

## Managing Digital Learning Environments: Student Teachers' Perception on the Social Networking Services Use in Writing Courses in Teacher Education

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### ABSTRACT

Limited studies have been conducted to examine how effective and what impacts dealing with students' learning experiences as well as the problems faced by the students. This study focused on English student teachers' experiences on the advantages and problems faced in using Social Networking Services (SNS) in English as Foreign Language (EFL) writing courses which is a part of larger research involving the use of SNS in two state universities in Jambi. This research was conducted in ten classes of two Indonesian universities for one year. This qualitative research involved a total of 6 focus group discussions with 60 students. Prior to focus group discussion, demographic questionnaires were distributed to know general information of all participants in relation to the use of SNS. A thematic analysis revealed general background of the participants in relation to the use of SNS, advantages of SNS use in writing courses, problems faced of the SNS use. The findings contribute to current understanding about how English student teachers experience using SNS. Based on the findings, this research offers policy recommendation to expand the use of SNS in EFL courses.

**Keywords:** social networking services, academic writing, advantages, problems, Indonesia

### INTRODUCTION

Social Networking Service (SNS) has been very popular during the past ten years and plays a significant role in people's daily life. By definition, SNS can be widely interpreted as internet or mobile applications designed to facilitate communication, collaboration, and content sharing (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Murray and Waller (2007) stated people working in internet technology developed the idea on how people know and interact with each other through SNS which facilitates them the ability to share, respond, comment, and discuss which makes the world more connected. Eventually, it helps millions of people share interests on many disciplines, and make possible to the registrants to share statuses, files, photos, videos, to create blogs, to send messages, and to conduct conversations. In higher education context, the emergence and popularity of SNS has made many lecturer researchers conduct research and publish their articles in that area. The implementation has brought some learning advantages such as contribute to higher score in some direct instances, reduce anxiety levels, increase the efficiency and mastery of task, and improve social interactions (Melor, 2007; Brown, 2010; Pursel & Xie, 2014; Kabilan, Norlida, & Abidin, 2010; Hamid, Kurnia, Waycott, & Chang, 2011 & 2015; Lowedahl, 2011).

Noting the use of SNS in higher education, some applied linguists and foreign language pedagogy educators in universities (e.g. Thorne & Black, 2007; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; McBride, 2009; Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Lee, 2011) have also explored the use of SNS in their teaching and realized the great potential of SNS for foreign language pedagogy because SNS use is currently an authentic and daily literacy practice, it is useful to be implemented in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching. In more particular issue and subject, SNS has been implemented as a medium in writing classrooms by scholars for recent few years (Warnock, 2009; Balci, 2010; Lee, 2011; Habibi, 2015) for example Warnock (2009) mentioned that number one reason to teach writing online is that the environment would be clearly textual. Students who are in a guided environment of learning express their ideas in writing to a varied audience. SNS allow students to write to their peers, teacher or lecturers, and even other audience in ways which will facilitate learning opportunities for everyone involved. In addition to that use, writing teachers or lecturers will possess a unique opportunity because online-based writings allow them and their students to interact in ways beyond content delivery. They make students create a community through the means of electronic.

Informed by these insights, we initiated a long-term, instructional research project to investigate the SNS use in EFL writing courses in two universities (University of Jambi and Islamic State University of Jambi). Further, this article which is part of the research focuses on the advantages and problems of the SNS use in EFL writing courses seen from student teacher experience. The kinds of SNS used in this research were WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram which were utilized to be media for EFL writing courses. The SNS were implemented in ten writing classrooms (5 EFL writing courses in Jambi University and 5 EFL writing courses in Islamic State University of Jambi). The levels of writing courses are paragraph writing (second semester) and essay writing (third semester). This research took one year time to conduct from May 2016 to May 2017. To attain the purposes, the guiding research questions for this study were: 1) what are the advantages of the SNS use perceived by the students in writing courses in two Indonesian public universities? 2) what problems emerged?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social networking service in education

In the literature, the terms of social media and social networking services (SNS) are often used interchangeably. Lowedahl (2011) described social media as web environments where content is aggregated, performed, and distributed. Further, Social technologies can be utilized to support teaching and learning through SNS educational activities in education. Social networking service used by world citizens which are available for free, are popular nowadays (Brown, 2010; Hamid, Kurnia, Waycott, & Chang, 2015). Social technologies are able to make flexible supporting in the process of teaching and learning and to ease of academic communication, to provide the sharing of ideas and re-utilizing of study content, and commentaries. They also provide links to support resources of relevant information controlled by the users in terms of teaching and learning, students and teaching staff (Brown, 2010). Those factors have made teachers increasingly utilize them in the process of teaching and learning.

Some instances of SNS educational activities are content sharing, interacting, and collaborating (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Pursel & Xie, 2014; Kabilan, Norlida, & Abidin, 2010). Students in the process are able to publish their work publicly for others to watch, listen, and download. For instance, multimedia files can be shared on file sharing services such as Flickr, YouTube or Slideshare, and other social bookmarking services which allow them to bookmark certain web services (Lockyer & Patterson, 2008). Social technologies also support interactions by engaging students to actively participate in a talk. They can fill in comments and inquiry for more detailed information, add friends and initiate communication by messaging (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). In Wikipedia's (2017) lists, there are many kinds of SNS including Facebook (1871 million users), WhatsApp (1000), Facebook Messenger (1000), QQ (877), Wechat (846), Q zone (632), Instagram (600), Tumblr (500), Twitter (317), Baidu Tieba (300), Snapchapt (300), Skype (300), Sina Weibo (297), Viber (249), Line (217), Vinterest (150), YY (122), Linked in (106), Telegram (100), BBM (100) and etc.

