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## Facebook and ESL Writing: Students' Perspectives in one of the Saudi Institutions

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### Abstract

There has been a mixed pattern of results concerning the use of Facebook in ESL writing outside class in the literature. To understand such a pattern, the researchers intend to gain an in-depth insight about the students' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of using Facebook in ESL writing. The researcher conducted this study with their students at one of the institutions in Saudi Arabia. 10 students participated in this study while they were studying the English composition course, which focused on different types of essays and academic writing. Their level of English proficiency was at the upper intermediate level. The researchers employed three methods to collect data: a questionnaire, an interview, and participant observations. The findings show six benefits for using Facebook in ESL writing: (1) motivation to write, (2) collaboration among students, (3) improvement of writing, (4) being a good medium to practice writing outside class, (5) providing a less-pressure atmosphere for writing, and (6) ease of use and enabling writing anytime anywhere. Two drawbacks were identified: (1) distraction by chat invitations and (2) use of impolite language. The researchers provided suggestions for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the drawbacks.

**Keywords:** ESL writing, writing issues, Facebook in TESOL, students' perspectives, out of class activities

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### **Purpose and importance of the study**

This study sought to have a close look at the students' perceptions about the use of Facebook as an additional out-of-class ESL writing activity in a Saudi institution. There has been a mixed pattern of results in the literature concerning the use of Facebook in ESL writing. Some studies found advantages of using Facebook in the ESL writing, such as improving their writing (Shukor & Noordin, 2014; Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012) and other studies found limitations of using Facebook in the ESL writing, such as distraction by Facebook chat and online ads and apps (Hani et al., 2014; Yunus et al., 2011). Consequently, delineating Saudi students' perspectives about the use of Facebook in ESL writing was important as these perspectives can either reflect the advantages of using Facebook in the ESL writing or bear witness to its limitations in this particular context.

### **Introduction**

Facebook is one of the major online Social Networking Sites (SNSs), serving as the prime example of Web2.0 technology that allows its users to interact, collaborate, and get engaged in useful social dialogue. Features of interaction, collaboration, and constructive social dialogue make Facebook suitable for educational applications in general and for language learning in particular. Maloney (2007) contends that SNSs provide suitable learning models as they promote collaboration and active participation of all users. SNSs enhance interaction among learners involved in problem-solving as they are faced with a dilemma and negotiate ways of solution. Moreover, Lemeul (2006) subscribes to the view that SNSs give educators a great opportunity of easy and useful networking with their students.

Mazman and Usluel (2010) recommend Facebook as both an instructional and social means of communication because it promotes thinking and writing skills through their personalized and convenient environments. Such personalized and convenient environment of Facebook makes it very beneficial with ESL writing. ESL students can practice writing in a less threatening atmosphere and can create their own groups of interest. They can use the comment, like, and share buttons to write their own words, share views, and engage in discussions either synchronously (via the chat feature) or asynchronously (via leaving a question or a statement in the user's timeline for later comments by classmates or other Facebook users).

Furthermore, my notes application in Facebook enables ESL students to write about any topic of interest and easily get feedback from classmates and other Facebook users. These features enable ESL students to write and collaborate by exchanging ideas, views, and useful expressions related to writing topics. These features also facilitate both instant and delayed feedback on students' writing by their instructor, classmates, and all interested Facebook users. As ESL student engage in writing, commenting, getting feedback on their writing, and reading their classmates' or Facebook users' writings; their writing will improve, and they will become autonomous learners writers (Mcloughlin & Lee, 2008).

### **Literature review**

#### **Advantages of using Facebook in ESL writing**

Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) reported in their primary study on the effects of using Facebook as a medium for discussions of English grammar and writing of low-intermediate EFL students. The participants were 83 freshmen at a university in Thailand; 61 were males and 22 were females. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22. Their proficiency level in English was lower-intermediate and they were placed in an English level 1 course. They used Facebook daily. The instruments used were Facebook, pre-and post-grammar and writing tests and interviews.

Results show that the participants improved in both EFL grammar and writing. There was a significant statistical difference between mean scores of the pre-and post-tests;  $t = 6.65$  and  $p =$

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0.000. Furthermore, the participants' writing content improved after using Facebook. Also, they wrote better ideas and more organized paragraphs in the post-test. They used punctuation more appropriately and other features of grammar in better ways. As for the participants' attitudes towards Facebook, most of them stated it is an effective means for grammar and writing discussions.

Shukor and Noordin (2014) performed a study to find out about the effects of Facebook collaborative writing groups on the ESL writing performance of the university students. The participants were 33 undergraduate students from Universiti Putra Malaysia; 9 males and 24 females. They were divided into two groups; control and experimental using random sampling. The control group was chosen for face-to-face collaborative writing while the experimental one was chosen for Facebook collaborative writing. Both groups were given a pre-and a post-test of writing an argumentative essay taken from Educational Testing Service (ETS) test bank. Grading rubric considers content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Results show that the experimental group, which used Facebook collaborative writing groups, scored slightly higher than the control group that used face-to-face collaborative writing groups. The comparison was made using independent and paired t-tests. Results also show a significant improvement in each group separately. Overall, Facebook improved the ESL students writing of the experimental group and provided them with a convenient educational environment suitable for collaborative writing through its features of comment and feedback both synchronously and asynchronously. It was also found to have more fun medium for writing.

