web 1.0 technology that provides tutorials for reading and writing skills (Stevenson & Liu, 2010). It is thus undeniable that traditional face-to-face learning forms the backbone of education, but the attractive technology of SNS may supplement these formal activities. As SNS will only continue to develop and flourish, it is only right that higher education keeps abreast with the technology, and uses it constructively in learning (Goodband & Samuels, 2010).

2.2 Gender and cultural differences on SNS

A study at a Californian university shows that the female students spend more time on SNS, have a stronger motivation to communicate with peers, and possess a higher positive collective self-esteem that relates to entertainment and passing time; while the male students are associated with more negative collective self-esteem that correlates with social compensation and social identification, and that they use SNS alternatively as a communicative platform to learn about the social world (Barker, 2009). The number of peers determine the females' continued SNS usage, but this do not have an impact on the males (Lin & Lu, 2011). Several US-based studies substantiate that young females use SNS for more relational purposes, i.e. to maintain relationships, talk about romantic interests and secrets, and share feelings; while the males are more focused on entertainment and making new friends (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Manager, 2007). Other factors that contribute to the continued use of social media among youths are; extroversion, openness to experience, enjoyment, usefulness, internet self-efficacy, the need to belong, cognition, and overall attitudes towards SNS (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010; Gangadharbatla, 2008; Leng, Lada, Muhammad, Ibrahim, & Amboala, 2011; Lin & Lu, 2011).

Students from different cultural and social background use SNS differently. While many American and Malaysian students use SNS for entertainment, many Koreans search for social support from existing relationships (Adi Kasuma & Wray, 2015; Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011). A growing shift in interest, however, shows that Facebook has become the medium Malaysian youths channel their dissatisfaction with politics. Added to this, the African-American students use Facebook to signal racial identities through photos and expressions of personal interests; while both African-American and Hispanic students are particularly concerned with how they would be read by others, especially faculty and White students (Lee, 2012).

Accordingly, students of different gender and cultures may also use Facebook differently for academic purposes; thus, it is necessary that we as educators, improve our awareness of these differences to shape a more effective learning experience.

2.3 Theories of language learning

Online acquisition, especially of vocabulary, is often linked to incidental learning (Kabilan et al., 2010). Incidental learning is unplanned and unintentional, results from other academic or non-academic activities, and occurs through observation, repetition, social interaction and problem solving (Kabilan et al., 2010). In attempting online activities such as discussions, content reading, and information searches, students pragmatically practice and develop skills and knowledge. For example, a group of Grade 1 to 3 students in Singapore incidentally acquire the target language when immersed in meaningful texts (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003). The students may also incidentally acquire inaccurate forms of the language; hence educators must be wary of the collateral outcomes that may impact students' learning and ability (Kabilan et al., 2010).

Incidental learning may be seen in relation to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that focuses on the process of meaning-making and authentic communication, rather than the mastery of forms. CLT promotes a learner-centred environment, where students are required to be active and independent in cultivating communicative competence, i.e. having both content knowledge and language ability, and knowing the way to use a language contextually (Woo & Reeves, 2007). The emphasis on fluency entails that mistakes are tolerated and rectified at a later time, as students will master the forms of a language by using it to communicate. The process of language learning is thus socially-mediated, and not isolated.

However, the idealistic principles of CLT are not without criticisms. The very act of teaching presupposes moral positions about the way knowledge and skills are learned and acquired in the classrooms (Harmer, 2003). The downgrading of teachers' roles from being the centre of knowledge and wisdom, to playing a more peripheral, supporting role is deemed unjustified (Hu, 2002). The Western values and cultures of CLT are unnatural and unappealing to students in other parts of the world. The clash of learning values and expectation is demotivating and leads to unsuccessful learning experience. Furthermore, the extent to which CLT's principles are emulated in the classrooms is questionable, due to various issues such as; pre-determined learning objectives, huge numbers of students in one classroom, difficulty for teachers to monitor many students' output at once, and insufficient facilities and equipment.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Participants

This research was conducted at a well-known university in the northern parts of Malaysia. The 622 participants were enrolled in a compulsory English proficiency course for the semester, due to their very limited (Band 1), limited (Band 2), and moderate (Band 3) ability; which was determined based on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET).

