

## **FACEBOOK: A TOOL TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN MEANING MAKING OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA**

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Technology has become an integral part of everyone's life. Students nowadays are adept at using technology especially online social network such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and so on in their everyday life. This has helped them to communicate and socialise with friends and relatives easily. It also helps them to support learner's internal negotiations and meaning making as well as to construct personal representations of meaning (Jonassen, Marra, Howland & Crismond, 2010). It is important for teachers to take this opportunity to integrate online social network in the teaching and learning processes to facilitate students' learning experiences. In the case of introducing Shakespearean drama in literature lessons, technology in the form of social media can become an effective platform for students to become active meaning makers. Through a case study of twenty teacher trainees, this paper explores how Shakespearean drama can be taught and learnt through online social network in particular Facebook. The findings generally show that when students got to express their thoughts and feelings through Facebook they were able to develop their linguistic, cultural and personal competence as they were able to connect, communicate and create meaning by becoming active learners when they participated actively online. They also showed positive attitude as they enjoyed the drama activities in the classroom.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today, our students grow up in a borderless world that is heavily depended on technology which allows them to communicate and socialise. They depend much on laptops, MP3s, I-Pads, smart phones, and social networking sites to support their interactions with others and with the world around them. Students are not only technologically sophisticated but also fundamentally different than their previous generations in their approaches to, use of, and relationship with these technology tools (Howland & Roberts, 2011). They are technology savvy and they spend a lot of time with these technology tools which they enjoy doing. Their desire for immediacy is palpable: they multitask or Google a subject rather than wait for an explanation from the teacher (Oblinger, 2005). Therefore, technology has had a striking impact on the students and their learning process.

Technology not only offers unlimited sources and target language speaker interaction (Guth & Helm, 2010) but also increases learner autonomy (Hampel & Hauck, 2006). In the case of teaching literature, teachers can use technology to engage students in co-operative learning in order to develop students' interest in

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literary work (Norlida Ahmad, Nuradyani Rosly and Puteri Rohani Megat Abdul Rahim, 2004). Technology can also encourage the exchange of ideas and students' participation (Vethamani, 2006). Therefore, teachers should use technology especially online social network in the teaching and learning of literature.

There are quite a number of online social networks, for examples, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Ning, Second Life and so on. In this study, the researcher will use Facebook as it is the most popular network tool among the students. It is more open and connected with more than 750 million active users all over the world (Facebook Statistics, 2011). Many people use it to communicate, interact and socialise with each other. It helps people to manage a range of interpersonal interactions with others, for example, by means of text, image, video, 'wall' spaces, status updates, news feeds, photo sharing and tagging and so on (Lankshear and Knobel, 2011).

According to Munoz and Towner (2009), there are a number of unique features that make Facebook amenable to educational pursuits. Such features are Bulletin boards, instant messaging, email, ability to post videos and pictures, post information and collaborate within the system. Besides, Facebook connects students with other students, indirectly creating a learning community which is a vital component of student education (Baker, 1999). Student can contact their friends to ask questions regarding assignment, examination or group projects. They can also ask their teachers questions or seek for advice. This increases both teacher-student and student-student interaction in the form of web-based communication (Mohamed Amin Embi, 2011). Indeed, the rich features found in Facebook have increased its uptake in college settings, where popular systems such as Moodle are being more and more replaced by Facebook groups (Deng and Tavares, 2013).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the Malaysian context, there have been numerous studies on teachers' approaches in the teaching of literature (Gurnam Kaur, 2003; Hwang & Mohamed Amin Embi, 2007; Tina Abdullah & Zaidah Zainal, 2008; Marzilah A. Aziz and Sharifah Nadia Syed Nasharudin, 2010). Research has revealed that many teachers prefer teacher-centred activities in the literature classroom, and this makes students become passive and more prone to being unable to respond critically (Gurnam Kaur, 2003). The findings by Hwang and Mohamed Amin Embi (2007) also showed that the teachers often read, retell and explain the story, ask questions and give answers based on what they felt would be relevant for examinations, rather than letting the students develop into critical literature readers. These teachers focus on information gathered about the text to enable students to look for the 'correct answer' rather than their own perception or personal response to the text (Tina Abdullah & Zaidah Zainal, 2008). In addition, the language part of the literature i.e. grammar and vocabulary is stressed while its aesthetic value is neglecting (Marzilah A. Aziz & Sharifah Nadia Syed Nasharudin, 2010).

