

Incorporating Facebook into an EFL Writing Course: Student Perception and Participation in Online Discussion

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Abstract

Facebook has been widely adopted for educational purposes and is viewed as a promising communication environment inside and outside second-language classes. Previous studies have demonstrated that the use of Facebook could benefit language learners regarding language-skills development and learning-motivation enhancement. However, few studies have examined whether language-learner perception correlates with actual participation on Facebook with teachers and classmates. To fill the gap, this study aimed to provide empirical evidence of the value learners place on using Facebook and the conditions within which their participation occurs. The study took place in an EFL university-level writing course with 16 sophomore students throughout an 18-week semester. They were required to respond to their teacher's writing prompts and their classmates' postings on the Facebook class page. The results showed that the participants recognized the usefulness of Facebook and the interactive nature of the writing discussion on Facebook, and identified the pros and cons of incorporating Facebook into the writing class. They replied to an average 1.6 teacher prompts per topic (one required) and gave an average 1.6 responses to peers per topic (two required). It appears that multiple factors other than the preference for Facebook might affect student participation in online discussion.

Keywords: English Writing, Facebook, Interaction Pattern, Perception, University Students

Introduction

Facebook, one of the most popular social networking sites (SNS), is quickly becoming a platform for educational purposes, and is viewed as a promising communication environment inside and outside of classes. (Ainin, Naqshbandi, Moghavvemi, & Jaafar, 2015; Menzies, Petrie, & Zarb, 2017). It may enhance student engagement in discussion because students are eager to know how their peers perceive their ideas (Kitsis, 2008). Constructive interaction can be elicited from peers when they exchange ideas on Facebook (Chang, 2014). Specifically, literature related to the use of Facebook for second-language learning suggests that teachers should incorporate Facebook into

class activities (e.g. Espinosa, 2015; Mills, 2011). However, few classroom-based studies have been conducted to explore the association between language-learner attitudes toward Facebook for learning purposes and their participation in the discussion on class content. More studies are needed to fill this gap.

Literature Review

The Integration of Facebook into Second-Language Classes

As Prichard (2013) suggests, the affordance of SNS like Facebook enables language learners to have opportunities of target-language use with features that allow learners to update status, give responses, and generally interact with other users. Facebook can also enhance student-teacher interaction (Aydin, 2014a). A convenient flow of communication between participants can thus be built. The integration of Facebook into second-language classes could be promising (Lin, Warschauer, & Blake, 2016). Mitchell (2012) conducted a case study to explore what motivated nine English learners in an intensive program in the United States to use Facebook or not. She found that the learners were inclined to use Facebook when they had adequate computer literacy. They used it for maintaining existing friendships and establishing new ones, and simultaneously improved their English writing and speaking abilities and cultural competency. Mitchell claimed that Facebook could increase the linguistic input and output of learners, recognizing that Facebook offers potential benefits when integrated into language classes. Shih (2013) incorporated Facebook into a tertiary-level course on English for Business Communication. One hundred and one English learners in Taiwan, with various majors, completed writing tasks on Facebook, made comments, gave feedback on peer work, and revised their work at peer suggestion. The results showed that the learners improved their knowledge of business English and increased their motivation to learn. Back (2013) conducted a ten-month web-based ethnography examining three Spanish learners studying abroad. By analyzing their Facebook postings, interviewing them, and investigating survey data, Back found that using Facebook gave them more opportunities for target-language input and output, and helped them develop relevant language use. In Blattner and Fiori's study (2011), 13 university Spanish learners in an intermediate-level Spanish-culture course searched groups in Facebook with search terms related to their textbook units, and analyzed the groups' use of language regarding greeting, leave-taking, and slang. The rich linguistic data on Facebook enabled users to boost their sociopragmatic awareness and sharpen their foreign-language multiliteracy skills.

Numerous studies indicate that language learners benefit from using Facebook to develop writing skills. For example, Shih (2011) integrated Facebook into his university-level English writing