Abdul Majid et al. (2012) investigated how to improve the writing process and performance via Facebook using scaffolding and blended instruction. The participants were ESL secondary school students in Malaysia in two groups; control and experimental with 45 participants in each group. Their ages were about 16. The control group received only classroom instruction while the experimental group received blended instruction and scaffolding using Facebook. Pre- and post-essay writing tests were administered to each group. Interviews were performed with selected participants. The treatment lasted for 14 weeks.

Results show that the participants preferred blended instruction to traditional classroom instruction. Overall, participants in this study prefer to use blended instruction to traditional classroom instruction. They believe that Facebook helped them with the writing process in finding ideas, re-writing, editing, and getting feedback as well as improved their writing performance.

Yunus et al. (2011) investigated using Facebook groups in teaching the ESL writing. The participants were 43 ESL students, 26 females and 17 males, in the school of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan, Malaysia. Their ages ranged from 21 to 28. The researchers wanted to delineate the students' perceptions of using Facebook groups in the ESL writing. So, they administered a 10-item questionnaire and the students had to participate in a Facebook group called "write out loud."

Results show that more than 80% of the participants view Facebook groups as helpful in the process of writing; brainstorming, finding better ideas, reducing spelling errors and learning new vocabulary. These also showed that more than 90% of participants read materials before sharing them. This also can improve their vocabulary and their writing because the more they read, the better their writing becomes. However, the main challenge in using Facebook as stated by more than 83% of the participants was the "distraction" by other features of Facebook, such as games and instant chat.

Hani et al. (2014) performed a study on utilizing Facebook groups in teaching writing in Jordan. The researchers aimed to delineate the perceptions of Jordanian EFL university students concerning using Facebook groups in writing. The participants were 42 female freshman students at Irbid University College. Their age range was from 19 to 25. They had to participate in a Facebook group where they were asked to brainstorm, summarize, and give feedback on each other's writing. A survey was administered to learn about the participants' perceptions of using

Facebook Groups in writing. Results show that more than 80% of participants recognized how Facebook groups helped with the process of writing, brainstorming, getting better ideas, and completing essays in an easier way.

Khan and Ivy (2014) reported on using Facebook for large writing classes in Dhaka University. They implemented a blended instruction course with both Facebook and face-to-face instruction. The use of Facebook was introduced to overcome the problem of the lack of feedback on writing and the lack of writing practice due to the large writing classes, which are 45-50 students in Bangladesh. They also reported on the students' perceptions of introducing Facebook in their writing classes. They contended that the writing instructors have a hard time teaching ESL writing to this large number of students; they cannot give detailed feedback to all students in class and the students do not have enough time to practice writing due to the short semester system that comprises only 12 weeks.

As a solution, the researchers introduced Facebook as a platform for collaborative writing to compensate for the lack of writing practice and the lack of feedback on students' writing. When the online Facebook writing course started, 182 students joined the writing group in just two weeks. They were motivated to join. They were asked to write descriptive essays about pictures taken from their writing textbook. They were asked to comment on and modify some mistakes and errors in each other's posts.

Results show that the students had a very positive attitude towards integrating Facebook in the writing class. They did not mind correcting each other's mistakes. One of the students stated: "well, I sincerely believe we learn from mistakes." Moreover, they started to build a community together where they sought help from each other more than from their instructor. Overall, integrating Facebook into the writing classes helped to overcome the problem of large writing classes and short semester times.

### **Limitations of Using Facebook in ESL Writing**

Despite all the advantages of using Facebook in the ESL writing, some negative drawbacks have been reported. For example, Yunus et al. (2011) reported in their primary study that some Facebook features distract students from focusing on their writing. More than 83% of the participants stated that they were distracted by games, instant chat, and other Apps. Students can spend a lot of time trying out a new game, chat with old friends about personal matters, or become attracted to hot new Apps that arrive every day.

Hani et al. (2014) reported on the same problem of distraction by some Facebook features as stated by their participants. More than 85% of them also reported they were distracted by some Facebook features, such as games and instant chat. Baran (2010) stated some negative student feelings about teachers sharing their photos and some personal information on Facebook. One student wrote: "teachers should be unapproachable and formal."