Moreover, many students themselves prefer language-based approach that helps them in understanding the lesson as they have limited access to the language and it is hard for them to express their opinion (Zubaidah Awang & Shaidatul Akma Adi Kasuma, 2010). Their incapability to understand what they have learned and appreciate literature (Marzilah A. Aziz & Sharifah Nadia Syed Nasharudin, 2010) as well as the linguistic and cultural barriers that exist between their knowledge and the texts (Zubaidah Awang & Shaidatul Akma Adi Kasuma, 2010) prevent them from studying literature.

In the Malaysian education system, drama is a new genre besides poem, short story and novel which was only introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2010. Drama is characterised by lines of dialogue and stage directions. Reading and doing drama is not about training students to become actors and actresses but rather to explore human conditions and to stimulate our students to have a better understanding of themselves and the world around them. However, language in Shakespeare's drama is difficult, and unfamiliar (Kermode, 2000). This has posed problems to the students when they study Shakespearean drama. Furthermore, Shakespeare's complex sentence structures and use of now obsolete words lead many students to think they are reading Old or Middle English (Mabillard, 2000) that they find it difficult to understand the text.

Another problem in studying Shakespearean drama is its unfamiliar culture. In a study by Mukundan (1993), he concluded that many students had "problems dealing with foreign cultural elements in the (literary) text." When students read Shakespeare's drama which is written in the Elizabethan era, they may find it difficult to understand the cultural elements of the time.

According to Gibson (2008), there are four main reasons for teaching Shakespeare: abiding and familiar concerns, student development, language and otherness. The next paragraph explains Gibson's reasons for teaching Shakespeare.

The first reason for teaching Shakespearean drama is to help students to recognise, identify and explore the concerns on the relationships of family members, lovers, friends and enemies, masters and servants. As they translate these relationships into their own experience, they engage personally with the issues of morality, of gender, of control over one's life. Besides, these concerns increase their moral understanding, develop their critical thinking as well as imaginative and emotional growth. Moreover, Shakespeare's language provides students with rich models for study, imitation and expressive personal re-creation. Finally, the otherness in Shakespeare's dramas in which we see his extraordinariness, his strangeness and his unfamiliarity has opened a way for students to experience their extremes of emotion and to imaginatively inhabit their remote worlds when they study the characters, language, setting and issues.

Generally, drama engages students to use natural, conversational English in a meaningful context (Chauhan, 2004). It gives a context for listening and meaningful

language production, forcing the students to use their language resources and, thus, enhancing their linguistic abilities. Students are able to connect the meaning in literary texts and improve their language skills through it. Since literature is made from language, if students are exposed to works of drama they will develop their 'literary competence' (Carter and Long 1991) especially when they use drama techniques. Drama provides situations for practicing language skills especially listening and speaking. They can use these skills in a more meaningful and real context and the language of the outside world can be brought into the language classroom when the students express their thoughts and emotions (Vethamani, 2004).

Drama also allows students to communicate with and understand others in new ways. As literature preserves cultural and artistic heritage, it allows students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space (Carter and Long, 1991). In the Malaysian secondary schools, there were only two dramas in English literature component: "Rumpelstiltskin", a fairy tale taken from Germany, in Form Two (for 14-year-old students) and "Five Short Plays" which replaces "Gulp and Gasp", both of which are contextually placed in Britain in Form Four (for 16-year-old students). The underlying principle behind the selection of these texts is that by studying these foreign texts, students get to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own (Carter & Long, 1991).

