

## EVALUATING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FACEBOOK STUDY GROUPS IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper examines the potential role of social networks in teaching-learning activities by reviewing nine 'Face book Study Groups' (FSGs) that have been functional since 2012. Secondary data was obtained by reviewing the comment-sections and posts on the Face book of 228 students from 9 subjects taught at Higher School Certificate, Graduation and Post-Graduation levels. Primary data was gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with nine students with regards to the types of questions, access to learning, timely intimations, revision, posting of relevant online resources on the page and dealing with absenteeism. Quantitative analysis of the data was performed by employing One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Statistically significant differences were found with regards to the type of questions:  $F(2, 226) = 70.197, p < .000$ . The interpretation of the interviews also identified the pertinent role played by the FSGs. The study recommends replication of the research in different settings by conducting more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** Quality assurance, pervasive learning, Facebook study groups

### INTRODUCTION

The current era of e-learning has provided innovative opportunities to learners by making “use of network technology to design, deliver, select, administer, and extend learning” [1]. In spite of transforming the conventional concept of learning altogether, it poses immense challenge to the educationists in maintaining the quality of education at all levels. In the current decade, students spend a considerable amount of their leisure on social networking which eventually shapes their cognitive abilities. For the convenience of students learning models have been incorporated with social networking in a variety of ways: which ‘included a location- and context-awareness service, a question and answer service, an adaptive mechanism; problem based ubiquitous learning models, social networking issue’ [2].

However, the notion of utilizing social networks in the enhancement of learning presents a challenging goal to all the stakeholders. One of the major responsibilities of ‘Quality Assurance is the planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced’[3].

Irrespective of such radical changes, quality education consistently strives for “outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society” [4]. Resultantly, quality assurance may encompass the services provided by the online learning web-sites by reviewing the policies to provide better learning opportunities to students and supportive environment to teachers. Several previous studies have contributed immensely towards establishing a new paradigm for teaching and learning.

The wavelength of studies, based on technological advancement in education, is gaining momentum at a much faster pace, keeping in line with the shift of interest of the learners from classroom learning towards online educational services. The overall pattern of educational practice has been constantly changing: “at present, the continued existence of the traditional educational system is under threat” [5]. This is clearly indicative of the fact the latest technology has not only questioned the effectiveness of conventional methods of teaching and learning but also seems to offer a breakthrough by replacing them with the new approaches.

In the same vein a “model [that] encompasses the key components of curiosity, interest and engagement in new media technology-pervasive learning environments while simultaneously considering personal, contextual and situational influencing factors” [6]. E-learning has been recognized as “the use of internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance” [7]. Notwithstanding the passive role of learners in the classroom learning, it is demonstrated that ‘nowadays students are empowered to involve in learning processes that play an active role in creating, extracting, and improving OLR [Online Learning Resources] collaborative learning platform and knowledge sharing as well as distributing’ [8].

Since social networks, especially face book, are a favorite pastime for individuals of all age groups but in particular between the ages of 11-25. Correspondingly social networks seem to have considerable potential in terms of influencing the mind and behavior of the users. Due to law and order situation in Karachi, every now and then teachers face difficulties with regards to absenteeism, developing academic skills, continuation of learning and completion of syllabus. In view of the time spent on Social Media, it was hypothesized that a certain amount of social networking can be utilized for academic engagement.

**METHODOLOGY**

Nine Face book Study Groups provided the secondary data of the study. Overall 228 students (Mean Age: university students 20 years; school students were below 19). The FSGs were comprised of Managerial Communication, Micro-Teaching, General Paper (GP), Psychology (Psych), and Sociology (Socio). The demographical details of the number of students according to the subjects are provided in Figure-1.

Figure1. Illustrating the demographical details of students and subjects

<i>Managerial Communication</i>	<i>Micro Teaching</i>	<i>GP</i>	<i>Psych A2</i>	<i>Eng. Lang A2</i>	<i>Socio A2</i>	<i>Psych AS</i>	<i>Eng. Lang AS</i>	<i>Socio As</i>	<i>Total</i>
73	16	16	17	18	16	23	13	19	228

The primary data was obtained by employing purposive sampling technique to choose participants (N=9) for the semi-structured interviews (one student from each FSG). Participants were asked 10 questions including the critical question (Q5. Do you think FSGs are helpful for academic activities?).

