

## Encouraging Class Discussion and Promoting Learning Performance through Facebook

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### Abstract

English language is undeniably significant in this globalization era. Thus, there is an urgent need among the second language educators to find ways to assist L2 learners in using the target language. However, research has shown that majority of L2 learners are not confident in using the language. As a result, they seldom take part and are passive during class discussion. The aim of this study is to find an avenue to promote student's self-confidence in using the language and directly lessen the language apprehension that makes them to be passive in classroom. This study focuses on the use of Facebook to boost L2 learners' confidence to participate in class discussion. Three classes of diploma students were randomly selected for this study. Data from observation, pre-test and post-test were employed for this study. Observation of students' participation and discussion in the Facebook groups and also classroom setting was conducted. The students were assigned reading materials via Facebook and were requested to interpret and share their thoughts of the text in the medium provided apart from the usual discussion in classroom context. The findings showed that both intervention groups showed positive involvement in class discussion both via cyberspace and classroom context. The respondents in the control groups did not show significant changes of behaviour in classroom context. However, for the intervention groups despite receiving the same stimulus the students in the two intervention groups responded differently through this medium. The findings illustrated there were regression in the post-test during the first intervention, while in the second intervention group there was a positive growth in the post-test where 71% respondents recorded a change in the attitude during the process of learning. The result showed that there are other factors to consider when employing Facebook as a tool to interact. Nevertheless, the study brings to light the prospective of using Facebook in building students' confidence in expressing thoughts and consequently improves their performance.

**Keywords:** *ESL learners, Language anxiety, Class discussion, Social networking site, Facebook, Tertiary level students.*

### 1.0 Introduction

English language undoubtedly has become the global language that is not just important for trading and business purposes, but also for knowledge transfer and mere communication. As it is so crucial to master the language, the Malaysian government has come out with many initiatives to help Malaysian students to be relevant in the global market. Recently, Malaysia's Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak has announced in 2015 Budget, the minimum grade requirement of Malaysian University English Test (MUET) SPM leavers to enroll to university should be increased as to highlight the importance of English among university graduates. Learning English language is no longer an option but a prerequisite. Thus, English language educators are pushing their efforts to help the learners to be well versed in the lingua franca. Nonetheless, learning a second language (L2) or any foreign language can be challenging as there are difficulties that may hamper its mastery.

Communication apprehension has been the primary reason that hinders the mastery of a new language as it may make the learners refuse to practice the language (McCroskey, Gudykunst & Nishida, 1985). Many L2 learners opt to keep quiet and do not want to contribute to class discussion as they are too worried that they will make mistake. When they do not use the language either speech or written form, it is hardly for them able to improve and be functional in the preferred language as language is a skill that needs to be used in order to be good at. At this juncture, educators should use the avenue to utilize the technology in making the learning process to be more interactive and lively. In the effort to attract the students to love learning, educators need to explore and discover to what extent does technology gives benefit to students' academic achievement. Thus, the objectives of the study are to examine to what extent the social network affects students' confidence in delivering their thoughts and to see whether the employment of technology in language classroom affect the students' performance in learning language.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Language Anxiety**

Anxiety has been defined as either a fusion of apparent behavioural characteristics that people can examine or an inward-looking emotion that can hardly be accessed (Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001). Generally, it is considered as individual feeling of "tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry" which is linked with a provocation of the automatic nervous system (Spielberg, 1983). As language anxiety is seen as a form of situation-specific anxiety, research related to it should use measures of anxiety faced in either second or foreign language settings (MacIntyre, 1998 & Young, 1991; 1994). In broader sense, emotion is complex. Hence, the means of its (read: anxiety's) measurement is also dealt with complexity. However, there are three main methods of measuring anxiety in research, which include behavioural observation or rating; physiological assessment; and participants' self-reports (Casado et al. 2001; Daly. 1991). These methods help researchers to identify the level of anxiety among L2 or foreign language learners and thus help them to come out with ways to lessen it. There are various contributing factors which lead to language anxiety. Some may feel anxious because of their perfectionist tendencies. In their effort to manifest their language perfection, it makes the language learning experience to be unpleasant (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). In other words, by not focusing on the errors made and be satisfied with the effort made in using the language will make the learners to be non-anxious. Other contributing factors of anxiety are difficulty level of foreign language classes, personal perception of language aptitude, certain personality variables (e.g., perfectionism and fear of public speaking), and stressful classroom experiences (Price, 1991). Thus, in making these learners to be less anxious, language teachers should find ways in omitting these contributing factors or at least lessen them.