3.2 Instrument

The students' responses to the questionnaire were based on their general Facebook usage. The questionnaire was broadly divided into two sections; I – Students with Facebook accounts, and II – Students without a Facebook account. Both YES and NO responses directed students to answer specific sets of questions. All 622 respondents reported to have at least one Facebook account, thus only those data are presented in this study.
The questionnaire was adapted from Kabilan et al. (2010), and comprised of six sections; Section A: Facebook usage, Section B: Facebook activity, Section C: Facebook experience, Section D: English language learning on Facebook, Section E: The language(s) use on Facebook, and Section F: Demography. The focus of this study is on Section D and the items are shown in the finding section.

3.3 Data analysis

The Mann Whitney U test, Kruskall Wallis test, and mean scores test were employed to identify any significant differences between the variables; gender and ethnicities with the effect of Facebook on English language skills.
The Mann Whitney U test compares two independent groups of gender; male and female. The Kruskall Wallis test identifies the statistical differences between two or more

independent groups of ethnicities; Malay, Chinese, Indian, and students of other ethnicities (SOE). The mean score test determines which group(s) score(s) higher than other.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Students' demographic and Facebook usage

All 622 respondents had at least a Facebook account. Seventy-four percent of them were female, and this shows the dominance of females in Malaysian tertiary environment.
Of the 622 students, there were 71 percent Malay, 22 percent Chinese, 4 percent Indian, and 3 percent SOE (i.e. Ibanese, Kadazan, Dusun, Melanau, Iranum) (Figure 1).
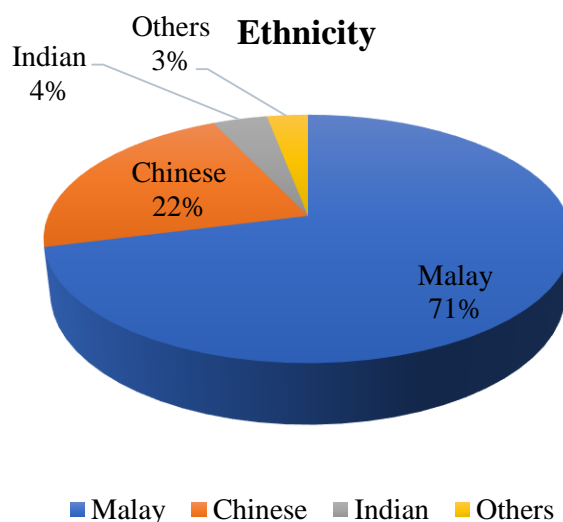

Figure 1: The distribution of the students' ethnicity

Ninety-eight percent of students were between the ages of 18 to 24, while two percent were in the range of 25 to 40 years old. The students were familiar with and commonly used Bahasa Malaysia, English, and their native languages (e.g. Hokkien, Mandarin, Tamil, etc.) in online and offline environments. They were enrolled in various courses at the university including Education, Arts, Pharmacy, Management, and Humanities. Eighty-eight percent were in their first year, while 11 percent were in their second year.

Ninety-six percent had been Facebook members for one year to more than five years, while the other four percent had less than a year's experience. Sixty-seven percent logged on to Facebook on a daily basis, 26 percent more than once per day. Another seven percent used it once a week, once a month, or at other frequencies. Based on their Facebook membership and frequency of logging onto Facebook, the respondents are considered as aware and familiar with Facebook.

4.2 Students' perceptions of using Facebook for ELL

4.2.1　The acquisition of English language skills

Table 1: Male and female students' perceptions of their English language skills after using Facebook

Item	Male (%) (n=161-162)			Female (%) (n=455-457)		
(After using Facebook, I feel that I have …)	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes
a)　*Increased English proficiency	2	21	77	2	16	82
b)　*Learned new English words	2	6	92	1	3	96
c)　*Learned new English sentences	4	8	88	2	4	94

Items that show significant differences between gender based on Mann Whitney U Test and mean scores

In Table 1, the female students illustrated higher percentages than the male students, for all three items. The differences between gender were significant, which indicates the female students' greater positive perceptions, openness to learning, language abilities, as well as initiatives in acquiring English skills on Facebook.