course in Taiwan as a type of blended learning. Peer-assessment activity was administered on Facebook for students to discuss, comment and interact with one another. At the end of the course, an improvement in student writing skills was evident and their interest and motivation in English writing were boosted. Yunus and Salehi (2012) found that their college students in Malaysia benefitted from the use of Facebook in the English writing class. A qualitative study administered by Yunus, Salehi, and Chenzi (2012) exhibited strengths and weakness in using Facebook. Students could broaden their knowledge, and increase motivation and confidence, whereas they had difficulties concentrating on their work on Facebook and suffered from the lack of adequate equipment as well as access to the Internet. Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) used Facebook as a platform for 83 university English learners in Thailand for English grammar and writing discussions. The results showed that the participants improved their grammar and writing competence, as evidenced by the significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of English grammar and writing, and had positive attitudes towards using Facebook in an English course. In Wichadee's study (2013), 30 undergraduate English learners undertook peer review on Facebook in an English course for one semester. The findings demonstrated that the learners focused more on exchanging opinions than on grammatical errors. Their comments and revisions helped improve the quality of English writing. Razak and Saeed (2014) implemented collaborative writing-revision on Facebook. The qualitative data demonstrated that 15 EFL university students adopted multiple writing strategies, including addition, re-ordering, substitution, deletion, scaffolding and negotiation, on revision tasks. In addition, Facebook was found to have potential for enhancing learner engagement in the writing process and participation in collaborative activities. In their quasi-experimental study, Wang and Vásquez (2014) concluded that there is promise in using Facebook to boost the writing quantity of an experimental group of second-language learners that regularly made updates and comments in the target language on Facebook, significantly increasing its writing quantity over that of the control group that did not use Facebook. Finally, Shukor and Noordin (2014) found that Facebook can be a tool for ESL learners for collaborative writing. They found that 33 sophomore ESL undergraduates in Malaysia had made gains in English-writing quality after completing the six-week collaborative writing activity.

Additionally, studies reported the positive perception that learners had of using Facebook. In a survey of 300 Malaysian university students, Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010) found that most respondents agreed that Facebook could be a meaningful and useful English learning environment in which they became more motivated to write in English. Aydin (2014b) found that 101 Turkish EFL university learners had a positive attitude toward using Facebook as a portfolio platform. They also thought that using Facebook as a portfolio tool helped them improve grammar and vocabulary as well as research, reading, and writing skills. Lee and Ranta (2014) analyzed survey data from 75 ESL learners in the English Language Program at a university in Canada and found a significant correlation between their English language proficiency and Facebook use, especially

regarding their English writing, speaking, and interaction abilities. Dizon (2015) specifically studied 41 university English learners in Japan and observed their positive opinions of Facebook as a useful tool for language learning. The learners favored its ease of use, convenience, and low-stress interaction environment. Finally, Rahimi, Azhan, Normeza and Baharudin (2015) surveyed 22 Arabic-as-a-foreign-language learners. They found that the students used Facebook to practice their Arabic language skills, simultaneously becoming motivated to communicate with each other in Arabic.

Arising from the students' positive perceptions, most of the aforementioned studies addressed the potential efficacy of using Facebook in learning a target language. Yet, few studies examined whether the perception of language learners would conform to their actual participation on Facebook with teachers and classmates. To fill the gap, the current study explored both what Taiwanese university students perceived about using Facebook in their English writing course and what they actually did on Facebook. The following questions guided this study:

1. How did Taiwanese learners of English perceive Facebook as a learning platform?
2. To what extent did learners participate in Facebook discussion as measured by both the quantity of posts as well as by the length of exchanges?

Method

Project and Participants

The study was undertaken in a three-credit intermediate-level English writing course at a public university in central Taiwan. The course was offered in the department of Applied English and took place on Tuesday nights for the 18-week semester. Sixteen sophomore students enrolled in the course and were the study participants as well. The course provided students with explicit instruction to develop their grammar knowledge and to help them learn how to write in different styles in English. The students were expected to improve their English grammar and become conscious of the connection between English reading and writing.

At the outset of the study, the students were fully informed that they could refuse permission to the researcher for data collection at any time if they so desired. Sixteen participants, comprising four males and twelve females, agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent form. The students were asked to join a page on Facebook specifically designed for the course and to attend online discussions on class content throughout the semester (see Figure 1). The online Facebook discussion was one of the assignments given by their course instructor and accounted for 20% of

the final grade. Aside from functioning as a platform for writing assignments, the class Facebook page was an interactive environment for both instructor-student and student-to-student communication.