This understanding can be beneficial for the students' personal growth (Carter and Long, 1991). Rosli Talif (1995) asserts that studying literature, for example, drama, motivates and encourages students to make a connection between the themes of a text and his or her personal life and experiences. Hirvela (1996) also explains that responses are personal as they are concerned with students' feelings and opinions about the literary text. An enjoyment and appreciation of drama will be developed as students are able to connect and communicate meaning in literary texts.

Drama often activates in students information which they have understood implicitly and allows them to verbalise what they have discovered (Vethamani, 2004). Therefore, drama can be used to promote active learning - to give students a kinesthetic and emphatic understanding as well as an intellectual understanding of a topic. The classroom experiences can provide students with a shared learning experience on a topic. Through active learning like drama, students can share responsibility to participate and collaborate, take advantage of each participant's strengths, and rely on each other for good project management and effective learning.

Drama also provides students the opportunity to explore and interact with the text and to portray their perceptions in new and imaginative ways (Vethamani, 2004). In the context of performance drama, when they are involved in preparing

and designing costumes and props for their drama performance, they become creative while developing a deeper understanding of the drama.

After discussing the benefits of learning drama, it is proposed in this paper to integrate the use of technology to help students to study Shakespearean drama. The use of technology tool such as online social network allows teachers to revolutionise the way they connect with others and the way teachers improve their way in teaching students. It allows teachers to connect one-to-one and one-to-many (Davis, 2010). This is very useful for a classroom with many students as teachers may not have the time to communicate with all students.

Technology not only provides the students with development in linguistic and socio-cultural expertise, but also ICT-related skills through the target language. According to Kaspar (2000), students “must acquire linguistic competence in a new language and at the same time develop the cognitive and socio-cultural skills necessary to gain access into the social, academic, and workforce environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p.106).

Rosenblatt (2005) stresses the importance of the reader’s role in interpreting literary texts. Rather than relying on a teacher to give them a single, standard interpretation of a text, she holds that the individual students learn to construct their own meaning by connecting the text to issues in their lives and describing what they experience as they read. The responses of fellow students also play a pivotal role. Through interaction with their peers, students move beyond their initial individual reaction to take into account a multiplicity of ideas and interpretations, thus broadening their perspective.

Facebook is a technological tool that can provide the students the opportunity to help one another to learn and understand when they gave personal responses, comments and feedback through their posts. It is very popular among the students. Walsh (2011) discussed the seven reasons to leverage Facebook which is one of the social networking tools in the classroom: (1) engagement, (2) social learning, (3) use time outside of class better, so teachers can use class time better, (4) provides opportunities for writing and writing assessment, (5) encourage dialogue, reach more students, (6) help students to get ahead of the professional curve and (7) build connections. This tool is useful for a classroom with forty or fifty students when the teachers are not able to give individual attention to each of them.

In a research done by Ru-Chu Shih (2011) on a group of 23 first-year college students at a technological university in Taiwan, the findings showed that students improve their English writing skills and knowledge not only from the in-class instruction but also from co-operative learning through Facebook integrated instruction. In addition, this significantly enhances students’ interest and motivation.

This paper proposes the use of online social networking, in particular the Facebook, to teach Shakespearean drama, within a Malaysian teacher training context. It is the most popular network tool among the students It can be accessed

easily regardless of time and location through mobile phones (Arabacioglu & Akar-vural, 2014). Since students are using it frequently, teachers can employ it to engage students in reading the literary texts for enjoyment and meaning making in order to gauge the students' interest to read a literary text and make personal response from it even when they are not in the classroom. This guides the aim of this study to promote the use of Facebook to help students to study Shakespearean drama.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This is a case study which employed quantitative and qualitative methodology. The quantitative data was collected through a survey questionnaire which was given to the students at the end of the course. Meanwhile, content analysis was used to examine the students' responses when using Facebook to collect the qualitative data. The advantage of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive (Jack and Norman, 2011). A researcher can "observe" without being observed, since the contents being analysed are not influenced by the researcher's presence. In this study, the content analysis was based on the students' responses in the Facebook when the lecturer was not with them in the drama class. The comments quoted in the study were taken verbatim from the students without any changes to spelling and grammar.