For quantitative data hypothesis was formulated: H<sup>o</sup>: There is no association between the type of question and time of the semester. The data was collected by reviewing nine FSGs which have been active for at least six months duration on FB. In the current study ‘data’ refers to the posts, comments, review, replies by the students on the page. Since the pages were active for long and there was plenty of data to choose from, so for standardizing the method rigorous selection criteria were adopted according to the time period:

- i) One week after the group was created, and

ii) One week before the midterm. Furthermore, data was obtained by randomly selecting the response of students on any one particular day. Since universities follow semester system which lasts between four to five months whereas schools follow annual system, thus the variation of time period was accordingly dealt with by reducing the time duration for the university students.

On the basis of the different activities carried out on FSGs, a developmental model was designed for enhanced learning: Students' acknowledgements; Reminders; Absenteeism; Questions; and Discussions. The developmental model is illustrated in Figure2.

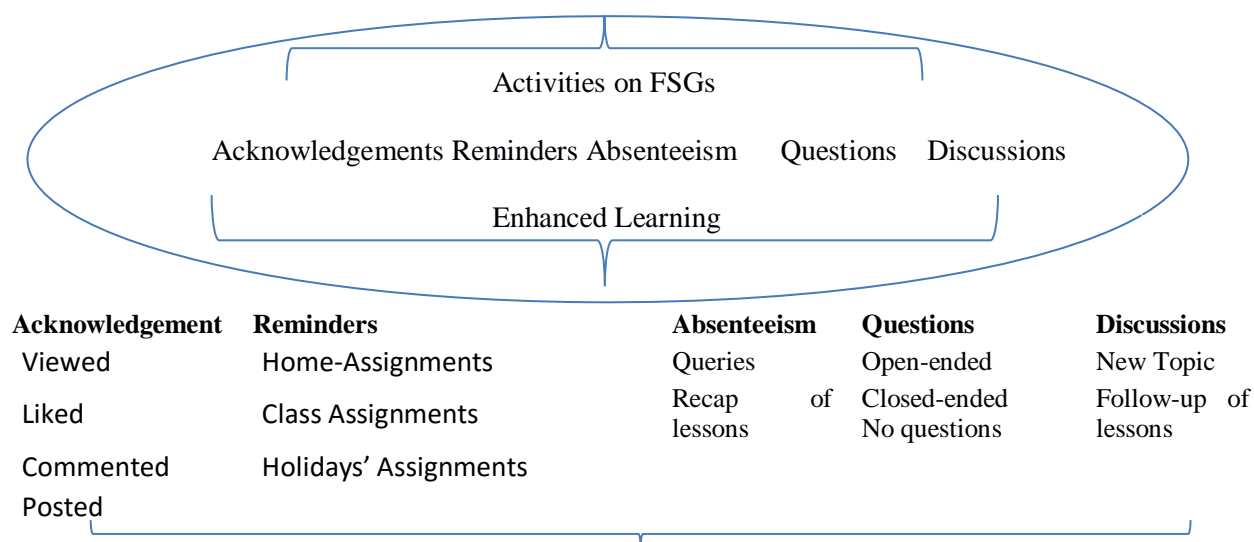


Figure2. Showing the Developmental Model of Learning

<p><a href="#">Zohaib Khan</a> uploaded a file. July 27, 2012 Please have a look this "Intercultural Communication" power point file, and read it at least one time because it will definitely help you to understand Intercultural Communication.....</p> <p><a href="#">Intercultural Communication.pptx</a></p> <p>Presentation <a href="#">Download</a><a href="#">Preview</a><a href="#">Upload</a> <a href="#">Revision</a></p> <p><a href="#">Like</a> <a href="#">Comment</a></p> <p>Seen by 69 <a href="#">Vicky Khan</a> and Liked by 44 others</p> <p>Comments <a href="#">Zohaib Khan</a> Presentation Memberz Are: <a href="#">Muhammad Ali</a>, <a href="#">Rizwan Khan</a>, <a href="#">Zohaib Khan</a>, <a href="#">Jibran</a> &amp; <a href="#">Talha</a> July 28, 2012 at 9:31am · <a href="#">Like</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Shaheera Amir</a> December 15, 2014</p> <p>Detail of the assignments is as follows: ● We have to learn 2 studies for each perspective/concept and provide a hardcopy of it. ● Make a list of all the glossary terms (including words at the back of the book, syllabus and bold words) and write 100 words with definitions. ● Use 25 perspectives/concepts/issues and write 50 words for each. ● Choose any 5 questions out of which 2 have to be data response and 3 should be essay type questions. ...</p> <p><a href="#">See More</a></p>
<p><a href="#">Sana GmShaikh</a> May 2, 2013 'great certainty can be achieved in sociological research by using the methods favoured by positivists'. explain and assess this view. which methods will be used by positivists??</p> <p><a href="#">Like</a> <a href="#">Comment</a></p> <p>Seen by 6</p> <p>Comments <a href="#">View 2 more comments</a> <a href="#">Sana GmShaikh</a> k n maam watabt correlations n causation ??? May 2, 2013 at 10:57pm · <a href="#">Like</a> <a href="#">Fatima Sheikh</a> Who uses experiments positivist or interpretivist ? May 10, 2013 at 11:22am · <a href="#">Like</a> <a href="#">Rubina Masum</a> Experimentst r used by positivists more May 10, 2013 at 1:19pm · <a href="#">Like</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Dania Tabassum</a> November 14, 2012</p> <p>Review for Tuesday's class: The State and Education in Britain. education is of 3 types; formal (what we get at schools), informal (by parents etc.) and incidental (that happens by chance).</p> <p>The British Education System went through trial and error for its development. before industrialization there were only grammar and public schools and were very expensive and only nobles and barons' children attended it. the common man either had informal or non-formal education. but after...<a href="#">See More</a></p>