Table 2: The different ethnicities students' perceptions of their English language skills after using Facebook

Item	a.　Increased English proficiency			b.　Learned new English words			c.　Learned new English sentences		
(After using Facebook, I feel that I have …)									
Ethnicity (%)	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes
Malay (n=439)	2	17	81	2	3	95	3	4	93
Chinese (n=135-136)	3	17	80	2	4	94	3	7	90
Indian (n=24)	4	13	83	0	4	96	8	0	93
Others (n=19)	4	37	59	0	5	95	0	5	95

Items that show significant differences between ethnicity based on Kruskall Wallis Test and mean scores

The Indian students obtained the highest percentages for two items; increased in English proficiency, and learned new English words (Table 2). Meanwhile, the SOE formed the highest percentage for item (c), having learned new English sentences after engaging with Facebook. Despite this, the SOE were the least improved in their English proficiency. The statistical differences across all three items were not significant with small variances between the ethnicities. Nevertheless, high students' percentages for items (b) and (c) may support previous findings that Facebook is useful in assisting the acquisition of English words and sentences (Shih, 2011). It may thus be implied that more Indian, Malay and Chinese students see the mastery of new words and sentences on Facebook as beneficial for their English proficiency, than the SOE.

4.2.2   Attitudes

Table 3: The male and female students' perceptions of their attitudes for ELL after using Facebook

Item	Male (%) (n=161-162)			Female (%) (n=455-457)		
(After using Facebook, I feel that …)	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes
a. *I like learning English more	3	9	88	1	5	94
b. *Learning English is easier	8	20	72	5	17	78
c. *English is more interesting	2	4	94	1	3	96

*Items that show significant differences between gender based on Mann Whitney U Test and mean scores

There were significant differences across all three items in Table 3, where the female students demonstrated higher percentages than the male students. This indicates the female students' higher positive attitudes towards ELL on Facebook, compared to the male students.

Table 4: The students of different ethnicities students' perceptions of their attitudes for ELL after using Facebook

	(After using Facebook, I feel that …)								
Item	a. *I like learning English			b. *Learning English is easier			c. *Learning English is more interesting		
Ethnicity (%)	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes
Malay (n=439)	1	6	93	4	18	78	1	6	93
Chinese (n=135-136)	2	8	90	10	18	72	2	10	88
Indian (n=24)	8	0	92	8	11	81	0	2	98
Others (n=19)	0	5	95	5	32	63	0	10	90

*Items that show significant differences between ethnicity based on Kruskall Wallis Test and mean scores

Table 4 shows that the Indian students scored the highest percentages for two items, (b) and (c); English learning is more interesting on Facebook, and that the process is easier. However, it is the SOE who in majority liked learning English on Facebook. The differences in percentages for items (a) and (c) across all ethnicities were small, thus suggest that Facebook's entertainment values have the potential to assist English language acquisition. There were significant differences across all three items, which suggest variances in the students' attitudes. The mean scores show that the Indian students possessed the most positive attitudes towards using Facebook for ELL, followed by the Malays.

4.2.3   Motivation

Table 5: The male and female students' perceptions of their motivation for ELL after using Facebook

Item	Male (%) (n=161-162)			Female (%) (n=455-457)		
(After using Facebook, I feel that I am more motivated to communicate in English …)	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes
a. *Online	4	12	84	3	9	88
b. *Offline	6	16	78	4	13	83
c. *With lecturers	5	14	81	4	13	83

*Items that show significant differences between gender based on Mann Whitney U Test and mean scores

There were significant differences across all three items of motivation between the gender, where the female students scored higher percentages than the males (Table 5). This might be due to Facebook's entertainment and social relation values which are often more appealing to women than men (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). A previous literature identified that more female students than the males, feel uncomfortable with their teachers' presence on Facebook due to privacy concern (Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). However, a slightly higher percentage of the female students in this study, were more motivated to communicate with lecturers on Facebook, compared to the males.