Social networking services can be great supplemental learning tools in various subjects in higher education due to its popularity among college students. In a recent investigation by Smith and Caruso (2010), for example 96% of the 36,950 undergraduates surveyed access SNS. Recent research has also shown that college students not only have memberships with social networking accounts but are accessing these accounts often

### Social networking service in foreign language pedagogy

In foreign language pedagogy, theories of social networking have historically had some focuses on description and evaluation; stage one of technology implementation. For example, Stevenson and Liu (2010) held usability evaluation on SNS built for foreign language learning, *Pa-labea*, *LiveMocha*, and *Babbel*. Their results show that the students were less attracted to the features of the SNS such as messaging, friending, publicly posting, on

line interaction than the traditional instructional elements of teaching such as lecturing, direct instruction, grades-based, seatwork and teachers-centered teaching. This is not coming for a surprise because it shows that a user's SNS network develops firstly around their existing face-to-face networks and followed with the expansion of individuals with the use of SNS (boyd & Ellison, 2007). The potential for SNS in foreign language pedagogy may therefore lie in first leveraging face to face class or learner affinity groups into digitally mediated users.

There are many studies conducted in promoting the use of SNS in foreign language pedagogy (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; McBride, 2009). For instance, Blattner and Fiori (2009) underlined the future potential for classroom community establishing through the most used social media, Facebook as one of social network services. They report on the opportunity for the expansion of socio-pragmatic awareness by getting their students to understand SNS practices established around linguistic identity, for instance, quizzes “you know you speak Swiss French when ...” that include the pronunciation of shibboleths and local accents. Another research reports the foreign language learning potential for SNS as environments in which to learn pragmatics, establish relationships, experiment with multiple identities, and practice writings” (McBride, 2009). She highlights the future use of SNS in developing pragmatic competences because their use needs netiquette and critical self-awareness. She supports projects that involve optional identity and group profiles, as well as media participatory activities. Yet, she informs that SNS use in a foreign language pedagogy classroom could exist as a popularity contest, causing estrangement and changing formation of groups and requiring participants to friend each other may have backfire, being classmates may or may not be sufficient grounds for students to be in friendships.

### **EFL writing using SNS**

Specifically, there are also some studies discussed the SNS use in writing courses (Balci, 2010; Lee, 2011; Warnock, 2009; Habibi, 2015). For instance, Warnock (2009) pointed out that the main reason teaching writing with online application is that the situation can be purely textual. Students are in an interesting learning environment expressing themselves to some variation of audience with their writing. Social networking services give students an opportunity in order to write to their teacher and to other students as well as to other people from outside the classroom in ways that will trigger a process of teaching and learning where everyone is actively involved. Further, teachers who teach writing would have times and opportunities to teach writing beyond the traditional ways with the use of SNS since the activity allow all parties to interact beyond content delivery. There would be a certain community with these applications which allow students to interact.

For students who have limited time and option to study, these social networking services allow them to establish professionally and socially the connections which create values in educational systems (Warnock, 2009). One example of the use SNS in teaching writing is the use of Facebook which is proven to affects learners' motivation and strengthens students' ability to practice in a social condition with the networking practices (Habibi, 2015). What is more, Lee (2011) informed that SNS also improve the interaction level of web-based interaction all parties involved in the teaching and learning process. Besides, they help the teachers to interact, communicate, and connect to their students outside of the classroom and discuss the assignment, activities and other useful activities.

### **The advantages of using SNS in education for language learning**

When we examine advantages deriving from the use of social networks as an educational tool, interactivity and participation provided by such environments should be also mentioned. Advantages possibly deriving from use of social networks as an education tool (Balci, 2010; Mills, 2011; Lee, 2011, Stevenson & Liu, 2010). For example, Balci (2010) informed that there are some advantages of SNS use: 1) Independence from time and location, 2) Improvement in quality, success, and efficiency of education by use of SNS for education, 3) Ability to learn in more systematic manner and in shorter time. 4) Individualization of learning, 5) Ability to have instant feedback. 6) Offering the student ability to repeat course content as much as desired, 7) Ease of displaying the content, 8) Allowing to the design of visual and auditory learning environments, 9) Archiving course content and synchronized class (virtual class) applications, 10) Tendency towards more voluntary behaviors on the side of students for improving research, knowledge, and skills in comparison to conventional programs, 11) Offering possibility to evaluate performance of students, 12) Minimizing risk of error in measuring evaluation results, and 13) Improving skills of students and teachers to reach, evaluate, use, and efficiently cite the knowledge.