### **2.2 Social Network in Education**

Krashen explained that learning a new language is possible if there is no hindrance either socially, environmentally or even attitudinal (including language anxiety/apprehension) (Conteh-Morgan, 2002). Thus, there are many novel and ingenious approaches experimented by educators to help their learners to reduce the anxiety and further motivate them to function well in the language (Lukits, 2014; Welch & King, 1997; Hampel & Stickler, 2005). In mastering a second language efficaciously, learning should be beyond the classroom context. Social networking technologies are invented appealingly to arouse the users' interest due to the attractive features; subsequently, the avenues of social networking provide students especially young adults to interact and connect with each other freely (Puteri & Norasyikin, 2017). Hence, as digital media has opened a new dimension of learning that covers "interactivity, non-linearity, instant access of information, and the convergence of text and images, audio and video" than in the printed environment (Liu,

2005), educators and scholars are starting to implement it as some sort of fresh pedagogical tools in easing up the apprehension level among the L2 learners.

Boyd and Ellison delineate social networking sites “as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile... (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections...” (Duncan-daston, Hunter-sloan & Fullmer, 2013). Despite this new factor, learning has become more interesting as internet and social networking sites offer various opportunities for learners to use the learned language realistically than the limited chances of in-class learning. As Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are common among students, these social networking sites have been used by so many people for different purposes including as teaching tools (Puteri, et al. 2017). According to Al-Mukhaini, Al-Qayoudhi, Al-Badi (2014) 60% of students claimed they utilise social networking tools to do class discussion, extra learning activity outside classroom, and planning to further their study. As it has been a part of the present society, technology is expected to be integrated into teaching as well. As there is a proliferation research fixated on social networking sites as educational tools (Hungerford-Kresser, Wiggins & Amaro- Jiménez, 2011; Johnson, 2010; McWilliams, Hickey, Hines, Conner & Bishop, 2011; West, 2008; Yang, 2009), it signifies that this novel method produces positive result in learning (Puteri, et al. 2017). As social media and social networking allows the users to positively experience various learning environments, a lot of researchers suggest they should be used for learning purposes and that educators should be positive in integrating it with their teaching approaches (Jenkins, 2009). Mazman and Usluel believed that social networking tools can be used to support educational activities by allowing the learners to make interaction, collaboration, have active participation, share information and resource and generate critical thinking (Al-Mukhaini, et al. 2014). A survey done by Al-Mukhaini, et al. (2014), concludes that 62% of students claimed that they were able to comprehend the lesson much better through online than the ones being taught in the conventional method, 63% of them enhanced their communication skills, 88% of students stated more technological skills were gained in the implementation of social network in education together with the other benefits like confidence in communicating, boost group work, and sharing ideas and beliefs.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Data Collection**

There were two types of data collected in this study. The data were collected from observation of respondents' responses on the stimulus given through Facebook and pre-test post-test. There is a need to collect pre-test data because the use of pre-test scores helps to lessen error variance, thus making more reliable tests than the ones with none. The observation approach was used to see the attitudinal change in terms of respondents' responses in the treatment given through the referred social networking site together with their responses and attitude in class. This roughly helps to see any changes in terms of their confidence level in using the language inside and outside of the class (via social network).