Table 6: The different ethnicities students' perceptions of their motivation
for ELL after using Facebook

(After using Facebook, I feel that I am more motivated to communicate in English …)								
Item	a.	*Online		b.	*Offline		c.	*With lecturers
Ethnicity (%)	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes
Malay (n=439)	3	11	86	4	14	82	4	12	84
Chinese (n=135-136)	5	5	90	5	15	80	5	14	81
Indian (n=24)	8	0	92	8	0	92	13	4	83
Others (n=19)	0	21	79	0	10	90	0	26	74

Items that show significant differences between ethnicity based on Kruskall Wallis Test and mean scores

The statistical tests show significant differences in the students' motivation to use Facebook for ELL (Table 6). The Indian students scored the highest percentages for items (a) and (b), i.e. to use English in online and offline settings; and the mean scores show that they were the most motivated across all items. Except for the Chinese students, other respondents reported slightly lower motivation to communicate with lecturers in English, compared to items (a) and (b). Meanwhile, the Malay students were the majority who felt more motivated to communicate with lecturers in English after engaging with Facebook.

4.2.4　Self-confidence

Table 7: The male and female students' perceptions of their self-confidence
for ELL after using Facebook

Item	Male (%) (n=161-162)			Female (%) (n=455-457)		
(After using Facebook, I …)	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes
a.　*Use English more in daily lives	10	14	76	7	15	78
b.　Am not worried about making English mistakes	11	17	72	11	19	70
c.　Feel more confident to read in English	7	22	91	3	13	84
d.　Feel more confident to write in English	7	23	70	8	20	72
e.　Feel more confident to speak in English	14	16	70	12	18	70

Items that show significant differences between gender based on Mann Whitney U Test and mean scores

Table 7 shows that the female students obtained higher percentages than the male students for items (a) and (d), while items (b), (c), and (d) show otherwise. However, the differences across these items were insignificant (0.5-2.0 percent). Only item (a) shows a significant difference between the gender, where the female students felt more confident to further use English in daily lives after engaging with Facebook. Despite this, there was a higher

percentage of the male students who were not worried about making English language mistakes compared to the female students. Both male and female students felt highly confident to read, but had lower confidence to speak and write in English after using Facebook.

Table 8: The different ethnicities students' perceptions of their self-confidence for ELL after using Facebook

Item (After using Facebook, I …)		Malay (%) (n=437-440)	Chinese (%) (n=136)	Indian (%) (n=24)	SOE (%) (n=19)
a. *Use English more in daily lives	No	8	8	13	0
	Unsure	16	12	0	16
	Yes	76	80	87	84
b. *Am not worried about making English mistakes	No	9	18	20	11
	Unsure	16	25	21	26
	Yes	75	57	59	53
c. *Feel more confident to read in English	No	8	6	4	0
	Unsure	2	14	8	5
	Yes	90	80	88	95
d. *Feel more confident to write in English	No	7	14	8	0
	Unsure	22	24	4	26
	Yes	71	62	88	74
e. *Feel more confident to speak in English	No	6	15	4	0
	Unsure	19	21	4	26
	Yes	75	64	92	94

Items that show significant differences between ethnicity based on Kruskall Wallis Test and mean scores

All five items in Table 8 show significant differences across the ethnicities, where the SOE obtained the highest percentages for two items, (c) and (e); more confident to speak, and read in English after using Facebook. While the Indian students and the SOE were highly confident with their speaking skills, not as many Malay and Chinese students felt the same. This is interesting as Asian students are often considered as passive, reticent, and anxious in English language speeches (Sawir, 2005). Thus, the students' confidence to speak is an improvement, which may be credited to Facebook's write-the-way-you-talk environment.

The students across the ethnicities felt a boost of self-confidence to read in English; but, it is the Indian students who showed the highest confidence to use more English in the daily lives and to write in English. The SOE, Malay and Chinese students also observed Facebook's usefulness in enhancing writing confidence, but the percentages were not as high as the Indian students. In fact, the Chinese students' percentage was the lowest for writing skills.