For language learning itself, some studies have found association between SNS use and improvement in new literacies and language skills in language class (e.g., Lee, 2011; Mills, 2011), and others have focused on non-standard uses of language in online interactions (e.g., Chen, 2013; Lee, 2011). Stevenson and Liu (2010), Mills (2011), and Lee (2011) reported that users of SNS in language learning achieve the following advantages: 1) perceived progress in vocabulary or vocabulary acquisition, 2) increase confidence in using the target language,

3) fostered an interactive community for communication, interaction, and discussions, 4) L2 learners' participation on SNS appeared to have a positive impact on their oral proficiency, and 6) syntactical complexity or grammatical improvement.

### **Problems in SNS application**

There are some studies discussing the weaknesses or problems in the use of SNS in higher education (Schroeder, Minocha, & Schneider, 2010; Hamid, Kurnia, & Walcot, & Chang, 2011; Lee, 2011). Hamid, Kurnia, Waycott, and Chang (2011) reported some concerns raised by the students to the limitations of SNS use. These concerns include time management issues, lack of ICT skills faced by some students, and limited technical infrastructure in some higher learning institutions. In addition, they stated that students' works are likely be more visible to others when using social technologies in higher education which can be motivating, but also present challenges, such as the fear from the students that other students will copy their work and the need for lecturers to educate the students for being careful when presenting their work in an online environment.

On the other hand, a study by some researchers demonstrate that students' grades can be affected negatively by using social networking tools and visiting lots of sites or applications. A questionnaire was conducted in this study to verify this fact, which shows that 63% of students get high grades because they spend less time using the SNS. Thus, spending more time on using SNS appears to result in a lowering of student grades. In addition, there are still a few learners are not using the SNS, such as e-learning, in proper ways, which has also resulted in failing to achieve success (Lee, 2011)

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This is a qualitative case study involving 60 EFL student teachers who were from two Indonesian state universities, University A and University B. The research needs one year to get finished, from May 2016 to May 2017. The research is a part of a joint research project conducted by lecturers from the two universities in order to promote the use of SNS in Jambi's colleges or universities. This happened as we were discussing the reality of the SNS use in higher education around the world that has become a global phenomenon. It is valuable to take a broad view and consider the views of SNS users in education. On the other hand, based on our previous preliminary data, there are few lecturers in Jambi utilizing the use of SNS in their teaching.

We discussed and agreed to use SNS in our teaching, writing courses which involved ten classes with 324 students (5 EFL writing courses in University A and 5 EFL writing courses in University B). We chose paragraph writing which is a course taught for the second-semester students and essay writing for the third-semester students. However, we excluded academic writing courses (semester four) since the course tends to focus on the advanced writing skills and the lengthy writing that the students should fulfill in forms of academic writing proposals. To make sure the research process would run well, we asked all of the students in those classes to provide their smartphones with WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook.

In this research, we utilized WhatsApp group, Telegram channel, and Facebook group the SNS supplementary applications or media in teaching writing. WhatsApp group was used as a medium for the students to report their daily assignment where they were allowed to discuss their counterparts' writings and in certain times, they were assigned to evaluate, revise, and give scores. On the same time, we utilized Telegram channel to accommodate one-way instruction from us to the students. Facebook group was used to share the students' writings in a bigger group for all of the students from the two universities.

For the sampling technique, we applied purposive one by choosing six students from each class to be the participant. To represent all level of competence, the six participants were chosen based on their final writing scores, two highest achievers, two middle achievers, and two lowest achievers. We applied focus group discussions as the technique of data collection. Focus group is a widely used technique in research to obtain data on attitudes, feelings, experiences, and reactions in a way that would not be achievable with other techniques e.g. questionnaires, one to one interviews, and observations. The situation of focus group discussions allows its members to participate, react, and establish responses of other members or think with a synergy in a group setting' (Klein, Tellefsen, & Herskovitz, 2007).

Before conducting focus group discussions, we distributed a demographic questionnaire to all participants/students because we wanted to know their background information in relation to the use of social networking services not only in classrooms but also outside the classrooms. It aimed at providing data which support the main data. Beside the general profile of the participant, we also listed some questions in relation to the use of SNS namely the familiarity of SNS kinds, the frequency, and the purposes of SNS use which we divided into two categories (Social tool and learning tool).

A total of six focus group discussions were held when the courses were completed and the samples were determined. Four researchers, two from Jambi University and two from Islamic State University of Jambi were in charge to get the data from all group discussions. The discussions were held in between 90 to 120 minutes long as on 20-25 May 2017. All participants were asked to give their opinions on the topic given in relation to the advantages of SNS use in writing courses. The discussions were videotaped using smartphone cameras to ease the process of data analysis and delivered in Bahasa Jambi to obtain in-depth understanding of both the question and the responses. In the focus discussions, the participants were asked to freely inform their opinions on the advantages of SNS use in their writing course. We set all group discussion protocols and submitted some questions. We focused on three main topics: their personal and educational use of the SNS; the activities and experience of SNS use in the writing courses (specifically focusing on the interactions) and the outcomes which include the advantages of the SNS use.