#### **3.2 Data Analysis**

The data from both Pre-test and Post-test were analysed by subtracting the scores in pre-test (Y1) and post-test (Y2) to get the gain scores (D),  $D = Y2 - Y1$ . The reason for this is to see any significant impact on students' performance in the language through the implementation of social network in teaching. The students' responses were analysed by using thematic analysis and being categorised according to different themes.

### **3.3 Sample**

In this study, three classes of diploma students were involved. All of them were in their second semester and they were taking the same English code which focused on reading. All of them were 19 years old. 37.1% of the respondents in group A and B were males while female respondents were 62.9%. Group A consists of students from Art and Design Faculty, while Accountancy students were involved in group B. Respondents in group C were among the Planning, Architectural, Building and Surveying Faculty students.

### **3.4 Instrument**

The Pre-test and Post-test given resembled the reading comprehension assessment of the English subject that they were taking. The tests consist of a reading passage and 13 questions that vary between reference words, contextual clues, WH questions, inferences and giving opinion.

### **3.5 Procedure**

Two classes (A&B) were given the same stimulus which was reading tasks that were posted in their Facebook groups for six weeks. These groups were the intervention groups and the stimulus given was the intervention treatment to the groups. As Facebook is one of the two largest social networking sites used worldwide with its more than a billion users, it is chosen as the medium of interaction in this study. The respondents have to respond to the reading material given by their lecturer via Facebook. The implementation of Facebook was incorporated with lessons in class, while the other class (group C) was not given the stimulus to act as the control groups.

## **4.0 Findings**

There were two types of data collected from observation of the respondents' involvement in the chosen social networking site (written response) and classroom context and pre-test post-test.

### **4.1 Written Response**

#### **4.1.1 Reasoning skill**

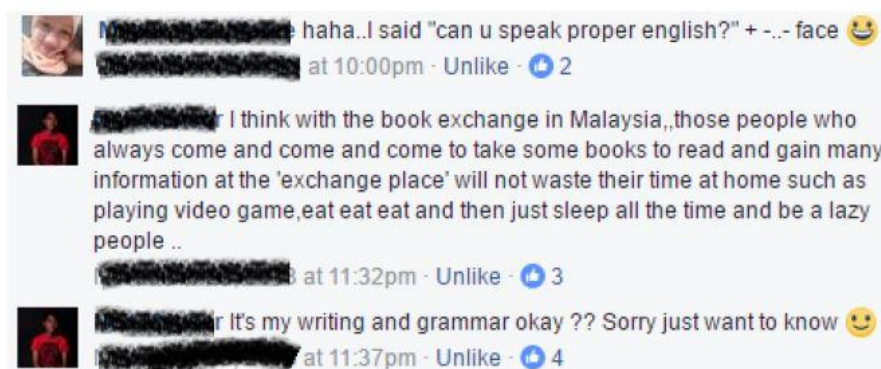
From the observation of the responses given in the social network site, group A showed positive involvement in responding to the online reading tasks. In classroom, most of the respondents in the intervention groups were quite passive and did not contribute much to the class discussion. They preferred to give short responses or kept quite when they were asked questions by their lecturer in class. However, in the Facebook group, most of them explained their opinion with relevant reasons. The responses were much more elaborated compared to responses given in physical class. Some organised their ideas coherently with the use of transition signals. The responses below were some of the responses given by respondents in intervention groups on one of the tasks posted by their lecturer.



From the samples, it can be seen that some of the respondents used transition signals accordingly to create cohesion in their responses. For instance, “one of the reasons, in addition, plus, besides, hence and for example”. They also provided more than one reason when giving out their opinion. One of the respondents related the response with her experience to support her stand on the issue discussed. All of the respondents gave different views and did not tend to always conform with their friends’ opinions as they freely gave opposite views.

#### 4.1.2 Language Awareness

From the respondents’ interaction in the Facebook group, it can be seen that some respondents are also aware of their incompetency in the language and voiced out their concern in their posts. As compared to verbal responses in physical classroom, the students did not mention this to the language instructor. Below are the samples taken from the Facebook group.