Maranto and Barton (2010) stated that some students forged profiles to "defame" faculty. Jung, Kudo, and Choi (2012) stated about Japanese students that: "It may not be easy to wean Japanese students off teacher dependency when they consider knowledge as something to be transmitted by the instructor rather than constructed by themselves." In other words, some students would resist Facebook as it decentralizes the authority of the teacher and enhances autonomy of learning especially if they prefer the traditional teacher-centered class. Shih (2011) stated that using Facebook along with the traditional face-to-face class would add huge extra load on the teacher: "a great deal of time and effort in evaluating, correcting, examining, and responding to the students' comments, feedback, and assessments, which required a great workload and time commitment."

### **Research questions**

The research questions were:

- 1- What are the students' perceptions of the use of Facebook in ESL writing outside class in this institution?
- 2- What are their perspectives of the advantages of using Facebook?
- 3- What are their views of the limitations of using Facebook?

### **Setting and participants**

#### **Setting**

The researchers chose an intact class of convenience to conduct this study at a small institution in Saudi Arabia. The course was called English composition III, known by ELC 103, where the focus was ESL academic writing. The text book used was *Effective academic writing 2: teacher's resource book*, 2012 version written by Savage, A., and Mayer, P. The textbook focuses on academic writing and spanned topics, such as: descriptive essays, narrative essays, compare-contrast essays, opinion essays and cause-effect essays.

The prerequisite for this course is what is known as the Preparatory Year Program (PYP), where all students are expected to study English general courses for one year ranging from level A1 (starter) to B1+ (intermediate) as per the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). There is a Cambridge Placement Test that places students at various levels of English proficiency at the PYP. The students study all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing along with grammar for 25 contact hours per week. At the PYP, this institution follows a quarter system of instruction, which lasts for eight weeks. Students' assessment comprises two quizzes, a mid-term and a final exam.

Upon successful completion of the PYP, students proceed to their respective departments at higher college, which is an engineering and technology college where they may join the mechanical, electrical, chemical, computers, or instrumentation department to earn an associate's or a bachelor's degree. They continue to study English as an advanced course at the institution, but the focus is now on the academic writing. The institution follows the normal semester system beyond the PYP, where classes last for 16 weeks before the final examinations start. Students' assessment comprises four quizzes, a mid-term exam, and a final exam as the semester system allows for it. The quizzes carry a weight of 40% of the final mark (10% for each quiz), the mid-term exam carries 20%, and the final exam carries the remaining 40% weight of the mark.

#### **Participants**

The students in that English composition III class were 20 male students. They were all enrolled in their engineering department of choice at the college. Their ages ranged from 19 to 21 with the mean age being 20. Their level of English proficiency is beyond the B1+, as per the CEFR. Therefore, it can be said that they are at the upper intermediate level of English proficiency. The researchers intended to gain in-depth information to answer their research questions about the students' perceptions of the use of Facebook in the ESL writing. Thus, a class of 10 to 20 students was sufficient since there was no intention to generalize the results to any larger population (Perry, 2011).

## **Instruments**

### **Task**

The researchers held a training session for the students to familiarize them with how to use Facebook for the ESL writing, how to use Facebook timeline and notes to write, how to join a Facebook open group and participate, and how to collaborate by exchanging ideas and relevant expressions among themselves and using the chat feature. The students were already very familiar with Facebook and used it a lot for social purposes but the aim was to familiarize them with it primarily for ESL writing.

After the training session, the students were asked to write a 250-word essay outside class once a week for eight weeks on a Facebook public group called ELC 103 Writing created by the researchers available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/613275272397930/>. The task prompted the students to choose one of three possible topics and write about it. They may collaborate in pairs or small groups to exchange ideas and relevant expressions before and while writing via Facebook chat feature. While each student eventually wrote the essay individually, he was allowed and encouraged to interact and collaborate with his classmates outside class either face-to-face or via Facebook chat.

The task also prompted the students to write on topics related to the textbook they study and related to their class discussions. For example, they were asked to write descriptive, narrative, opinion, and compare-contrast essays which they were studying in their textbook and discussing in their classes. Appendix A has the weekly writing prompt.

## **Data collection methods**

### **Questionnaire**

The researchers administered the questionnaire in class after the students completed the weekly writing tasks. The questionnaire included ten items for the students to answer and comment on in detail. Moreover, the questionnaire ten items were self-devised, and the questionnaire contained four main sections: (a) students' general perceptions of Facebook in the ESL writing, (b) students' perceptions of the benefits of Facebook, (c) students' perceptions of the drawbacks of Facebook and (d) future use of Facebook.

The questionnaire answers were anonymous by assigning a number for each participant. Three students refused to participate in the study as they had other assignments with their engineering department. Three responses were excluded as they were telegraphic and did not provide details as was prompted by the questions. Four other responses were also excluded from the data as they answered four questions only out of ten questions. Thus, only ten responses were used as one source of data as they were complete and detailed answers.

The questionnaire items (Appendix B) were written in both English and Arabic, which is the students' native language, and they were encouraged to use their native language. Researchers usually adopt this practice to give their research participants a chance to fully articulate their perspectives about the research questions. For example, Koc and Koc (2016) translated their adapted questionnaire into Turkish so that their Turkish participants can understand the question and answer it without any misunderstanding.