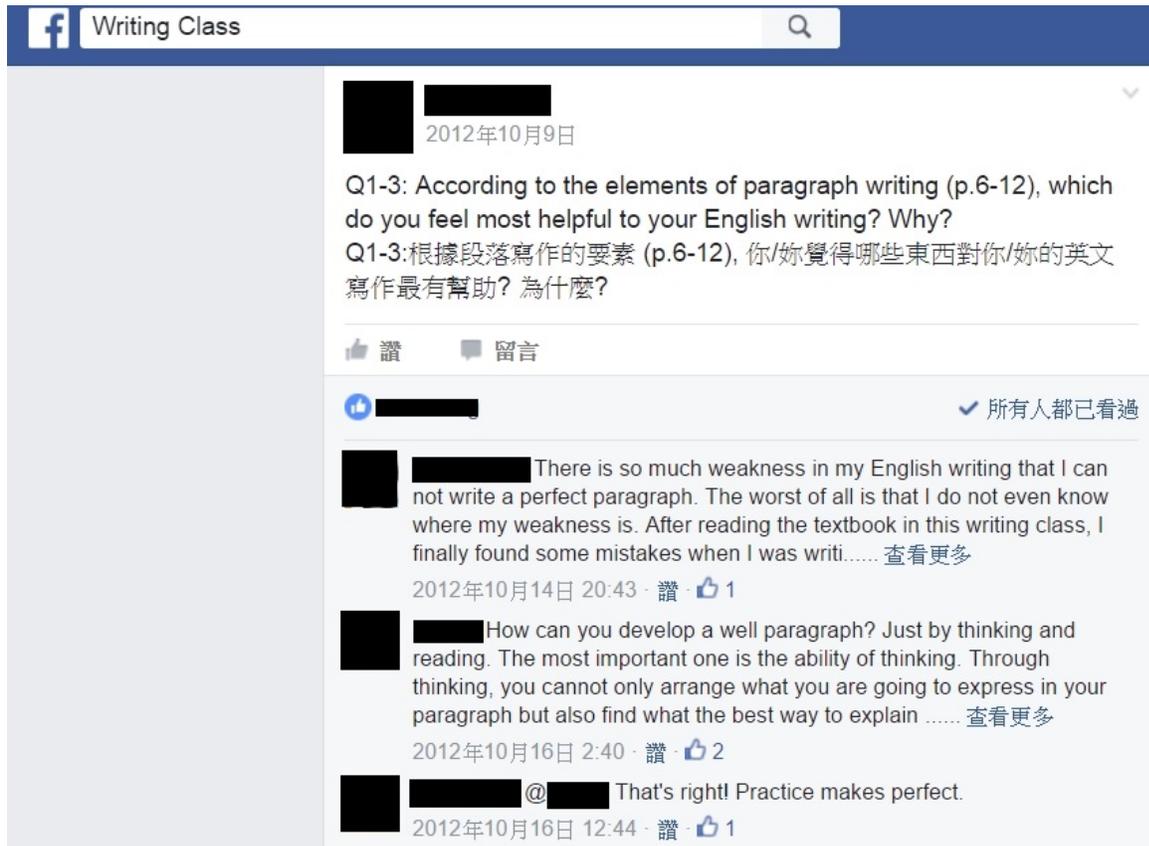


Figure 1. Snapshot of class page on Facebook.

According to the result of a background survey administered at the beginning of the semester (see Table 1), the majority of participants already had Facebook accounts. Additionally, most of them ($n=14$, 87.6%) checked Facebook at least once a day. They were familiar with Facebook functions, such as befriending other users, sending messages, and responding to each other. A large proportion of them ($n=15$, 93.7%) had had experience crafting new postings on their own pages prior to participating in the Facebook discussion. However, none of the participants had experience in using Facebook for the purpose of discussing class content.

Table 1

Participants' Use of Facebook

Item		Number (Percentage)
Have had a Facebook account:	No	1 (6.3%)
	Yes	15 (93.7%)
Frequency of checking Facebook:	Never	1 (6.3%)
	Several times a day	11 (68.8%)
	About once a day	3 (18.8%)
	3 to 5 times a week	1 (6.3%)
Have added friends on Facebook:	Never	4 (25%)
	Yes	12 (75%)
Have commented on friends' postings on Facebook:	Never	1 (6.3%)
	Yes	15 (93.7%)
Have posted messages on self-owned page on Facebook:	Never	1 (6.3%)
	Yes	15 (93.7%)
Have sent private messages to friends on Facebook:	Never	1 (6.3%)
	Yes	15 (93.7%)
Have participated in Facebook discussion for class content	Never	16 (100%)
	Yes	0 (0%)

Data Collection and Analysis

When the semester commenced, a background survey was administered to investigate whether the students were capable of using Facebook. The course instructor specifically built a Facebook page for the class and invited all students to become members. The Facebook discussion officially took

place in the fifth week of the semester, so that a student without experience of Facebook could apply for an account and familiarize himself/herself with its functions in advance.

When the writing activity started, the instructor posted one class topic, comprising three relevant writing prompts in both English and the students' first language, Chinese, on Facebook every two weeks throughout the semester. The prompts encouraged the students to expand their opinions on the content. The students were required to reply in English to at least one prompt for each topic and, furthermore, provide their classmates with at least two responses every two weeks for the purpose of idea exchange. A total of seven topics (21 relevant prompts) was posted throughout the semester (see topic examples in Appendix 1).