One of the respondents mentioned to her classmates whether they can use proper English when they started to code switching and posted incomprehensible sentences. While another was concerned about his writing and grammatical error in his response to the task given.

### 4.1.3 Active Conversation

From the observation made on their activity in the Facebook group, most of them showed positive involvement in responding to the online reading tasks. Some of them were actively participating in the Facebook group as they sometimes posted new topics or shared something new to their friends than the ones posted by their lecturer. Even there were many grammatical errors in their comments and posts, it can be seen that they were comfortable to share their thoughts via social networking site compared to when they were in the classrooms. Samples can be seen from the snippets below.



From the samples taken, it can be seen that they are interacting with each other in the preferred language. It seems that they were less anxious in delivering their thoughts. They also seem to be enjoying using English language and use some slangs like “gonna” and “brit”. This situation or discussion was rarely seen in the physical class and they ended up using their mother tongue when they were asked to do group discussion

## 4.2 Pre-test and Post-test

There was no substantial progress for the control group's Post-test. Conversely, the respondents for both intervention groups (group A & B) showed improvement in their Post-test. 52.6% respondents of group A and 71% respondents of group B exhibited positive progress in their Post-test.

In group A, there were 38 respondents involved. Referring to Figure 1, 20 (52.6%) of them exhibited growth, while 17 (44.7%) respondents showed decrement and 1 (3%) respondent had a constant progress.