### **Semi-structured interview**

The researchers administered individual semi-structured interviews in class with the participants one week after completing the questionnaire. The interviews contained five questions, four corresponding the four main sections of the questionnaire: (a) general perceptions of Facebook in ESL writing, (b) perceptions of benefits of Facebook, (c) perceptions of drawbacks of Facebook, and (d) future use of Facebook. The fifth question is an open-ended prompt for the participants to

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add anything else they find relevant to the use of Facebook in the ESL writing outside class.

The individual interviews were audio-recorded for accurate data analysis and revision of such analysis by other researchers for reliability issues. The ten students who completed the questionnaire satisfactorily were the ones who did the interview successfully and thus the data from both interview and questionnaire came from the same ten participants.

### **Participant observations**

Dewalt and Dewalt (2011) defined participant observation as a method used in qualitative research to collect data in a natural setting by researchers who observe and/or participate in the activities of the people under study. This observation is then recorded and analyzed (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011). Therefore, the researchers kept an open eye on the students' views and perceptions of the use of Facebook for the ESL writing outside the classroom since the training session for Facebook writing was held with the students. They recorded these observations as notes on Microsoft word document and discussed these with each other. Later, they analyzed these observation notes as a source of data.

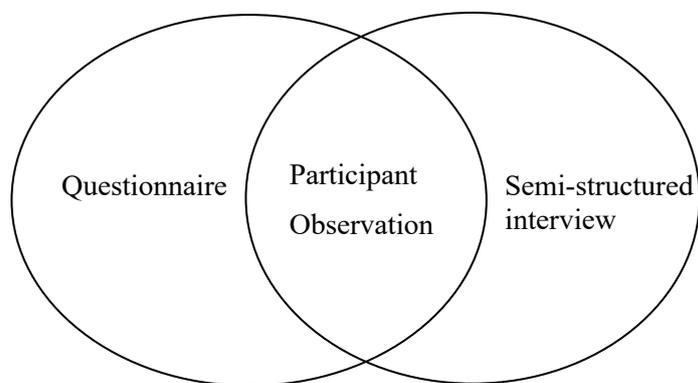


Figure 1. A Diagram of Data Collection Method

### **Data Analysis**

#### **The constant comparative method**

The researchers adopted the constant comparative method for analyzing qualitative data to analyze the data from questionnaire, interview answers, and their participant observations. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) described it as:

A method of analyzing qualitative data which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. As each unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped--categorized and coded--with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed. In this process, there is room for continuous refinement; initial categories are changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered (p. 134).

In other words, the verbal data from the students' questionnaire answers, the transcribed individual interviews, and the participant observations notes were perused many times and then coded into themes according to their content. Then, the themes were listed under two broad categories: (a) positive perceptions and benefits of Facebook in ESL writing and (b) negative perceptions and drawbacks of Facebook in ESL writing. Similar answers were listed under the same category. Depending on the content of the students' answers, different themes were found

in each broad category. Table 1 shows the emerging themes.

Table 1  
*Categories and codes/themes of the students' perceptions of Facebook in ESL writing*

Students' perceptions	
Positive views/benefits of Facebook category Codes/themes	Negative views of Facebook category. Codes/themes
Facebook motivates writing.	Distraction by chat invitations.
Facebook fosters collaboration among students.	Use of impolite language by some Facebook users.
Facebook improves writing.	
Facebook is a good medium to practice writing outside class.	
Facebook is less formal and provides a less pressured atmosphere than in class.	
Facebook is easy to use and can be used anytime anywhere.	

These themes were shared with colleagues who went through the data and confirmed these as well.

### **Findings of the study**

**Students' perceptions of using Facebook in the ESL writing.** This section answers the first research question: What are the students' perceptions of the use of Facebook in ESL writing outside class in this institution? The students' perceptions were collected via the first question of both the questionnaire and the interview.

The ten participants of the study expressed favorable perceptions of the use of Facebook for ESL writing outside class. Such perceptions and views were recurrent in both the questionnaire and interview and were also supported by the participant observation notes. For example, student #1 stated in the questionnaire: "I believe Facebook writing is an innovative and excellent medium for writing. It was useful for me; however, it needs to be more controlled by the instructor." In other words, this student believed that Facebook was helpful for him and was a very good and inventive writing medium. He hoped that the teacher would supervise Facebook writing more closely. This student expressed similar idea in the interview, as shown in Table 2.

Moreover, student #10 stated in the questionnaire: "In my point of view, Facebook writing is a new and innovative medium for writing. Moreover, it helps develop writing and English in general." This student believed that Facebook writing is a novel method of writing that helped him improve not only his writing but his English proficiency. He also expressed a similar perspective in the interview (Table 2) where he reiterated: "Facebook helped me develop and improve my writing as I read and learned from my classmates' essays. As I read those essays, I realized and corrected the mistakes in my writing."