The focus group discussions were held at each university; Jambi University and Islamic State University of Jambi. Every student in each focus group completed a form of permission to participate in this research. For anonymity and ethical purposes, the participants were identified using their focus group's number and anonymous names. Mack, Woodson, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, (2005) explained that the dignity of all participants in research must be appreciated and it encompasses that people in research will not be used simply as an object to get research objectives. The demographic information of the research participants in the focus groups is pictured in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The distribution of participants and focus group discussion

Location	Discussion	No. of participants/ Gender	Codes
University A	G 1	5 males and 5 females	G1Anton, G1Andy, G1Ali, G1Budi, G1Bara (Males) G1Ani, G1Amber, G1Aina, G1Bella, G1Bebi, (Females)
	G2	4 males and 6 females	G2Charlie, G2Cole, G2Dani, G2Dion (Males) G2Christy, G2Cella, G2Chelsea, G2Dara, G2Dewi, G2Dessy (Females)
	G 3	6 males and 4 females	G3Emil, G3Eko, G3Enzo, G3Farid, G3Fadh, G3Fathir (Males) G3Elsa, G3Ella, G3Fahira, G3Flora (Females)
University B	G4	4 males and 6 females	G4Gilang, G4Greg, G4Habib, G4Hussein (Males) G4Gina, G4Gladis, G4Giska, G4Hilfa, G4Haye, G4Hesty (Females)
	G5	3 males and 7 females	G5Indra, G5Ikhsan, G5Jack (Males) G5Ines, G5Inayah, G5Ivo, G5Isti, G5June, G5Jenny, G5Julia (Females)
	G6	4 males and 6 females	G6Kamil, G6Kiko, G6Lilo, G6Louis, (Males) G6Kinan, G6Kikan, G6Kleo, G6Lili, G6Lolita, G6Lisa (Females)

We used both numbers and percentages analyzing the demographic questionnaires to observe the frequency distribution of each part. Information on the use of SNS was analyzed using a compiled mean to capture the general information of all population. The mean was chosen because participants' answers were worth in the form of different compiling, and this procedure is available as the most reliable method in appropriately understanding and presenting the data. Fink (2013) stated that descriptive statistics produce simple summaries about the population examined and the responses to most of the questions.

Analysis across and between the data went on until no more thematic patterns were recognized. Even though the participants were from different classes and with different lecturers, the data were used in equal manners without analyzing and focusing particular dissimilarities on how SNS were utilized by various groups. The analysis of the research is an attempt to meet the purpose in describing results regarding participants' experiences in using SNS in English writing courses. All data transcripts were computerized, printed, read and re-read, translated, coded, divided into themes and some themes and presented. Notes were obtained in some borderlines to pinpoint prospective themes. The data were then collated, reviewed, and examined for connections and redundancies. The data were analyzed by manual coding thematically (Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Kvale, 1996). Finally, we broadened, contrasted and changed the themes concurrently with other transcript analysis.

In dealing with the trustworthiness of our study (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 300 as cited in Mukminin, 2012a, 2012b), we conducted focus group discussions which last approximately 90 to 120 minutes. For verifying the accuracy of the data, findings, and interpretations (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Mukminin & McMahan, 2013) the data analyses were reviewed by all researchers and participants as part of member checking. In relation to this paper purposes, the researchers focused on identifying main themes that appeared when participants discussed the advantages and problems on the use of SNS in writing courses. The findings of all analysis are presented below.

**FINDINGS**

The findings of this research are divided into three themes (1. general background of the participants in relation to the use of SNS, 2. advantages of SNS use in writing courses, and 3. problems faced on the SNS use). Theme one has two sub-themes which are a. participants profile and b. the use of SNS. In addition, theme two includes a. offering possibility of peer review, b. independence from time and location, c. perceived progress in vocabulary, and d. grammatical improvement. The last theme, problems faced on the SNS use, there are three sub-themes namely connection, costly to use, and inexperienced in using SNS

**Table 2:** Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. General background of the participants in relation to the use of SNS	a. Participants profile b. The use of SNS
2. Advantages of SNS use in writing courses	a. Offering possibility of peer review b. Independence from time and location c. Perceived progress in vocabulary d. Grammatical improvement
3. Problems faced on the SNS use	a. Connection b. Costly to use c. Inexperienced in using

**General background of the participants in relation to the use of SNS**

In this part, we describe the findings of the demographic questionnaires we distributed which include the general profile of the participant. The use of SNS namely the familiarity of SNS kinds and the purposes of SNS use which we divided into two categories (social tool and learning tool). General Profile of the Participants

**Participants’ profile**

Participants in this research are 60 EFL student teachers who were from two Indonesian state universities, University A and University B. Sixty percent of those participants were women while forty percent were males with ages ranging from 17 to 22. Most of the participants had smartphones since four to six years ago. They use their smartphone for SNS use from one hour to seven hours a day. The detail explanation of the participants’ profile can be seen in Table 3.

**Tabel 3:** Gender, age, length of smartphone use, frequency using sns

Variable	Value	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	60
	Male	40
Age	17-19	51,66
	19-20	41,66
	+20	6,66
Length of smartphone use	1-3 years	20
	4-6 years	66,66
	+6 years	13,33
Frequency using SNS	1-3 hours	5
	4-6 hours	63,33
	+6 hours	31,66

**The familiarity with SNS**

The participants were asked to indicate whether they were (1) unfamiliar, (2) familiar, or (3) very familiar with SNS. Table 4 presents the summary of the responses.