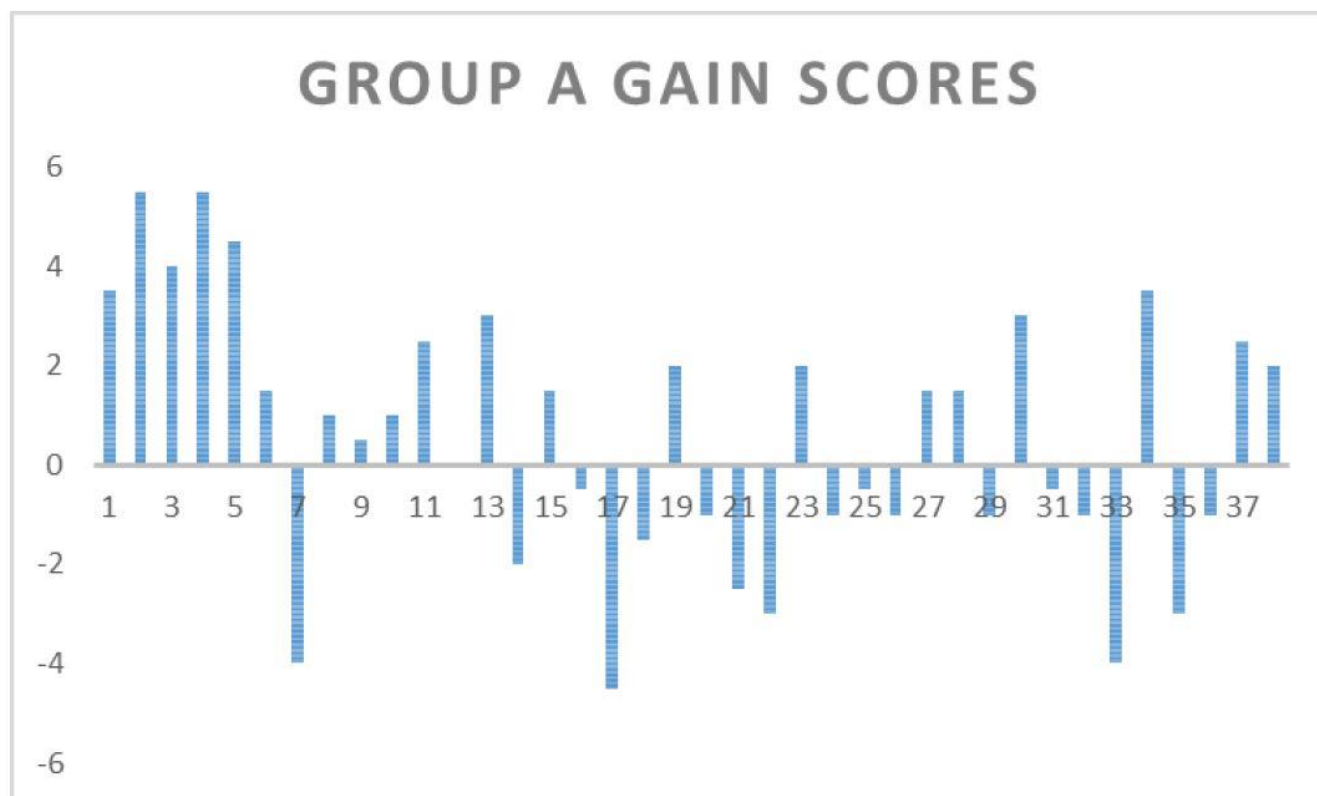


Fig. 1 gain scores of respondents in group A

As shown in Figure 2, group B that consisted of 24 respondents exhibited improvement as more than 71% of them achieved higher marks in the Post-test compared to their Pre-test. This improvement represents 17 respondents compared to only 21% (5 respondents) that showed a regression in their Post-test scores. Meanwhile, 8% (2 respondents) did not show any changes in both tests. It is quite unexpected to see the decrement for group A, as respondents in group A and B answered the same set of questions and were given the same treatment. Even with the slight difference, it still can be concluded that majority of the respondents in group A and B exhibited positive growth in their Post-test as more than 50% of respondents of each group showed increment in their gain scores. This shows that the treatment given for the consecutive six weeks has affected them positively in their Post-test.