### **Research Instrument and Participants**

Besides the content analysis based on students' responses on Facebook, a survey questionnaire was distributed to all students at the end of the course. The results of the survey questionnaire were analysed in three categories: connecting meaning (items 1 to 4), communicating meaning (items 5-8) and creating meaning (items 9 to 12) in which students gave their responses towards the activities done in the classroom.

The participants were a group of twenty students who took the course "Drama in English" (TSL1064) in the second semester in the foundation course at an Institute of Teacher Education Campus in Johor, Malaysia. In this course, they had to read one Shakespearean drama in detail.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The 12 items in the questionnaire had mean scores ranging from 4.45 to 4.80 on a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=not sure; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree) with standard deviation ranging from 0.03 to 0.33, indicating the students agreed or highly agreed with the statements on the survey questionnaire (Table 1). The mean scores were significantly higher than 4, indicating the students' attitudes

and perspectives towards the use of Facebook in a drama classroom were in highly consensus.

The statistics shown in Table 1 indicated that the students agreed that the drama class and the use of Facebook engage them to connect, communicate and create meaning in the learning experience.

TABLE 1: RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

<i>No</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	I improve my language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing after this course.	4.50	0.14
2	I improve my understanding of the others' culture after this course.	4.50	0.07
3	I experience personal growth after this course.	4.55	0.07
4	I am able to understand the meaning of the elements (setting, character, theme, etc.) found in a drama after the course.	4.65	0.06
5	I enjoy sharing information with the lecturer and friends through learning on Facebook.	4.55	0.33
6	I enjoy communicating with the lecturer and friends through learning on Facebook.	4.70	0.33
7	My interaction with the lecturer and friends is enhanced through learning on Facebook.	4.80	0.03
8	I am able to complete my coursework through learning on Facebook.	4.70	0.05
9	I am able to design costume and props for the drama performance after this course.	4.65	0.12
10	I am able to act confidently in a drama performance after this course.	4.70	0.22
11	I am more creative (for example, create a rap) for a drama performance after this course.	4.45	0.13
12	I am more confident to organise a drama performance in the future after this course.	4.80	0.03

Based on Table 1, through the activities done in the classroom, the students were able to connect the meaning of the drama when they were able to enhance their language skills, understand the others' culture and experience personal growth. They were also able to understand the meaning of the elements (setting, character, theme, etc.) found in a drama.

The results also showed that they were able to communicate meaning with their lecturer and friends by sharing the information and interacting with one another on Facebook. They enjoyed doing it and at the same time, it helped them to complete the coursework as they could ask question online and receive feedback spontaneously. The online discussion enabled them to make meaning as Facebook provided them the opportunity for communication between student-student and student-teacher.

The drama class also helped the students to create meaning from Shakespearean drama through their performance in the final project for the coursework. They were able to design costume and props and act confidently in a drama performance. They were also more creative by creating a rap at the end of the drama performance.

This experience gave them confidence to act in a drama and they believed they were able to organise a drama in the future. The online learning environment makes a positive contribution to co-operative learning and teamwork when they designed the costumes and props and writing the script for the rap together. It also facilitated students to engage them in the critical and creative thinking that enabled them make meaning from the drama texts.

The findings on the Facebook responses were discussed based on the content analysis under three main themes: connection, communication and creation of meaning in the drama class. Activities discussed in this study were watching the movie, attending drama workshop, role-playing Shakespeare's other plays and drama performance.