Table 2  
*Quotes of two students' answers of questionnaire and interview perceptions question #1*

Question #1: What are your perceptions of the use of Facebook for out-of-class ESL writing?		
Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Student #1	I believe Facebook writing is an innovative and excellent medium for writing. It was useful for me; however, it needs to be more organized/controlled by the instructor.	Facebook writing is an excellent medium for writing. It was beneficial for me.
Student #10	In my point of view, Facebook writing is a new and innovative medium for writing. Moreover, it helps develop writing and English in general.	Facebook helped me develop and improve my writing as I read and learned from my classmates' essays. As I read those essays, I realized and corrected the mistakes in my writing.

Appendices D and F provide a detailed record of the ten students' perceptions of Facebook in the ESL writing as expressed in the questionnaire and interview. The students expressed the following positive attitudes and had favorable perceptions of using Facebook in writing:

1. Facebook motivates writing as it is a break from the routine of class.
2. Facebook fosters collaboration among students outside class by exchanging ideas and expressions relevant to the writing topic.
3. Facebook improves writing by reading other classmates' essays and learning more ideas, expressions and how to organize writing from them.
4. Facebook is a good medium to practice writing outside class.
5. Facebook is less formal and provides a less pressured atmosphere for writing than in class (no time limits).
6. Facebook is easy to use and can be used for writing anytime and anywhere.

The researchers' participant observation notes attested to these students' perceptions. For example, one note recorded on Sunday Jan 28, 2018, indicated that the students were familiar with Facebook and motivated to use it outside class. Another note recorded on Wednesday February 7, 2018, showed that the students considered Facebook to be a good medium to practice writing outside the class because it provides a less pressured environment for writing than in class. Moreover, one of the observational note recorded stated that the students were enthusiastic to write on Facebook because they can write whenever and wherever they liked. One student said that he preferred to write in Starbucks café in the Galleria Mall. In addition, another note expressed that students reported that they felt their writing improved as they exchanged ideas and vocabulary expressions with each other and read each other's essays. Appendix G has more participant observation notes.

**Benefits of using Facebook for ESL writing outside class.** The second research question was about the benefits of Facebook in ESL writing outside class. It asked: What are their perspectives of the advantages of using Facebook?

The students attested to many benefits in using Facebook for ESL writing outside class. For example, student # 2 stated in the questionnaire: "Facebook provides an opportunity and a space to practice writing outside class. It has features, such as ease of editing and correcting your text (writing). This student believed that Facebook writing was a useful writing practice outside the classroom. He liked auto-correction features to easily revise the text. In the interview, he claimed: "Facebook writing gave me a chance to compare myself to my classmates and evaluate my writing

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in relation to theirs. This made my writing improve. Moreover, Facebook features enabled editing and correcting my writing.” From table 3, the reader can see how this student thought that Facebook writing enabled him to compare his essays with his classmates’ essays. Thus, he could rate his essays compared to theirs and this improved his writing.

In addition, Facebook helped edit and correct mistakes in his essays. Another participant, student # 9, stated in the questionnaire:

Facebook has many benefits for writing such as collaborating and sharing ideas and information with classmates. It helps a lot to see my classmates’ essays as examples for me before I write; this developed my writing and made it better and more organized.

This means that Facebook enabled him to collaborate with his classmates by exchanging views and data. In addition, he learned from reading his classmates’ essays and thus his writing improved. Table 3 displays what this student contended in the interview. He stated that Facebook facilitated collaboration and exchanging points of view between him and his classmates. He also perused their writings on Facebook and thus his own writing became better. Appendices D and F include all students’ answers to questionnaire and interview question # 2.

Table 3  
*Quotes of two students’ answers of questionnaire and interview benefits question #2*

Question #2: What are your perceptions of the benefits and advantages of Facebook in ESL writing?		
Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Student #2	Facebook provides an opportunity and a space to practice writing outside class. It has features such as ease of editing and correcting your text (writing).	Facebook writing gave me a chance to compare myself to my classmates and evaluate my writing in relation to theirs. This made my writing improve. Moreover, Facebook features enabled editing and correcting my writing.
Student # 9	Facebook has many benefits for writing such as collaborating and sharing ideas and information with classmates. It helps a lot to see my classmates’ essays as examples for me before I write; this developed my writing and made it better and more organized.	Facebook made me collaborate with classmates to share ideas about the writing topics. By reading their essays, my writing improved and became more organized. Moreover, Facebook writing is more comfortable and poses no pressures for me, no time limits for writing as in class.

In addition to the second question of the questionnaire, which was a general question about benefits of using Facebook in the ESL writing outside class, questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 asked about specific benefits for using Facebook in the ESL writing that were reported by previous research (Appendix B).