**Table 4:** SNS kinds used by participant (Mean)

SNS	Mean	SNS	Mean
Facebook	2.95	Instagram	2.87
WhatsApp	2.87	Tumblr	1.20
Facebook Messenger	2.70	Twitter	2.23
QQ	1	Baidu Tieba	1
Wechat	1.47	Snapchapt	1.45
Q zone	1	Skype	2.45
YY	1	Telegram	2.21
BBM	2.70	Line	2.45

Facebook is the most familiar SNS among the participants (mean 2.95) followed by WhatsApp and Instagram (2.87). Other SNS such as Facebook Messenger (2.70) Line (2.45), Telegram (2.45), and Blackberry Massanger (2.70), Twitter (2.23), and Skype (2.45) are also popular SNS. On the hand, they are not really familiar with Wechat (1.47). Snapchat (1.45), QQ (1), Baidu Tieba (1), YY (1), and Q zone (1).

#### **Advantages of SNS use in writing courses**

Some advantages found through the focus group discussions are offering possibility of peer review, independence from time and location, perceived progress in vocabulary, and grammatical improvement.

#### ***Offering possibility of peer review***

The first advantage highlighted by the participants when their lecturers used SNS in writing courses is offering the possibility of peer review. The term “peer review” refers to students sharing information with each other to support learning activities. Therefore, this theme includes all comments students made about sharing information with their peers to support each other's learning. The analysis found that students shared knowledge with each other when social technologies were used.

Peer review is one of learning processes which requires the students to give some comments, suggestions, and corrections freely to their friends' paragraphs. There are no clear criteria for doing peer review which mean that the students may give any comments, suggestions, and corrections if they found any mistakes such as in grammatical errors, vocabularies, ideas, and even contents of the writing. Through SNS, the assignments are not only can be seen, read, and corrected by the lecturers but also by all the members of the classroom. In that case, all students are having same chances to give responses to their friends' writing. Through this way, the participants realized that the corrections, suggestions, and comments from their friends and lecturers give some contributions to improve the quality of their writing. The students realized that through SNS, they can see their previous paragraphs in the previous assignment that they made with all the correction given by their friends and lecturers. As the result in the next assignments, they may give some attentions to those mistakes and would not do the same mistakes anymore.

“Yes in my opinion my writing is getting better because from SNS we can get knowledge and corrections from my friends as well as the lecturer so I can be more careful to write my next assignment and not make any more mistakes.” (G2Christy)

“In my opinion my writings are getting better because through SNS everyone can see our writing and if for example we do some mistakes in our writing the lecturer and my friends can give some corrections.” (G3Enzo)

Almost all participants argued that peer reviews given by their friends to their writings give them some advantages and contribution to the improvement of the quality of their writing such as in grammatical errors, vocabularies improvement, and content development. Fifty out of sixty participants agreed that peer reviews have important aspects to the improvement of their writing. They all believed that they have different ability in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and ideas in writing. Through SNS used in their writing courses, they can share their ideas to write.

“Of course the role of my friends are really important because we have different ability there are friends who have more vocabularies, there are friends who have good ability in grammar, so when we write and do a mistake, they can give some corrections like grammar that they know like for example they said that this is best for this situation and not for this situation, indirectly they teach us and sharing actually.” (G1Bara)

In addition, G1Budi stated that through this way [using SNS], his writing is getting better. He believed that he got new knowledge from the comments, suggestions, and corrections from all of his friends as well as lecturer.

For her, those comments are something that has to be a reminder for her to write better than before and not doing the same mistakes anymore.

“Yes in my opinion, my paragraph is getting better because can get new knowledge from all the corrections from my friends and lecturer and from that mistakes make me more careful in writing my paragraph so I do not do the same mistakes so like reminder for me to be more careful like that.” (G1Budi)

In situations such as the above where students' writings are viewed in the public space, other people can also read the output. The participants' attempted to produce their best work so that their output would be positively judged and assessed. This situation also resulted in students becoming more aware and more critical of their writings. Another participant, G5Jack, stated that the comments and suggestions that are given by his friends contributing so much to the improvement of his paragraph. According to his opinions, he believed that his grammar understanding is more increasing and better. He realized that his paragraphs are getting better when his lecturer uses SNS. He argued that it is because all of his friends and lecturer can see his paragraphs, so they may know the mistakes that he made and they are all free to give comments and suggestions to his paragraphs. Besides grammar, he also believed that his friends also give him some ideas to write better in the next assignments because he realized that sometimes his ideas are not interesting and his friends with pleasure always give him suggestions.

“Comments and suggestions from my friends of course really important first of all from the ideas. Perhaps our ideas less interesting so friends may give some suggestions about the idea that this should be like this. Then, from the grammar which is one of them when I do a mistake of to write “I” and it should be written always with capital letter so the comments and suggestions are really beneficial.” (G5Jack)

Although almost all the participants agreed that peer reviews give a huge contribution to the improvement of their paragraph writing which mostly in term of grammar and vocabularies, one of the participants stated that not all of his friends' comments and suggestions are good. G6Lisa realized that even though the purpose of the comments and suggestions from their friends are to make paragraphs getting better, however, sometimes the comments and suggestions that are given not always right. Sometimes, according to her opinions, some friends give wrong comments and suggestions. She believed that the paragraphs are already written properly, however some friends still give some corrections. In this case, the corrections of the lecturer are really important to have the real corrections from the professional. That is why she believed that the lecturer always gives the real corrections in the end of the sessions of peer review to make everything clear and right.