One of the activities students did in the classroom was watching the movie "Hamlet" by the actor Mel Gibson and the actress Glenn Close. After the lecturer posted the question on their views of the movie, two students commented that the movie was difficult for them to understand. One of them commented, "i thought the movie was ... well, interesting... but i loose my focus because i cannot comprehend the words." But other two students commented that the actor's expression was great and extreme. Then, one student commented that "maybe Shakespeare's play was meant for a stage play and poor for a movie". Here, we could see that the students connect and communicate their meaning of Shakespearean drama through Facebook. Then, a student commented that "their expression were too extreme. haha. the ending a bit tragic too and hope all of us will try our best to do this play. haha". Later, we would see how this movie give them ideas on creating meaning in their drama performance.

As for the drama workshop, the students gave long comments on what they had learnt from the workshop. One of the comments given was,

"I have learnt that acting is not just about facial expressions but also voice projection, breathing and posture... it is important to know the storyline. Not only our own lines but knowing the flow of the whole drama."

Another student also commented,

"To me the breathing part also plays an important role because when we want to deliver our dialogue, we need to know when to stop or when to continue... It also kind of linked with voice projection also... Higher pitch requires deep inhale... I think."

Other students also communicated their ideas about the workshop. This drama workshop had really helped students to connect the meaning in the literary texts through their drama performance at the final stage.

Instead of waiting for the lecturer to post questions, the students had also posted their own questions through the Facebook. One student posted his question regarding the play that the different group had chosen for the role play. The other groups responded and gave their answers. They interacted with one another in the

target language without passively waiting for prompts by the lecturer, or even asking the lecturer's opinion. In oral communication, this behaviour can be seen as an indicator of 'willingness to communicate', or WTC, defined by MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547) as "readiness to enter into a discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2". The present study considers the principles of WTC transferable to the computer-mediated communication (CMC) and synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) on Facebook. This latent advantage of communication through Facebook, especially in the previously relatively unexplored domain of the Malaysian context, also aligns with studies by Beauvois (1998) and Warschauer (1996). In their studies, they found evidence of an increase in overall participation in communication, as well as an increase in lexical and syntactic development (Sauro, 2012).

In the role play activity, the students had to choose a character from Shakespeare's other plays to role play. They need to design costumes and props for a selected scene of the play. The students had shown their creativity in that they sewed the costumes themselves. There were two boys who played their roles as girls and they borrowed their blouses, skirts, scarves and wigs from the girls. The students also did their own props when they made their own crowns for the king and drew trees on polystyrene as scenery. When the photos were shared on Facebook, they explained why they chose such materials to do the props and costumes. This suggested that the students were able to connect and create meaning in Shakespearean drama from the activities done in the classroom.

It seemed that the students enjoyed this activity very much. This could be seen in their comments to one of the lecturer's posts after their drama performance. The comments given were "Enjoyed!", "Drama class is the best class" and "yep!!! I enjoyed it too!!!" This post received 21 "likes".

In a post by a student on his own Facebook account, he posted the group photo after one of the drama classes and gave a comment "Drama in English class, Filled with fun!" This post received 56 "likes". Also, at the end of the drama performance, a rap was done by the students for the play, a comment given was "OMG, so funny!" This showed that the students really enjoyed the activity carried out in the drama classroom.

The results from the Facebook responses had shown the students' attitude were highly positive as their comments of "enjoyed" and "fun" were found in their responses and posts. This motivated and encouraged them to read literature especially Shakespeare's drama.

The findings had shown that the use of Facebook is beneficial as it enhances learning not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. When students got to express their thoughts and feelings through Facebook they were able to connect and communicate personal meaning openly which in turn encouraged participation in classroom learning. This promotes active learning (Dale, 1946).

Active learning is a process whereby students engage in activities, such as reading, writing, discussion, or problem solving that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content. Therefore, teachers can utilise Facebook to engage students in active learning in addition to PowerPoint lectures, multimedia and movies.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the evidences disclosed in this study, the lecturer and students can interact with one another easily through Facebook. It saves time and space as the lecturer and students do not need to meet face-to-face in a classroom to give all the instructions, input and guidance. Therefore, it is important for teachers to employ this technology tool which promotes active learning in the language learning process so that the students are able to perform and compete with others in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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