At the end of the semester, a survey was conducted to examine the participants' perceptions of using Facebook as a platform to practice English writing and to respond to peers. The survey was developed in reference to Shih's study (2011) on the perspectives of Taiwanese EFL learners on using Facebook in a blended learning course. The survey items were further revised according to the suggestions of an experienced English teacher and a language-education professor. There were two parts to the survey. The first consisted of 25 five-point Likert-scale items and was further divided into three themes, constituting views of Facebook, views of interaction with class members, and views of incorporating Facebook into class. The second part of the survey posed an open-ended question on the pros and cons of using Facebook for the assignment. Only two participants volunteered to take part in individual interviews with the researcher. Each interview took around one hour.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The quantitative data, consisting of the background survey in English and Chinese, the perception survey items in English and Chinese, and the number of participants' postings, were examined using descriptive statistics. The participants' responses to the open-ended question in the survey were carefully read and recurring themes were highlighted. Other qualitative data from the student interviews were transcribed and used to triangulate the research findings. Finally, content analysis was used to examine the student postings. A coherence graph, which connects each posting to the one that it intends to reply to, developed by Schallert, Lissi, Reed, Dodson, Benton and Hopkins (1996), was adopted to illustrate the students' interaction patterns in the discussion. The coherence graphs provide information on how many contributions the teacher and students posted to each discussion, and they reflect the degree of student participation. (Vogler et al., 2013). This analysis was undertaken manually.

Results and Discussion

In order to address the research questions on how EFL university students perceive and participate in writing discussion on Facebook, the findings obtained from the study are divided into three subsections: EFL student views on using Facebook to discuss writing, student contributions to writing discussion on Facebook, and student-interaction patterns on Facebook.

EFL Student Views on Using Facebook to Discuss Writing

The survey of students' perceptions of Facebook was completed in the last class of the semester. All participants filled out the survey. After an analysis of the internal-consistency reliability test on the survey, a .96 Cronbach alpha coefficient was obtained. As demonstrated in Table 2, the mean scores of all items were above 3.5, ranging from 3.81 to 4.56 on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). This indicates that the students liked Facebook and considered the Facebook activity useful. They recognized the fact that they were able to interact with their classmates on Facebook for educational purposes. However, compared to the other items, their responses to the Item *"I am confident writing in English on Facebook when interacting with my classmates"* were slightly lower but still positive. The findings were in line with previous studies (Dizon, 2015; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Lee & Ranta, 2015; Rahimi et al., 2015; Shih, 2011; Yunus & Salehi, 2012) that demonstrated that the EFL university participants greatly appreciated using Facebook in their English writing class. As Shih (2011, p. 840) contends, Facebook's "popularity, accessibility, and unique features attracted the students and eased their resistance to learning." This may explain why Facebook made such an impact on the students' perceptions that it could be a meaningful tool for learning. One interviewee even noted that *"I'm good at using Facebook. I use it in my daily life and love its functions. It's a good idea that we can discuss what we learn in class on Facebook."* In conclusion, the students recognized the benefits of writing in English to interact with class members on Facebook and were satisfied with the activity.

Table 2

Students' Perceptions of Facebook and Interactive Writing Task on Facebook

Views on Facebook	Mean	SD
1. Facebook allowed me to communicate with my classmates well.	4.25	0.68
2. The functions of Facebook motivated my learning interest.	4.31	0.70
3. Facebook helped me understand the thoughts of others.	4.44	0.51
4. Using Facebook gave me more freedom and control over my own learning.	4.25	0.68

5.	Facebook allowed me to engage actively in the process of reflecting on my writing.	4.44	0.51
6.	Facebook was an effective way of sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas with others.	4.31	0.70
7.	Facebook was a motivational tool for me to learn how to write in English.	4.31	0.70
8.	I felt comfortable sharing my ideas and interacting with others on Facebook.	4.31	0.70
Views on interaction with class members on Facebook		Mean	SD
1.	Reading the postings of others and feedback was interesting to me.	4.06	0.77
2.	Commenting on the postings of others in Facebook increased my English writing ability.	4.06	0.57
3.	In general, I was satisfied with how my classmates participated in the Facebook activity.	4.06	0.48
4.	Reading and commenting on the postings of others in Facebook enhanced my critical thinking ability.	4.25	0.68
5.	Reading and commenting on the postings of others on Facebook enhanced peer collaboration for learning.	4.43	0.51
6.	I received useful feedback that strengthened the quality of my writing content.	4.12	0.72
7.	Interaction on Facebook promoted friendship between my classmates and me.	4.00	0.89
8.	I am confident writing in English on Facebook when interacting with my classmates.	3.81	0.75
9.	Reading the postings of others helped me gain different writing ideas.	4.44	0.63
10.	I found peer comments on Facebook informative.	4.10	0.81
Views on the incorporation of Facebook into class		Mean	SD
1.	I liked to use Facebook in this writing course.	4.56	0.63
2.	In general, I was satisfied that Facebook was integrated into this course.	4.56	0.63
3.	Including Facebook in this class enhanced my English writing skills.	4.38	0.72