The researchers decided to provide a summary of the students’ answers to each of these questions because the answers of these specific questions had little or no variations amongst students. Moreover, these specific questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 were not repeated in the interviews. This allows for a more reliable comparison between students’ answers of the questionnaire main four questions, which are 1, 2, 7, and 10, and interview main four questions (1, 2, 3, and 4) which were basically the same but with more explanations or details in the interview answers. While Table 4 summaries students’ answers to question 3 and 4; Appendix E has a summary of answers to questions 5, 6, 8 and 9.

Table 4  
Summary of students' answers to questionnaire items # 3 and 4

Questionnaire item	Summary of students' answers
3- Why does Facebook motivate you to write? If you do not think so, why not?	Facebook motivate me to write more because it is easier than using paper and pencil and is a social media app that is more fun than the class.
4- How does Facebook make you collaborate with your colleagues outside the classroom? If you do not think so, why not?	Facebook encourages me to collaborate and interact with my classmates to exchange ideas and vocabulary expressions related to the writing topic.

Furthermore, the participant observation notes reflected the students' views of the benefits of using Facebook for the ESL writing. One of the notes stated that Facebook was an interesting writing medium and did not pose any pressures similar to writing in the class. Another note recorded indicated that Facebook was a good solution for shy students who did not participate in class because they were afraid of losing face before their classmates and instructor. Facebook offered such students a good opportunity to write and participate without being shy. More participant observation notes are available in Appendix G.

**Drawbacks of using Facebook for ESL writing.** The third research question was about drawbacks of using Facebook in the ESL writing outside class. The students perceived only two drawbacks: (a) distraction by chat, games, or other apps; and (b) the use of impolite language. Each drawback was expressed by one student only out of the ten participants of the study. Students' answers about the drawbacks are listed in the Appendices D and F.

For example, Table 5 has the answers of two participants. Looking at the answers of student # 2, he believed that some users may use impolite language with other users while on Facebook. He also thought that some users of Facebook sometimes use impolite language to offend and disturb some other users. Moving to student # 4, his answers stated chat invitations sent by some friends or family distracted him while writing on Facebook. He also believed that twitter was more commonly used than Facebook.

Table 5  
Quotes of two students' answers of questionnaire item #7 and interview drawbacks question # 3

What are your perceptions of the drawbacks and disadvantages of using Facebook in ESL writing?		
Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Student# 2	Facebook may be used sometimes by some users to offend/flame others with impolite language or comments.	Some users of Facebook may use provocative or impolite language or write provocative and personally offensive comments on your writing.
Student #4	There are no disadvantages in Facebook writing. I think some chat invitations may distract me sometimes. Also, twitter became more wide-spread (in Z) than Facebook.	Generally, there are no disadvantages but sometimes some users send invitations for chat, upload videos and other similar things that may distract me.

Moreover, the participant observation notes recorded the drawback of distraction by chat invitations. For example, the note recorded on Tuesday March 6, 2018 indicated that one student

maintained that he wanted to finish his writing assignment in one hour but ended up spending three hours and still did not finish all because his friends sent him chat invitations that distracted him and took his time and attention.

**Future use of Facebook for ESL writing outside class.** In response to the tenth item of the questionnaire and the fourth question of the interview, all 10 students expressed their preference to use Facebook for ESL writing in the future and they provided different reasons, such as it motivated them, made them collaborate with each other, and improved their writing. For instance, student #1 will use Facebook for ESL writing as it enabled collaboration, reading his classmates' essays, and sharing essays (Table 6). Another participant, student # 5 will use Facebook as it made his writing better (Table 6). Appendices D and F have all students' answers to questionnaire item#10 and interview question # 4.

Table 6  
*Quotes of two students' answers of questionnaire item #10 and interview future use question # 4*

Would you prefer to use Facebook for ESL writing outside class in the future? Why/why not?		
Participant	Questionnaire	Interview
Student# 1	Yes, because it is a useful medium for collaborating and sharing essays with the group (classmates); this is an interesting and sociable activity.	Yes, as this medium enabled me to participate, collaborate and share essays with my classmates.
Student # 5	Yes, I prefer to use Facebook for writing in the future as it improved my writing.	Yes, I will use Facebook for writing in the future as it developed and improved my writing.

Furthermore, the participant observation notes attested to the students' preference for the future use of Facebook for ESL writing. For example, the note recorded on Thursday March 22, 2018 indicated that one student maintained he will use Facebook for writing after this writing course was over because Facebook enabled him to read his classmates' essays and helped improve his writing. More participant observation notes are available in Appendix G.

Finally, the interview included an open-ended prompt, which was the fifth question of the interview. Three students out of ten answered it. For example, student # 2 stated that "Facebook is used for writing and can be used to discuss other beneficial topics and subjects as well." He believed that Facebook was suitable for writing and discussing various topics. Student # 7 maintained that "Facebook will continue to be used for writing, but I think other platforms maybe created for writing with more collaboration/interaction features." In other words, this student subscribed to the view that people Facebook will use for writing in the future along with other apps that foster interaction among users. Appendix F has the answers of the three students to the interview open-ended prompt.