The Malay students formed the majority of those who were not worried about making English mistakes. The percentage was not remarkably high with 75 percent, but it was higher than students of other ethnicities. This might indicate their openness in learning, motivation to master the language, and emphasis on fluency than accuracy. On the contrary, the students of other ethnicities might feel more anxious during the learning process, and were concerned with the language forms than fluency. The Chinese students showed the lowest self-confidence across the items, compared to other ethnicities. This is an indication of how seriously, they viewed learning and the mastery of the English language, that they feared making language mistakes. More opportunities to participate in social but meaningful

interactions with peers, about topics of their interests, may develop their confidence. Specific teachers' guidance and instructions could be helpful to assist them at the beginning.

4.2.5　Summary of findings

A majority of the Malaysian university students perceived highly positive attitudes, motivation, self-confidence, and acquisition of the English language skills after using Facebook. They learned new words and vocabulary, liked learning the English language, and felt more motivated and confident to read and communicate in English. These abilities might have been developed from their interactions with friends and family, the reading of useful information and academic knowledge, as well as engagement with multimedia. Essentially, the students used Facebook for academic purposes as frequently as they used it for social activities. This is an indication that they relied on Facebook to enrich both educational and recreational activities at the university level.

The statistical tests showed that gender and ethnicity affected the usage of Facebook for ELL. In terms of gender, there were significant differences in the male and female students' acquisition of the English language skills, attitudes, and motivation. Meanwhile, the students of different ethnicities showed significant differences in their attitudes, motivation, and self-confidence. The female students, and the Indian respondents showed significantly higher positive perceptions than the male students, and participants of other ethnicities. Nevertheless, the Malay students' percentages did not fare off too widely from the Indian respondents, thus indicated their equally high positive perceptions.

Other gender-related conclusions are; the male students preferred using English more in online than offline environment, and were less likely to worry about making English language mistakes, compared to the female students. The female students had more self-confidence issues in relation to ELL as they showed uncertainty in a higher number of items than the male students.

In terms of ethnicity, many Indian students; were highly motivated to use English in offline and online environments and with lecturers, were the most confident of their speaking skills, perceived the highest improvement in English proficiency, found the process of English learning on Facebook easier, and had the most favourable attitudes towards ELL on Facebook. While both Indian and Malay respondents perceived boosted confidence in reading skills, their confidence to write was the least improved. In line with this, the Malay students seemed to be the least confident with their speaking ability, but were the least worried about making English language mistakes. The Chinese students, on the other hand, possessed good English language skills, had acquired new vocabulary and sentence structures, and were more motivated to use the English language after using Facebook. However, they were not confident with their abilities, and many were worried about making English language mistakes.

4.3 Students' perceptions of using Facebook for English language skills

This section discusses the implication of the findings. Previous studies presented gender as the only predictor of SNS use, while other variables such as race/ethnicity and parents' education level have no statistical significance (Hargittai, 2007). However, not many studies have explored these variables in relation to SNS and ELL.

The students' high positive perceptions of their English language skills, motivation, attitudes, and self-confidence might be seen in relation to a productive Facebook experience. This contradicts popular beliefs that Asian students are passive and reticent (Hu, 2002). Abu Bakar and Mickan (2005) reckoned that this has something to do with students being able to use the language freely on the platform. It goes on to show that students take time to digest what they have learned, and put the knowledge to good use when they are ready (Dennen, 2008). In accordance with the CLT, students' mistakes are noted and rectified at a later time to encourage fluency. Nevertheless, the students were as confident to speak and write, as they were not worried about making English language mistakes. However, this was not unexpected as the online environment invites more consumer than producer of knowledge (Cain & Policastri, 2011); which substantiates the higher percentage of students who felt more confident to read in English after using Facebook.

The students' positive perceptions of using Facebook for ELL might also be attributed to the fact that it was used for social and academic purposes on their own accord, rather than being pressured to complete a task. Students would have a completely different attitude if the Facebook activities were formal and graded (Cain & Policastri, 2011). Optional, but teacher-guided activities are preferred than compulsory and graded ones (Adi Kasuma & Wray, 2015).