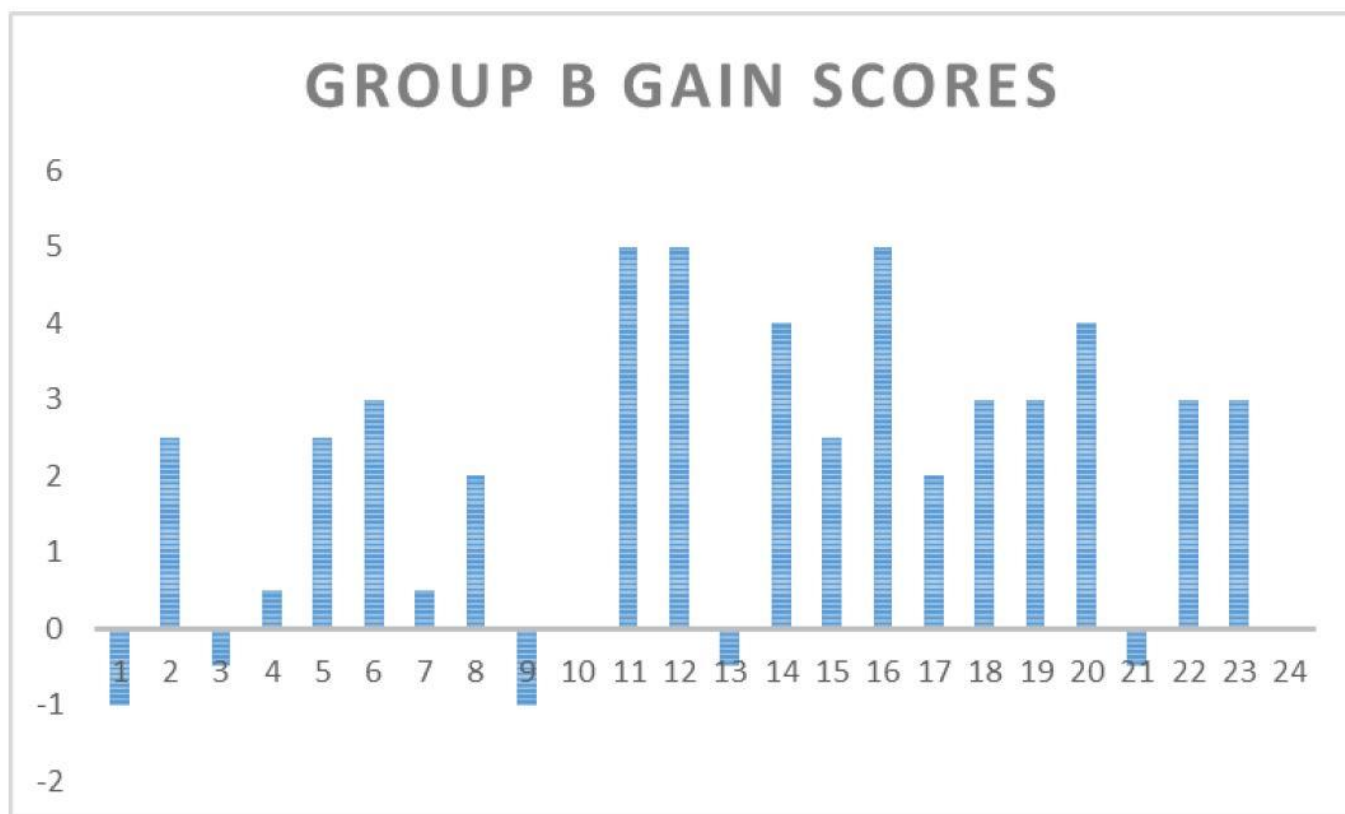


Fig. 2 gain scores of respondents in group B

Based from Figure 3, there was no significant result can be seen for group C in their Post-test. 18 respondents were involved in this control group. Since they were not given the treatment like the other two experimental groups (A&B), 50% (9 respondents) portrayed decrement in their Post-test. Only 44% (8 respondents) showed positive growths, while the smallest percentage referred to constant growth with only 6%. Even though, there were 6% difference between the positive and negative gain scores it was insignificant compared to the experimental groups (A&B) that have greater difference in their gain scores.

A comparison of the mean scores in Table 1 illustrated the effect of the treatment using Facebook on the students in reading classroom. The scores indicated that overall students obtained a higher score in the Post-test. The means obtained from the Pre-Test of Group A was 8.5111 and Group B was 9.9375 and Post-test of Group A was 10.3889 and Group B was 11.8958 respectively. The t-value for Group A = -6.484, Group B = -4.851, df for Group A= 44, df for Group B= 23, Group A and Group B  $p < 0.000$  shows that there is significant difference between the Pre-Test and Post-Test scores for both Group A and B. This indicates that a significant improvement does exist on the Post-test's score of the students in Group A and Group B after the treatment.



Table 1: Means, standard deviations and t-value of percentage scores of the Pre-test and the Post-test of the Experimental groups (Group A & B)

	Mean Scores		t-value	df	p
	Pre-test	Post-test			
Group A	8.5111	10.3889	-6.484	44	.000
Group B	9.9375	11.8958	- 4.851	23	.000

Note: Standard deviations are listed in parentheses (Group A: SD 1.94281, Group B: SD 1.97768)