## **Discussion**

This study found that the students perceived several benefits for using Facebook in ESL writing outside class. For example, they believed that Facebook motivated them to write, fostered collaboration among classmates outside class, improved their writing, was a good medium to practice writing outside class, was less formal by providing less pressure than writing in class, and was an easy to use medium for writing that could be used anytime and anywhere.

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On the other hand, one student saw a drawback for using Facebook in the ESL writing outside class which was distraction by chat invitations. Another student believed that some Facebook users sometimes used impolite language to offend other users (Table 5).

As discussed above, the previous studies have found similar results for using Facebook in the ESL writing. For example, Yunus et al. (2011) and Hani et al. (2014) reported in their studies that Facebook motivated their participants to write. Moreover, Shukor and Noordin, (2014) and Khan and Ivy (2014) reported in their primary studies that Facebook fostered collaboration among participants.

In addition to the studies we discussed earlier, more studies have similar findings. First, Abdul Majid et al. (2012) reported that using Facebook improved their participants' writing. The control group received only classroom instruction while the experimental group received blended instruction and scaffolding using Facebook. Results show that the participants preferred blended instruction to traditional classroom instruction. The students believed that Facebook helped them with the writing process by finding ideas, re-writing, editing, and getting feedback. Secondly, Shukor and Noordin (2014) reported that Facebook provided a convenient and fun educational environment for writing which is related to the current study students' perception of Facebook as less formal and thus provided a less pressured atmosphere for writing.

However, the two drawbacks reported by students in this study, distraction by chat invitations and using impolite language, were also reported in previous studies. Hani et al. (2014) and Yunus et al. (2011) claimed that using Facebook distracted their participants by chat invitations and games. Comparable distractions were found in other studies, such as Nepomuceno (2011) who reported about the use of impolite language by some student bloggers and users of blogs at a university in the Philippines. Furthermore, Abrams (2003) reported on the phenomenon of flaming, including impolite or sexually-explicit language, as a possible outcome of the use of the computer in the writing class, especially in case of synchronous writing by the computer. Table 7 relates the findings of our study to previous studies' findings:

Table 7  
*Current study findings related to previous studies findings*

Current study	Previous studies
<b>Benefits</b>	
Facebook motivates students to write.	Yunus et al. (2011) Hani et al. (2014)
Facebook fosters collaboration among students.	Shukor and Noordin (2014) Khan and Ivy (2014)
Facebook improves students' writing.	Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) Abdul Majid et al. (2012) Yunus et al. (2011) Hani et al. (2014)
Facebook is a good medium to practice writing outside class.	Shukor and Noordin (2014) Khan and Ivy (2014)
Facebook is less formal and provides a less pressured atmosphere for writing.	Shukor and Noordin (2014)
Facebook is easy to use and can be used to write anytime anywhere.	Abdul Majid et al. (2012)
<b>Drawbacks</b>	
Distraction by chat invitations.	Yunus et al. 2011 Hani et al. 2014

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Use of impolite language by some Facebook users.

Nepomuceno, 2011  
Abrams, 2003

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### **Suggestions for maximizing Facebook benefits in ESL writing**

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions should be taken into consideration to maximize the benefits of using Facebook in the ESL writing outside class and minimize the drawbacks.

First, instructors should hold an orientation session for their students before asking them to participate in Facebook writing.

Second, instructors should choose topics for Facebook writing that are related the textbook. Moreover, the length and content of writing should rely on their students' level of English proficiency.

Third, instructors should pair each weaker student with a skilled student to work together outside the class. While collaborating among themselves via Facebook chat or face-to-face outside class, the skilled students will scaffold the weaker students and thus the weaker ones will benefit from them.

Fourth, instructors should make fluency the focus of Facebook writing rather than accuracy; in other words, they should ask their students not to worry about grammatical or spelling errors but to focus more on ideas and expressing their voice.

Fifth, instructors should involve their students to establish a code of ethics for Facebook writing where they take a pledge not to use impolite language with each other or other Facebook users. This is sometimes called netiquette, "Internet Etiquette" (Nepomuceno, 2011). The aim is to minimize the drawback of online writing in which impolite language might exist.

Sixth, instructors should also advise their students to spend their time wisely while being on Facebook and not to waste it on chat invitations, games, or similar distracters.

Finally, instructors should prepare a good rubric for evaluating students' Facebook writing and share it with them before Facebook writing starts so they know what is expected of them.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

**Limitations.** One limitation of our study is that it was not longitudinal in nature; it lasted for eight weeks only. In studies seeking participants' perceptions, such as the current study, it is recommended to do it over a whole academic year to allow a chance for such perceptions to be fully developed and allow the participants to be exposed to the treatment more deeply and thus they can articulately express their perceptions of it and state clear reasons why they think so. If such case happened, students could live the experience of Facebook writing outside class more fully and they could form deeply expressed perceptions of their Facebook writing. Moreover, they could provide good reasons and examples from that experience as to why they have such perceptions.