“The advantages of the comments and suggestions depend on friends who give the corrections sometimes there are some of my friends still comment even though the paragraph has already written properly but maybe according to their perceptions that are still wrong but actually it is already good according to my lecturer when the lecturer give the real comments.” (G6Lisa)

### ***Independence from time and location***

The next advantage that the participants stated from the discussions was the independence from time and location. All participants believed that using SNS makes them easier to submit their assignment. The participants felt free to do the assignments everywhere and whenever they had spare time. They were not asked to do and submit the assignments directly in the university. One of the participants, G2Dewi, stated that she preferred doing the assignments outside the classrooms.

“We should not write it on paper but I prefer to write it in social networking service because we can send our assignments everywhere.” (G2Dewi)

In addition, her friend, G1Aina, strengthened the opinion by stating that she is very glad of using WhatsApp and Facebook in her writing class. Through the use of the SNS, she is able to do the assignment everywhere such as at home, restaurant, and hang out places. She said,

“That is easier to use because we can send our assignments everywhere at home or wherever we are on that time and we should not go directly to our campus.” (G1Aina)

Another participant believed that through SNS, she enjoyed learning more because she felt that using SNS is a fresh and new thing. She emphasized that these days, university students embrace the use of technology including SNS in learning activities. For her, it makes her easy doing her homework or assignment because she was always with her Smartphone. As a result, it can increase the effectiveness of the learning process.



“In my opinion, the use of SNS is very effective because it can save my time doing my homework. You know, I can do my assignment everywhere and every time. Besides, it is very fun to learn in such a way.” (G4Gladis)

### ***Perceived progress in vocabulary***

Some of the focus group discussion members talked about the improvement of vocabulary used in their writing classes. One of the participants, G2Charlie, realized that when using SNS her vocabulary becomes more enriched. He opined that each student had different knowledge in terms of vocabularies. Through SNS that is used by her lecturer to collect the assignments, he could see her friends’ paragraphs as well as their vocabularies and make his vocabularies richer than before. It is important because she convinced that when someone has a lot of vocabularies, their paragraphs are getting more interesting to read.

“I feel that my vocabulary are more enriched because when I read my friends’ vocabularies, I indirectly add my list[vocabularies]. Another advantage that I think it is important for our English.” (G2Charlie)

Other participants, G5Indra and G6Kikan, thought that all the students had different abilities such as in grammatical understanding, and vocabularies abilities. Through the use of SNS, the students have the chance to use it as a media to share their knowledge and information since SNS help the participants give comments, suggestions, and corrections on their friends’ writing. They stated,

“There are friends who have good ability in grammar, so when we wrote our writing incorrectly in terms of grammar of sentence structure, they who have good English grammar had some corrections. With the guidance of our lecturers, we can surely get more benefits grammatically.” (G5Indra)

“SNS can be a tool for us to pay attention more on the glossary or vocabulary of the sentence. I frequently gave suggestion to my friends about their vocabularies. Before delivering corrections or some additions, I checked first in Google or other resources to make sure that the corrections or additions have been appropriately discussed.” (G6Kikan)

### ***Grammatical improvement***

Another advantage claimed by the participants for language learning when using SNS in their writing classes as supplemental learning tools is grammatical improvement. All the participants ascertained that their writings were getting better in regard to grammar because they were allowed to have correction for the grammatical aspects. Ani had an idea on this matter in group 1,

“The most significant improvement that I feel from the peer review is in grammar. My friends gave positive grammatical so that we can discuss the mistakes and honestly it makes me remember many things [grammar]. It is really helpful, though.” (G1Ani)

Using SNS, all participants in WhatsApp group and Facebook could give comment and revise their peers’ writings in terms of sentence structures or grammar. They could improve their understanding about English grammar and the guidance of the lecturers, the participants discussed and remembered more things through the discussions. Two of the participants said,

“I used to give comments on my friends’ writings. When there was something that in my opinion were wrong in terms of grammatical, I always tried to told them. It was because the lecturers suggested that we should be active in the discussion in the group WhatsApp or Facebook.” (G3Flora)

“The discussion of the grammar for the writing that we had is very important for us to have. It is very good since we can have the discussion everywhere and every time. It is so much helpful that we did not only learn it in the class but also outside the classroom.” (G1Bella)

Furthermore, since they learn together, one of the participants confirmed that they have different ability and skills in English since they come from different high school with different experienced of learning English. By using SNS, she believed that it is a good media to share the knowledge that the students have. Writing classes may create discussions among the students. One of the participants had his saying,

“There are friends who have good ability in grammar, so when we write and do a mistake, they can give some corrections that they already knew already and indirectly they teach us and share what they already got from their previous knowledge.” (G3Farid)

### **Problems faced on the SNS use**

Regardless all of those merits that may be derived from the use of social networking service as educational tool, some researchers concern about some problems of using social networking service in educational environment. Hamid, Kurnia, Waycott, and Chang (2011) reported some concerns raised by the students to the problems of SNS use. These concerns include: 1. time management issues, 2. lack of ICT skills faced by some students, and 3. limited technical infrastructure in some higher learning institutions. Through the findings of this research, the researcher found that there are three main problems in the integration of SNS as supplemental learning tools in EFL writings. Those three main problems are internet connection, costly to use, and inexperienced in using SNS.