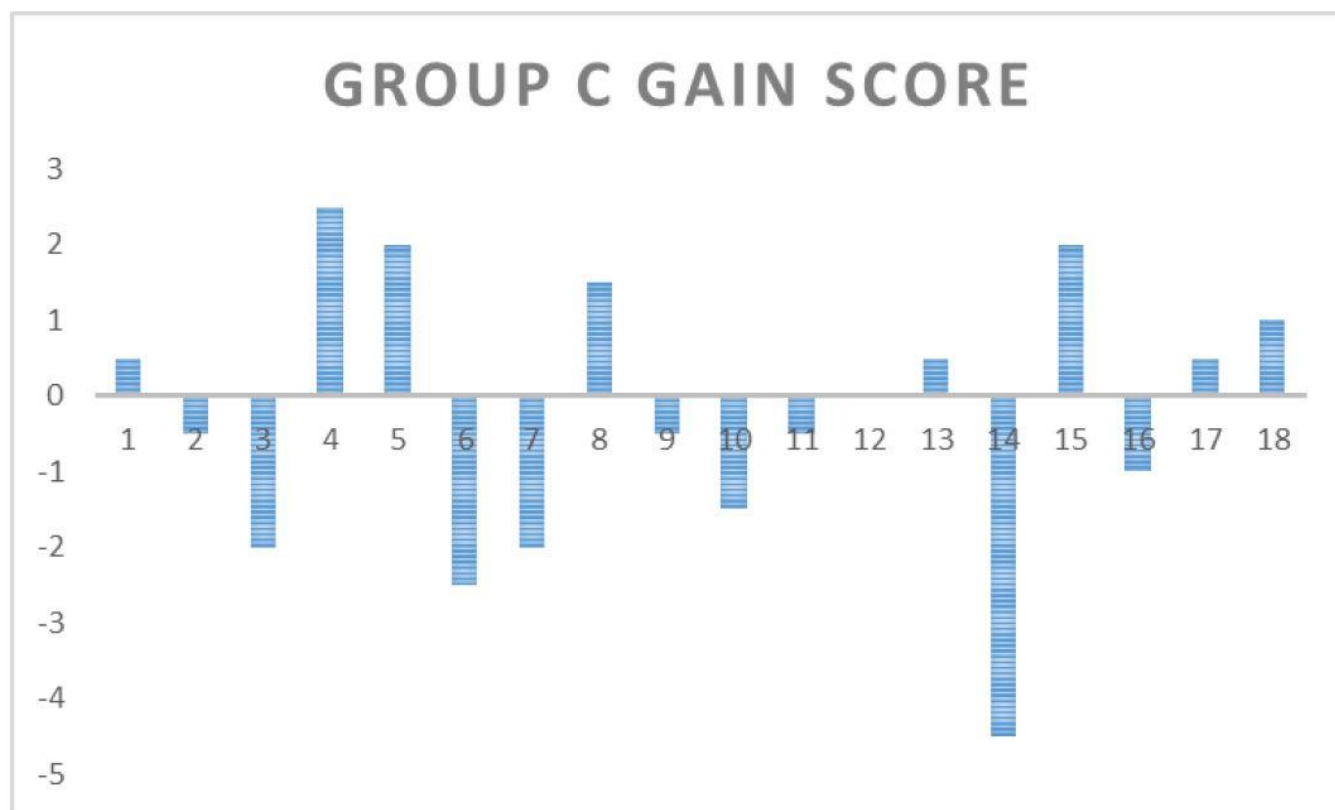


Fig. 3 pre-test and post-test scores of respondents in group C

From the data obtained, it can be concluded that both of the experimental groups showed improvement in their gain scores from Pre-test and Post-test after they were given the treatment via social networking site approximately six weeks. Meanwhile, the control group showed decrement after six weeks without the treatment. The mean scores obtained, as shown in Table 2, the Pre-test of Group C was 9.9167 and the Post-test of Group C was 9.6667. The t-value for the Pre-test and Post-test were .586. The Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference between the means of both the tests, as indicated by a t-test for paired samples, t-value for Group C = .586, Group C df = 17, p = .565.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and t-value of percentage scores of the Pre-test and the Post-test of the Control group (Group C)

	Mean Scores		t-value	df	p
	Pre-test	Post-test			
Group C	9.9167	9.6667	.586	17	.565

Note: Standard deviations are listed in parentheses (Group C 1.8088)