4.	Including Facebook in this class motivated my interest in English writing.	4.13	0.72
5.	I was able to monitor my own writing progress by revisiting my own postings and comments on Facebook.	4.00	0.73
6.	I found Facebook assignments meaningful.	4.37	0.62
7.	The integration of Facebook into this class made me learn actively.	4.00	0.73

Participants were requested to share their viewpoints on the pros and cons of joining writing discussions on Facebook by answering the open-ended question on the survey. A range of advantages of using Facebook was revealed. The participants recognized that the Facebook interactive discussion allowed them to gain learning autonomy ("We can log on to the page to write our comments and feedback when it is convenient.") and became motivated to learn ("We become more motivated to use English to interact with each other and feel that writing on Facebook is more meaningful than on paper."). They also experienced collaborative learning ("We can share our knowledge with each other, learn from each other about expressions or vocabulary we don't know, and interact with each other for meaningful information.") and developed critical thinking ("We can improve our competence in critical thinking by comparing and contrasting each other's perspectives."). Moreover, the interaction on Facebook, as the class assignment, brought novelty to the participants, because some noted that "it is special to write in English on Facebook as per the course requirement."

One of the possible explanations of the participants' positive perception of using Facebook might be empowered learning autonomy (Benson, 2007). By means of the availability of Facebook, the participants could log on to the class page without the constraints of time and place. They were in charge of their own learning. The other interviewee mentioned, "*We have a lot of freedom to participate in Facebook discussion. We can determine our learning pace. When I have time, I go to our class page and then make a posting or give a comment to my classmates. Very convenient.*" Furthermore, students were given more opportunities to interact with their teachers and peers on Facebook. This interactivity increases student satisfaction with using Facebook (Razak & Saeed, 2014). The interviewee said, "*One of the reasons that the Facebook assignment is amazing is that I can receive the teacher's comment. It's nice. And reading other classmates' postings helps me understand the classmates better.*"

However, some participants expressed several downsides of using Facebook in the course. According to the survey responses, these participants did not agree that peer comments were always prompt and helpful ("*I just received late comments from my classmates*"; "*Not all peer comments are constructive.*"), and some had concerns about eyesight health ("*If we continue using*

Facebook, I have to spend more time staring at my computer screen and it affects our eyesight.") and about lack of access to technology for accomplishing the Facebook discussion (*"I need access to the Internet to participate in the discussion. It's not convenient for me."*). Furthermore, there were many distractions on Facebook, which could impede their participation (*"There are many interesting games on Facebook. They are very distracting. We might just play computer games rather than finish our work on Facebook."*). These disadvantages were brought up in relevant computer-mediated communication studies (e.g. Ho, 2015; Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). Whether the classmates could provide constructive feedback was also a concern in this type of interactive learning activity, which frequently happens in peer-collaboration activities (Cho, 2017). Also, the lack of facilities for access to Facebook and the distractions on Facebook disadvantaged the participants (Yunus, Salehi, & Chenzi, 2012).

The Participation of Taiwanese Learners of English in Discussing Writing on Facebook

Participants' contributions to the writing activity on Facebook were explored by counting the frequency of their responses to the writing prompts and comments on peer postings. As demonstrated in Table 2, the participants acted mainly as responders to the teacher's writing prompts ($n=182$, 49.5%) and to peer postings ($n=178$, 48.4%). Sometimes they interacted by replying to the teacher's comments ($n=8$, 2.1%). Regarding the number of student responses, the participants replied to an average 1.6 teacher prompts per topic (one required) and gave an average 1.6 responses to peers per topic (two required). It shows that the participants were more motivated to answer teacher prompts than to reply to their peers, as indicated by the fact that they submitted more replies to the prompts than required but fewer to peer postings.