#### ***Internet connection***

SNS are very attractive tools for undergraduate students due to its popularity because SNS present opportunities to the independence from time and place. However, using social networking service means that we need the internet connection, and this is where the problem arises. All the participants agreed that they have the same problems which are the connection to connect them to SNS. All the participants stated that it is sometimes difficult to have the connection in both Jambi University and Islamic State University of Jambi. One of Jambi University students said

“Hmm... the problem is the connection in our university, Jambi University but in other places is ok. It is difficult to have the signal in this faculty for friends who use 3 [one of low cost internet providers’ names]. However, we have other options [changing internet operators].” (G4Bebi)

Having the same problem with G4Bebi who is Jambi University student, G5Ikhsan and G6Lilo from Islamic State University of Jambi also stated that one of the problems faced in using SNS as in EFL writing is the internet connection.

“I sometimes find it difficult to have the internet access,. The instability of Wi-Fi connection in our building and for some providers that are not reachable here in our faculty is the problem. However, we have good access when we did our assignment in the city [Jambi city].” (G4Lilo)

“The signal is sometimes bad and low and it is the only problem that I have.” (G5Ikhsan)

From the data, all the participants were having problems with the connection in the two state universities. All discussions in the two state universities show that connection of the internet was always the issue and it also relates to the other problem which is about the cost of the internet.

#### ***Costly to Use***

Another problem found in this research is that the participants are required to prepare a good operator in order to make them able to write and send their assignments everywhere. Since the data show that many of the students tend to buy the cheapest ones namely 3 and XL (both are low cost operators with low connection). As a result, they have to buy more expensive internet access card. One of the participants from Jambi University expressed their feelings in the discussion,

“In relation to the connection, I had to buy a Telkomsel card since this card is the best [for the connection]. Although, it is slightly more expensive than my previous internet card, I have to buy it.” (G3Elsa)

Having the same opinion with Elsa from Jambi University, Louis from Group 6 also mentioned the same thing about the internet card that he used during the course. In addition, he informed us the price difference percentages of the operator.

“Previously, I bought and used 3 as the internet operator but now I am using Telkomsel for the writing course which is 25 % more expensive than 3. It is costly but worked, I think.” (G6Louis)

Students in Jambi University and State Islamic University of Jambi tend to buy low cost internet cards to provide their needs of internet. However, in the EFL writing courses in which the lecturers assign them to use SNS in their writing activities, the students had to buy other internet cards which have better services for the internet connection.

#### ***Inexperienced in Using SNS***

Some of the students have no experience using some applications which were required in the writing courses. Some of them have not tried Telegram and have less experience in using some features of WhatsApp and

Facebook. They confessed that they just used the services for basic use for examples to send messages, make a phone or video calls, and share pictures or videos. Some of them did not know how to use some other features like to make italic words, bold words, and forward messages in WhatsApp application. The fact that there are many features that can be utilized is one of encountered limitations in this finding. Two of the participants from both universities revealed,

“Frankly say, I did not have Telegram and I had to download the application first and thanks to our lecturers for having introduced it to us. I just knew that Telegram can provide 5000 members for its group. The one way communication is also good to have simple instruction for our lecturers.” (G2Dessy)

“I just used my smartphone for 1 year and I was amazed by how our lecturer gave us time to do some activities using our smartphone. Yes, there are some applications and features that I am accustomed to using but there are greater positive effects that I think very useful.” (G4Fadh)

The basic features of the SNS use have represented the needed activities. However, should the participants of the research utilize some additional features, it will be more enriched and simpler. Another statement of one participant in the discussion,

“I could the activities with basic feature that we had in our writing course. It turned out that some of my friends were more advanced using their applications and I could learn from them. Such a good way to learn using WhatsApp or Facebook and that was my first time knowing Telegram, a great application.” (G5Ines)

## DISCUSSION

Findings from this research are in line with previous studies on the frequent use of social networking services by undergraduate students, as well as those investigating the potential advantages and problems of using social networking service in educational environment. All participants in this research reported that they had so many accounts in some social networking services which support the previous findings of Smith and Caruso (2010), who reported that 96% of undergraduate surveyed across disciplines had an account with at least one social networking service. In addition, all the participants reported that they had some SNS accounts long before their lecturer used them in writing courses.