## 5.0 Discussion

Based from the results in pre-test and post-test, there was a significant difference between the three groups. Both group A and B showed positive growth in their gain scores, however the difference between the percentages of growth differ. Comparing these data with the ones obtained from the observation, it can be seen that the respondents in intervention groups did not just fulfil the task given by the lecturer but also added new topics and responded to each other's posts and comments. They seemed to be enjoying the tasks given online based from the responses given. This differs than the control group as majority of the respondents showed regression in the post-test results. Based from the responses given by respondents in the intervention groups, it can be seen that contributing factors of anxiety such as certain personality variables (e.g., perfectionism and fear of public speaking), and stressful classroom experiences (Spielberg, 1983) can be reduced as the students did not have to face their classmates and lecturer physically, therefore making them less anxious to achieve perfection in using the language. As they were interacting via cyberspace, the stressful classroom experience can be avoided and his initiated them to use the language freely without being physically evaluated. This illustrates that online reading tasks affect students positively if the students treat the task seriously.

From the intervention groups' active participation in social network, it can be seen that most of them responded as how they respond with their friends like making jokes. The use of language most of the time is casual and colloquial when they commented each other's opinion. Nevertheless, the absence of other supplementary data such as interview and survey hinder the fact whether the implementation of social networking site contributes to better comprehension in reading or deflect them from learning as they are strayed to engage with socialising in the cyber world instead of learning itself. To attain a more holistic picture of the effectiveness of the social networking site in encouraging students' discussion and promoting language learning, this study should be extended with other types of data that will give in-depth understanding on the students' motivation and attitude. Even so, it can be seen that the use of Facebook as a form of pedagogical tool promotes students' participation in communicating in English. They seem to be interested to communicate with their friends in English via online and were not shy to respond even with grammatical errors, incorrect sentence structure or wrong choice of word compared to passive involvement in class discussion. This should be highlighted as it might be useful for educators who have passive students in class because of their inability to converse well in English language. This shows social networking sites do produce positive result that not just increase the students' confidence to use English, but also facilitate learners in learning the preferred language (Al-Mukhaini et al., 2014; Hungerford-Kresser, et al. 2011; Johnson, 2010; McWilliams, et al. 2011; Wes, 2008; Yang, 2009).

With this positive result, educators should opt for this interactive platform to attract and help the language learners to master the language efficiently (Jenkins, 2009). However, language learning and teaching is exclusive to each classroom or student and it is difficult to foresee the effectiveness (Tudor, 1998). Thus, as the concept of a student-centered approach has been approved and considered as one of the most practical educational approaches (Copeland, 1952), allowing the students to interact and use the learnt language among themselves particularly in social network could give positive impact.

Encouraging the students to depend more on themselves and assuring them to depend less on the teacher would promote self-motivation to learn the language and by creating a space for these learners to interact with each other in the preferred language, can nurture their ability to articulate their thoughts better (Piage, & Inhelder, 1975; Vygotsky, 1934/2014). As social network allows the users to positively experience various learning environment. Thus it should be considered for learning purposes and accepted this novel method positively in integrating it with teaching approaches (Jenkins, 2009 & Puteri, et al. 2017).

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Through this study, it is learnt that the usage of social networking in teaching promotes students' confidence in using the language. Nevertheless, the idea of integrating it into the teaching and learning should be highlighted as some students might feel the tasks given through social media sites are just for leisure. The difference between learning via social network and socialising in social network should be stressed and understood. If there is no indication done on that, students might not treat the task given via the cyberspace seriously and will give a converse effect. However, bigger samples would give more solid evidence on this implementation. Students seem to be more confident and comfortable in responding and communicating to each other and with the lecturer via the social networking sites based on the documentation of students' writings and responses in their Facebook groups. Some possible limitations of this research could be the lack of data involving the respondents' view on the social networking implementation in teaching and learning. Survey and interview technique should be employed as well rather than collecting the data from the pre-test and post-test. This could give a better insight and shed some light to students' attitude towards the implementation of social network in learning English how it affects them in learning. Furthermore, time constraint would be an issue as reading comprehension could not be observed within six weeks solely. Longer time should be consumed to see the effect of the implementation.

## Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the participants who have volunteered in this study.

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