The phenomenon of more responses to the teacher and fewer to the peers may be due to the perceived discrepancy in value between the feedback of teacher and peers. The participants may have thought that the teacher would give them feedback if he read their responses, which was considered useful for the development of writing skills and grammar knowledge development (Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). However, the peers might have little confidence in giving peer comment or worry whether they could always provide useful, constructive feedback (Guardado & Shi, 2007). As the interviewee pointed out, *"I could see the teacher trying his best to give us his comments and feedback. His feedback helped us improve our writing quality. We can write better in terms of the teacher's comments, but you cannot always expect good feedback from classmates. They might just echo what you say without adding anything new."* The participants might also worry about the correctness of responses from the peers or to the peers, regarding English grammar. The interviewee stated, *"I am sometimes unsure of the accuracy of my classmates' feedback. I also question myself as to whether my comment is good enough. Consequently, I am not very motivated to continue replying to my peers."* Thus, the motivation for giving feedback to peers was not as high.

Table 3

Frequency of the Participants' Contributions to the Discussion on Facebook

Category	No.	Example	Note
Students' response to other students	178	Vicky: "for Lin's comment- I agree with your opinion, everyone is different."	Fewer than required number (224= 16 students*7 topics*2 responses to peers)
Students' response to the teacher's writing prompts	182	(responding to the prompt to share ideas after watching a video in class) Zeng: "I think we try to fit with others, and others also try to fit others. If we just keep out sharp horns and never want to ground them into smooth, we will become the missing piece."	Much more than required number (112=16 students*7 topics*1 response to the prompts)
To the teacher's comments	8	Wen: "# Teacher- some people will smoking to reduce their pressure, and some people think it can help them find the inspiration, these are not bad things."	

*All names are pseudonyms.

Student-Interaction Patterns on Facebook

To take a further look at the participants' engagement with the online discussion, their turn-taking interaction was examined by observing response level. As demonstrated by Figure 2, Kay's response to the first prompt of Topic Six (Q6-1) was labeled as a "one response to prompt". "One-turn exchange" is illustrated by Steve's comment on Zeng's response to the prompt. In the same vein, in the "three-turn exchange", there are three comments on the response to the writing prompt. For example, Steve's response to the writing prompt was commented on by Kay who, in turn, received a response from Steve. Then, Steve received further feedback from Kay on his initial comment to Kay. An example of students' actual exchanges is in Appendix 2.

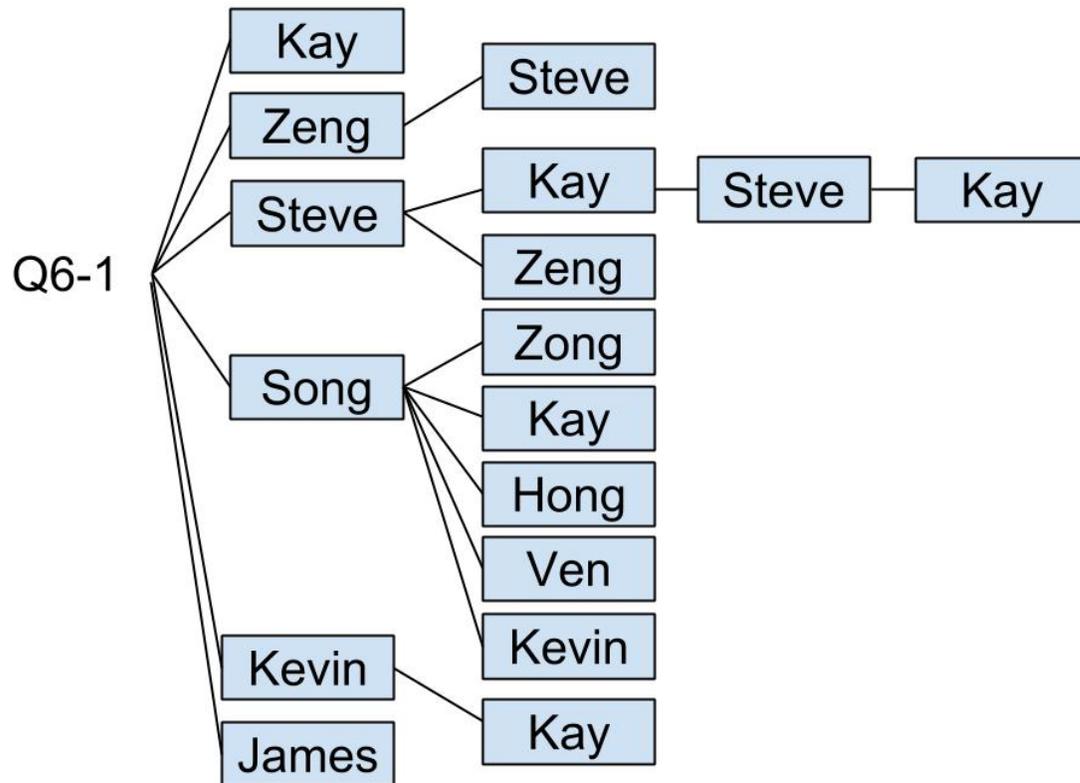


Figure 2. Example of participant interaction pattern.