Students subconsciously acquire language skills and knowledge while doing other activities such as interacting with friends and families, and sharing information. The learning process that builds their confidence is thus a by-product of their online socialisation and not burdensome (Kabilan et al., 2010). The incidental, subconscious learning may be seen in relation to Krashen's (1982) learning-acquisition theory. *Acquisition* is more powerful than *learning* as students would know about the language to be able to use it, and have a feel for its correctness, rather than consciously learning its rules. Adult students will have the opportunity to achieve near-native competence, although they will never pick up the language naturally the way children do (Krashen, 1982). Therefore, students' engagement with meaning-making activities than form-focused, could lead to a successful language learning experience (Kabilan et al., 2010).

The students' high motivation to use English in online and offline settings, as well as with lecturers illustrates the possibility of knowledge transfer from one environment to another, i.e. blended learning (Shih, 2011). Students' ability to apply and discuss knowledge in multiple settings demonstrates critical thinking skills and life-long learning interests. Students are also more motivated to learn affectively in a positive classroom climate, knowing that their teachers are reachable on Facebook; but, they are aware of the possible negative associations between Facebook usage and credibility (Mazer et al., 2007).

Many of the students agreed that they liked learning English, and English was more interesting after using Facebook. However, not as high percentage agreed that English was easier to be learned on the social platform. Facebook users circulate a variety of content in English that might have positively influenced the students' experience. For example, the games on Facebook such as Farmville and Mafia Wars, require students to understand and use English (Kabilan et al., 2010). When students acquire a word while using it, they learn its meaning and the context in which it is employed. Notably, learning English is not an easy task, although it becomes more interesting on Facebook. To produce a language requires skills and confidence, and students might be anxious and intimidated when they feel pressured to do it. As such, Facebook is a good platform for the weaker students who need

time to read and digest information and linguistic knowledge. Once the invaluable period of silence is over, they will become more prepared to impart knowledge to a group of audience, even on a public space.

4.4 Ethnicity

Many of the existing studies are US-based and classify the students into the ethnicities of White, African-American, Hispanics, Latinos, and Asian-American (Hargittai, 2007; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). While the White students use a lot of Facebook and LinkedIn, the minority students gravitate towards MySpace. The Hispanics prefer MySpace over Facebook, while the Asians like Xanga and Friendster.

There is thus a lack of research in the discussions of SNS usage among the ethnicities in Malaysia. A study identified that ESL students from similar ethnic groups, especially Malays, felt self-conscious when communicating in English among themselves (Abu Bakar, 2007). This substantiates the finding that the Malay students had lower confidence in their speaking abilities, compared to the Indian students. In another study, the Indian and Chinese participants responded the most positively to the statement *'it is easier to learn Science and Mathematics in English'*, while the Malays were the most reluctant (Kasmo et al., 2015). This resonates with the finding that the Chinese and Indian students had better English language proficiency than the Malays; thus, it was easier for them to receive instructions in the language. Low English language proficiency among the Malays might be a result of geographical locations and teachers' expertise; as students in rural areas disliked reading English books, had writing issues, unable to master grammar, and faced difficulty learning English language in general (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003).

4.5 Gender

Female and younger adults who live in urban areas are the likeliest to use SNS than their male counterparts. Females are also 10 percent likelier than males to have profiles on Facebook, while males have more LinkedIn profiles (Lenhart et al., 2010).

In an Arab EFL classroom, both males and females experienced equal amounts of motivations and anxiety in learning, but the females experienced higher anxiety than the males in the use of Web 2.0 (Mathew, Job, Damen, & Islam, 2013). This however, did not apply to SNS and video sharing applications (Huang, Hood, & Yoo, 2013); thus justifies the female students' higher motivation and more positive attitudes when Facebook was used for ELL. Despite the anxiety, the female students still outperformed the males in assessment and class participation; hence suggests that while the female anxiety facilitated learning, the male anxiety was counterproductive (Mathew et al., 2013). This positivity might also be seen in relation to the females' need for intimacy with friends and families to alleviate isolation and aloofness. Therefore, when writing on other people's profiles, females are highly likely to share thoughts and feelings, while males adopt a more instrumental relationship by doing activities together (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009). Females employ more social and affective strategies by using support-offering expressions to deepen relationships, express appreciation and thanks, and use more empty adjectives to express emotions; while males use 'tighter' and less direct expressions (Amir, Abidin, Darus, & Ismail, 2012).