It is a usual thing for a media to have its own advantages and problems. It also applies to SNS used in writing courses in this research. According to Balci (2010), there are 13 possible advantages derived from the use of social networks as an education tool, stated as follows: 1) Independence from time and location, 2) Improvement in quality, success, and efficiency of education by use of SNS for education, 3) Ability to learn in more systematic manner and in shorter time, 4) Individualization of learning. 5) Ability to have instant feedback. 6) Offering the student ability to repeat course content as much as desired, 7) Ease of displaying the content, 8) Allowing to the design of visual and auditory learning environments. 9) Archiving course content and synchronized class (virtual class) applications. 10) Tendency towards more voluntary behaviors on the side of students for improving research, knowledge, and skills in comparison to conventional programs, 11) Offering possibility to evaluate performance of students, 12) Minimizing risk of error in measuring evaluation results, and 13) Improving skills of students and teachers to reach, evaluate, use, and efficiently cite the knowledge. Besides those advantages, there are some specifically advantages for language learning when the lecturer uses social networking service as an educational environment. There are at least six advantages that deriving from use of social networking service as a supplemental language learning tool, as stated by Stevenson and Liu (2010), Mills (2011), and Lee (2011) reported that users of SNS in language learning achieve the following advantages: 1) perceived progress in vocabulary or vocabulary acquisition, 2) increased confidence in using the target language, 3) fostered an interactive community for communication, interaction, and discussions, 4) L2 learners' participation on SNSs appeared to have a positive impact on their oral proficiency, and 6) syntactical complexity or grammatical improvement. Based on the group discussions, the findings show that some of those advantages which stated by Balci (2010), Stevenson and Liu (2010), Mills (2011), and Lee (2011) informed by the participants in the group discussions. There are 4 advantages (offering possibility of peer review, independence from time and location, perceived progress in vocabulary, and grammatical improvement) which exist based on the data from the participants when their lecturer using SNS in their writing courses. The results of the focus group discussions were described descriptively to explain the data.

Another finding in this research shows that the participants believe that SNS can be used not only as communication tool, but also as learning media in some subjects in higher education specifically in English Education Study Program since it is believed that social networks improve communication skills, enhance

participation and social commitment, reinforce peer support, and ensure realization of education based on collaboration. Moreover, social networking services can be easily and inexpensively used without a substantial support from universities so that they can be integrated into educational process of students (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; McBride, 2009; Warnock, 2009, Melor 2007). Although the majority of findings were positive, some students still find some problems in using SNS in EFL academic writing. Two out of three of problems which stated by Hamid, Kurnia, Waycott, and Chang (2011) are in line with the findings of this research. Those two emerging problems are the connection which shows the limitation of technical infrastructure, inexperienced which shows lack of ICT skills of the students in using SNS. Therefore, it is possible that inexperienced with the educational application of this newer technology contributed to the students' negative perceptions. And, with continued use of SNS as part of social networking service in educational environment in higher education such perception could be reduced. The findings of this research also found another limitation which not mentioned by Hamid, Kurnia, Waycott, and Chang (2011) which is costly to use. All the participants are demanded prepare a good operator in order to connect them to the internet to access the application. However, all the participants agreed that those problems are solvable. Furthermore, the findings presented here suggest that students recognize and value the learning advantages of using SNS.

### CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research show that all participants are familiar with many kinds of social networking services since all of them are free to use. Further, those social networking services are used actively by them. This finding shows that those social networking services potentially provide great advantages as a supplemental learning tool for the students in higher education. The familiarity of SNS used by the students could also help them feel more comfortable and motivated since SNS provide the users a communication environment which is not limited with space and time because they are online tools that generate interaction by allowing new opportunities for more information, interest, and data sharing.

This research focuses to discuss about English students' perceptions of using social networking services which in this case represented by WhatsApp which is used as a supplemental learning tool in paragraph writing class in higher education. In response to the research question, the findings offer a detailed explanation of how students view their interactions when using WhatsApp in higher education in paragraph writing class. Through the finding of this research, all the participants agreed that SNS are great communication media as well as a supplemental learning tool in paragraph writing class. What participants liked the most about using SNS as supplemental learning tools in writing classes is that they are free to do the assignments wherever and whenever they want. Also, through the social networking service, all the participants have an opportunity to give and get some corrections and comments not only from the lecturers but also from their friends as a way to improve their writing skill in terms of grammar, the content of the paragraph and vocabularies. Although SNS give many advantages for the participants, it still has some problems on its implementation as a supplemental learning tool in paragraph writing class. The first as well as to be the main limitation found is on the connection to connect them to SNS since it is difficult to get signals or connection for some internet providers. The second limitation is when the participants run out of the quota for connecting them to social networking service and the inexperienced of using WhatsApp. However, those problems are not huge problems for the participants since the participants believed that the problems are solvable.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this research also show that all participants are very familiar with the use of social networking service and use it often. This situation should be a great chance for the lecturers to use SNS their teaching media since there are so many kinds of SNS that are available and free to use. As the data above show that all the participants agreed that social networking service which is used by the lecturer as a supplemental learning tool in paragraph writing class get positive welcome from the participants. However, it should be noted that not all classes can use SNS in their teaching and learning activities, should there be limited a limited educational value. Hence, Hamid, Kurnia, Waycott, & Chang, (2015) stated that the integration of technologies should be done by the lecturers in their teaching only if and when they see educational value in doing it. Therefore, before SNS is adopted in higher education, a thorough evaluation need to be conducted to assess its appropriateness for teaching and learning.

Almost all the participants argued and gave their suggestions that many classes except speaking and listening class can potentially give many advantages when using SNS as supplemental learning tools namely in the class of grammar, reading, writing and other classes. Finally, the findings of this research would be able to help the educational actors such as lecturers to make decisions on whether to use and implement SNS as learning media for language learning purposes. While for further research, this research can be a guidance to know and evaluate the perceptions of students towards the use of SNS in education.

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