As shown in Table 4, “one-turn exchange” is the most common interaction pattern, followed by “one response to prompt”, accounting for 68% and 21% of all the patterns, respectively. It means that the participants frequently gave a comment on another student’s response and ended the conversation on Facebook. No further discussion on the topic was made. Occasionally, some participants’ postings did not draw any feedback from other classmates. It is uncommon to have a long-turn posting exchange, as demonstrated by just one case of a “five-turn interaction exchange”. In contrast to Aydin (2012), communication and interaction among students on Facebook were not frequent in the study, regardless of their perceived value in the interactive discussion assignment.

Table 4

Analysis of the Participants' Interaction Pattern

Interaction Pattern	Number	Percentage (%)
One response to prompt	56	21
One-turn exchange	178	68
Two-turn exchange	22	8
Three-turn exchange	6	2
Five-turn exchange	1	0.3
Total	263	100

* The percentage was rounded up to the second decimal place.

There are several possible explanations for the distribution of the interaction patterns. The first three reasons are concerned with the nature of task design. Firstly, as suggested by Wang and Vasquez (2014), with the nature of asynchronous text communication on Facebook, users could not immediately receive messages sent by other users if they were not using Facebook simultaneously. Thus, a delay in comments from other participants might have decreased their motivation to give and take feedback. This was criticized by some participants in their responses about the disadvantages of the Facebook activity. Secondly, the nature of writing topics might have affected the participants' engagement in the discussion on Facebook. The topics with three writing prompts were related to various aspects of learning reflection, life experience, and language-learning knowledge. If the students were not interested in or had little insight into such topics, they might have detached themselves from the discussion, as demonstrated by the number, length, and complexity of the exchanges. Thirdly, it was compulsory for the participants to join the interactive discussion on Facebook. They might have posted to satisfy the requirement for the grade without caring about the quality of messages. Thus, they might not have initiated interesting, meaningful discussions, or engaged in learning-related activities.

The other two possible explanations relate to issues of access to Facebook. To begin with, because the majority of participants in the study were not new to Facebook, they might have joined a variety of groups and pages and received a large number of posting notifications or messages from their friends every time they logged on to Facebook. Plus, due to the design of Facebook, newer comments on the class page would appear at the top of the page such that the participants had to scroll down to reach their own comments. Thus, the distractions and inconveniences might have diminished the participants' motivation and commitment to the discussion. In addition, the device that the participants used to log on to Facebook might have been a factor in explaining their moderate participation in comment exchange. As mobile devices have become popular, it was not uncommon for the participants to check their Facebook updates on their smartphones. As Huang

and Lin (2011) found out, readers disliked reading on a phone's small screen. The participants might have felt uneasy reading the English text filling up their small screens, causing cognitive overload (Sweller, 1994). This might have reduced incentives for participants to complete comment exchanges and key in their feedback.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perceptions of 16 Taiwanese EFL university students using Facebook in their writing class and their subsequent interaction patterns. It was found that their high regard for Facebook for writing discussion did not ensure active interaction among members on Facebook. The results showed that the participants recognized the usefulness of Facebook and the interactive nature of the writing discussion on Facebook, and identified the pros and cons of incorporating Facebook into the writing class. They replied to an average 1.6 teacher prompts per topic (one required) and gave an average 1.6 responses to peers per topic (two required). This suggests that multiple factors other than a preference for Facebook might affect student participation in online discussion.

The findings of this study suggest several pedagogical implications for the integration of Facebook into an EFL university writing class. Firstly, the students' self-reporting on using Facebook is not equivalent to their actual participation. Language teachers need to be aware that learner preference for certain technologies does not necessarily lead to wide participation. To minimize the gap and reap the successful use of computer-assisted language learning, the learning goals (i.e. more idea exchanges written in the target language) and the role of technology (i.e. a platform for interaction) need to be conveyed clearly to students before they engage in learning activities (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Secondly, some participants remarked that they were uncertain of the quality of self- and peer-feedback. It is important to empower students with communication skills and teach them how to provide constructive feedback. By doing so, they can learn more from each other in collaborative activities. Thirdly, quantitative and qualitative evaluations of student performance in the activity could be adopted. Both the number and quality of their postings could be designed as evaluation indicators. This might prevent students from simply achieving the required number of postings mindlessly. Next, although the writing discussion on Facebook enables students to take charge of their own learning progress, not all students are prepared for such a learning task, due to their various levels of readiness for such a task (Cotterall, 1995). Training is essential in developing students' autonomous learning skills, such as time management, and gaining more awareness of the importance of autonomous learning. Last but not least, teachers could encourage students to take active advantage of the nature of Facebook interaction, where every member on a page shares the floor equally in the context of electronic discussion (Warschauer, 1996).