Men also exhibit greater risk-taking behaviours compared to women, and women participate in fewer overall risky actions on SNS (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009). This might explain the reason that more male students were not worried about making English language

mistakes, compared to the females in this study. Accordingly, male students made more English language errors in expression writing compared to females (Gyimah, Amponsah, Pin, & Ofosuhene-Mensah, 2014). Furthermore, more male respondents agreed that it was easier to learn Science and Mathematics in English, compared to their female counterparts; which further demonstrates their calm demeanour, and not-taking-things (including learning) too seriously attitude. The female students were thus seen as better at language acquisition compared to the males (Gyimah et al., 2014); while the males were described as less motivated, had lower participation rate, and received lower marks than the females in the learning of French and English (Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013). However, females tend to exert very careful behaviours in online environment (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009), which was perhaps the reason they made fewer attempts to practise English language with native speakers compared to males who were more open to the experience (Sawir, 2005).

On the other hand, while both males and females showed strong representation of visual learners, there was no statistical relationship between language learning strategies or preferences and gender (Ahamad Shah, Ismail, Esa, & Muhamad, 2012).

5.0 CONCLUSION

University students in Malaysia need a technological change in their academic instructions, and familiar tools of social media could be of assistance (Manca & Ranieri, 2013). Many of the participants perceive that Facebook positively affected their acquisition of vocabulary and sentence structure, and improved their English language skills in general. There are significant differences between the male and female students' perceptions towards motivation, attitudes, and acquisition of English language skills; where the female students show more positive perceptions than the males. In terms of ethnicities, there are significant differences between the Indian students and the students of other ethnicities' motivation, attitudes, and self-confidence to use Facebook for ELL; where the Indian students show higher interests in the activity, followed by the Malay.

On Facebook, the learning process happens mainly incidentally. However, it is when the students shift their attention to the educational aspects that they acquire language skills more meaningfully and effectively (Kabilan et al., 2010). The process requires a lot of guidance and encouragement from teachers at the initial stages, before students are comfortable enough to function independently. As such, Facebook-integrated pedagogical activities may need to be introduced in stages so that it is not too overwhelming. Besides the teachers-students' dialogue sessions (Selwyn, 2007), seven key factors underline by Adi Kasuma and Wray (2015) could serve as a guide, i.e. a) purpose of the activity, b) topic/content of interaction, c) posting requirements, d) teachers' presence, e) students' language ability, f) language aspects, and g) sociocultural influences.

This study has identified the students' strengths and weaknesses based on gender and ethnicity. Bearing this in mind, educators may need to search or create online instructional activities that are tailored to their strengths, while progressively challenging them to overcome their weaknesses. Group activities allow students to learn from their peers' good qualities, and raise awareness of their own shortcomings. For example, the female students are likelier to participate in an activity on Facebook due to their more positive attitudes and motivation, but it is the male students who would be more confident to present themselves on the platform. The female students may learn to be more confident and assertive, while the male students could become more positive and highly motivated. Similarly, while the

Chinese students have good English language knowledge, they do not possess the confidence to use it. Therefore, the awareness of these strengths and weaknesses may guide teachers to create strategies that match the students. Students who are placed in mixed-ethnicity groups get more opportunities to practice and improve their language skills (Abu Bakar, 2007). Essentially, any rivalry between students of different ethnicities may be positively challenged when they work collaboratively to reach a common learning goal. The students who previously do not get as much exposure to mix with the other ethnicities may feel uncomfortable at the beginning; but, with teachers and peers' encouragement, they may grow to appreciate each other's strengths and values during the learning process.

In summary, Facebook has the potential to assist Malaysian students' English language acquisition through incidental learning. This study however only focuses on the general use of Facebook. Future research may examine students' experience and interaction in a specific group for English learning, students' English language exposure and use on Facebook, and specific instructional activities on Facebook, such as content reading and writing and their relationship to English language acquisition. These areas would further raise the awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of such technology to students' learning.

Two major limitations of this study were the small number of the Indian students and SOE, as well as the convenient sampling of the participants that might not be representative of the university population.

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