Figure 3. Illustrating the screen shots of different academic activities on FSGs

## **RESULTS**

Qualitative data assisted in assessing the affective domain of the students who expressed satisfaction with the technique. In the unstructured interviews all 9 students supported the use of FSGs and the productivity for the academic activities. Students were also inquired about the probable ‘interference of these academic groups with their social life on the FB’ to which they replied that it certainly did not interfere with any of recreational activities since there was no compulsion of time and they could respond and inquire according to their suitability. Apart from that they could keep several windows open and take part in the on-going discussions simultaneously. Additionally, students were questioned about the nature of learning with regards to the material posted by the teacher (on FSGs) and seven out of nine stated that it helped them to surf the net with more focus which saved their time. The other three students found the posted files/documents to suffice for their requirements.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for quantitative analysis of H<sup>o</sup>: There is no association between the type of question and time of the semester. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of IV (Time-frame) on DV (Question-type) in open-ended, closed-ended and no questions conditions. There was a significant effect of IV (time-frame) on DV (Questions) at the  $p < .05$  level for the three conditions [ $F(2, 226) = 70.197, p = .000$ ]. There is a significant difference between some of the conditions in the experiment.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of the study support consistent improvement in students’ by providing innovative learning environment. The triangulation approach presented the two sides; the qualitative data was deciphered at a micro approach whereas quantitative provided more generalizable findings. An intriguing element of FSGs chat/comments was related to the level of informality in the use of English language. During the pilot study some students expressed their gratitude for the “chatty style” of the FSG because it allowed them their comfort zone and they could express their thoughts more freely than in a classroom situation. In order to encourage the student the researcher also used an informal style frequently. Some pages on the FB have become inactive for academic activities but are still used for conveying noteworthy information.

An interesting element of the study presented the diversity of questions; questions which were asked in the earlier part of the academic sessions were closed ended but gradually the questions became more discussion prone. And the likelihood of the student who asked the question to sustain the argument increased in the latter part of the academic sessions. Similarly, students who were absent in class, presented adjustment of behavior while in asking questions about classroom activities; initially they justified with their absences but gradually they were more peculiar about asking precise questions. Interestingly students who would not login to their FB accounts were intimated about the upcoming news, test, or quiz on WhatsApp, or via SMS as well. However, analyses of these applications were beyond the scope of the current research.

The study has presented the prevalent trends of the past decade on the social networks. However, the effectiveness of other applications can also be investigated in coordination with FBSGs or independently, especially WhatsApp which has gained enormously popularity among students since last year. A comparative analysis between FBSGs may help to measure the change taken place with regards to the preferences of the users. Additionally, the impact of age can be further explored in detail by carrying out independently research with reference to the social networks.

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## **APPENDIX-A**

### ***Links to the Groups***

English Language Closed Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/212524972205238/>

English Language 2015-16 Saint Patrick's High School (Closed Group)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/402187929976114/>

General Paper: Saint Patrick's (Closed Group)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/106091289543862/?ref=browser>

Psych: St. Pats Closed Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/735804146525164/>

SAINT PATRICK'S AS PSYCHOLOGY 2014-15 Closed Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1475427626043655/>

Managerial Communication (Closed Group)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/190438894416292/>

MICRO TEACHING (Closed Group) (16)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/324429787638107/>

SOCIOLOGY AS & A2 SAINT PATRICK'S 2014-15 (Closed Group)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/694760660614895/>

Sociology: Cordoba (Closed Group)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/466499503384312/>