In line with previous classroom-based studies (e.g. Wang & Vásquez, 2014), the generalizability of the present study is limited due to the convenience sample and small sample size of participants. In addition, the "novel effect" might occur because it was the participants' first time undertaking Facebook discussion as a class activity. When students gain more experience of Facebook in language classes, their perception of Facebook for educational purposes and, consequently, their participation, might be different. Finally, the survey on student perceptions of using Facebook for an English writing activity was administered at the end of the semester. No attention was paid to how student attitude developed over the semester. Future studies could address these research limitations and further investigate which approaches might work better to engage language learners in online interaction on social-networking sites for the purpose of class discussion. Also, it is worthwhile conducting an in-depth analysis of student postings and exploring how students interact with others in English-writing practices.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Dr. Chung-Kai Huang for his support of this project, and the reviewers as well as the Editor of CALL-EJ for their insightful remarks in revising and publishing the paper.

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Appendix 1. Examples of writing topics

Q1-1: What are your difficulties in English writing?

Q1-1: 請問你/妳在英文寫作上的困難為何?

Q1-2: Please share your ideas about the assigned reading (p.3-4) by Michael C. Flanigan, "From reaching across the gap: How I write." How do you like this article? What did the writer learn from his early letter writing?

Q1-2: 關於指定文章 (p. 3-4), 請分享個人閱讀的經驗! 作者從他早年的寫信經驗學到了什麼?

Q1-3: According to the elements of paragraph writing (p.6-12), which do you feel most helpful to your English writing? Why?

Q1-3: 根據段落寫作的要素 (p.6-12), 你/妳覺得哪些東西對你/妳的英文寫作最有幫助? 為什麼?

Appendix 2. Snapshot of Students' Exchanges on the Facebook Page



Q6-1: Please reflect on the issues raised in Yang Lan's speech.

Q6-1: 請分享個人聆聽楊瀾演講(重塑中國的一代)的看法!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch...>

Chinese Susan Boyle... See More



楊瀾: 重塑中國的一代

楊瀾, 一位新聞記者兼企業家, 被稱為是“中國的奧普拉,” 介紹中國這些住在城市、(通過微博)互相聯係、對社會不公很警覺的下一代. Source: TED Talk

YOUTUBE.COM

Like Comment



Yang Lan - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Yang Lan (Chinese: 楊瀾; pinyin: Yáng Lán; born March 31, 1968) is a Chinese media propeitor, journalist, and talk show hostess. She is the co-owner with her husband Wu Zheng (also known as Bruno Wu) of Sun Television Cybernetworks based in Shanghai, China. In April 2009, Forbes listed Wu and his wife...

EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG

December 18, 2012 at 9:46pm · Like · 1 · Remove Preview

Zeng I think everyone to listen to a lecture, do not want to lecture people are very rigid.

And Yang Lan's speech is lively.

Laughter applause given by the audience on behalf of the lecture was very successful.... See More

December 25, 2012 at 11:21pm · Like · 1

Steve Yang Lan's speech which made a point on the young Chinese people. She mentioned about how powerful the internet program is, and how the Chinese local government deals with the new generation. However, it is not that beautiful that we have seen, there a... See More

December 27, 2012 at 12:05pm · Like · 1

Nick... 我和世界不一樣

-  **Hong** for **Song** i agree your opinion, if you can something make people feel you are different but good,that enough
January 8, 2013 at 4:28pm · Like ·  1
-  **Ven** for **Song** I agree with you, too! And I like your opinion.
January 10, 2013 at 12:38am · Like ·  1
-  **Kevin** I think through Yang Lan's speech, modern young people can realize that we don't just need to be an innocent and surpportive, we can also have our own opinions. Because of a great deal of teenagers have been educated have to listen to their parent's o... See More
January 10, 2013 at 1:56am · Like ·  1
-  **Kay** @ **Kevin** Yes, two things should never wait: doing good deeds and being good to our parents =))
January 10, 2013 at 2:32pm · Like ·  1
-  **James** I think Yang Lan's speech is very influential. He mentioned a lot of problems, not only china but also other countries. we can't ignore them, we have to solve! People always look us what we've done for then or just corruption their money.A country must be united and have centripetal force that will be everyone respected.
January 11, 2013 at 5:01am · Like ·  1
-  **Kevin** @**Song** I agree with you, you just pointed out the question that most people's stereotype for women.
January 11, 2013 at 10:04pm · Like ·  1