However, it was impossible to perform a longitudinal study in this institution because students have other numerous assignments, lab work, and practical workshop training in the engineering departments. Furthermore, students had to take four quizzes, a mid-term, and a final exam in this writing course, which lasts for one semester of 16 weeks. Thus, it was suitable to ask them to

engage in Facebook writing for half of the semester and do the questionnaire and interview before they get busy with final exams and other academic commitments.

Another limitation of the current study is that the participants' perceptions of the benefits of using Facebook in the ESL writing outside class was self-reported by the students and was not objectively and quantitatively measured. For example, the students reported that two of the benefits of using Facebook in writing were collaboration by exchanging ideas and vocabulary expressions related to writing topics and improvement of writing. Such claims were not quantitatively measured. However, this was outside the scope of the study.

**Suggestions for future research.** A qualitative study of female students' perceptions of using Facebook in the ESL writing outside class needs to be performed in a female college. In Saudi Arabia, co-education is not allowed at the tertiary level. Such a study is important and will shed light on similarities and differences between male and female perceptions of using Facebook in writing.

Another study involving a special platform for collaboration in the ESL writing, such as wikis, can be useful as well. Wikis are considered part of social media and are especially created for collaborative writing. Students can collaborate with each other before and while writing. Each student can write a part of it alone or more than one student can write a part or more of it. A study that aims to delineate the students' perceptions of using wikis for ESL writing outside class is also needed.

A quantitative study of using Facebook in the ESL writing outside class can also be performed to see if a large sample of students has similar views of the benefits of using Facebook for writing. In such a study, a big sample of students which is randomly selected, and representative of a target larger population is a must for generalizing results to that target population (Perry, 2011). For example, researchers may seek to find out the perceptions of Saudi engineering students of the use of Facebook in ESL writing outside class. In such a study, random sampling must be used, and issues related to representativeness of the target population, such as Saudi engineering students, must be satisfied and the random sample should be large enough—about 300 students or more—to make up for any sampling error and be reliable and valid for generalizations.

### **Conclusion**

This study reported the students' perceptions using of Facebook in the ESL writing outside class. Their perceptions reflected many benefits, such as: motivation to write, collaboration among students, improvement of writing, being a good medium to practice writing outside class, being less formal and providing a less-pressure atmosphere for writing, ease to use, and being able to write via Facebook anytime anywhere.

Moreover, one student attested to the drawback of distraction while Facebook writing. This distraction was caused by chat invitations from his friends. Another student bore witness to the disadvantage of sometimes using impolite language by some Facebook users to offend other users. Ten students reported six benefits for using Facebook in ESL writing outside class while only two students found only two drawbacks for its use in writing. These six benefits and the two drawbacks were reported by previous studies, such as: Hani et al. (2014); Khan & Ivy, (2014); Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi, (2012); Shukor and Noordin, (2014); Abdul Majid et al. (2012); Yunus et al. (2011); and Nepomuceno, (2011) respectively.

Thus, it is safe to say that the X students in this study had favorable perceptions of using Facebook in ESL writing outside class. Moreover, suggestions were offered to maximize the benefits of using Facebook in writing and minimize the two drawbacks reported above. To sum, Facebook can be recommended to be used for practicing ESL writing outside class especially if certain measures are taken to enhance its many benefits and avoid its two drawbacks.

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**Appendix A: Week 1 writing prompt**

**Write an entry of at least 250 words individually (your own writing)** about a compare/contrast essay on (write on only ONE topic per week):

1. High school vs. college.
2. Two cars of your choice.
3. Traveling by car vs. traveling by plane.

**You may collaborate with your classmates (discuss relevant ideas and vocabulary before and while writing) using (Facebook) FB Chat/Timeline or face to face outside the classroom in pairs or small groups.**

Clearly express your opinions, views and feelings about the topic.

Do Not worry about grammatical/spelling errors; this is a fluency rather than an accuracy activity.

**Week 8 writing prompt**

**Write an entry of at least 250 words individually (your own writing)** about an argumentative essay on (write on only ONE topic per week):

1. JIC students should be required to wear a uniform.
2. Attendance should be compulsory for college students.
3. JIC accommodation is a good place to live for students.

**You may collaborate with your classmates (discuss relevant ideas and vocabulary before and while writing) using (Facebook) FB Chat/Timeline or face to face outside the classroom in pairs or small groups.**

Clearly express your opinions, views and feelings about the topic.

Do Not worry about grammatical/spelling errors; this is a fluency rather than an accuracy activity.

For all the weekly writing prompts please visit:  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/613275272397930/>

**FB writing Rubric**

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
Content	Entries show no evidence of understanding or reflection on the topic.	Entries show minimal evidence of understanding and reflection on the topic.	Entries show moderate evidence of understanding and reflection on the topic.	Entries show good evidence of understanding and reflection on the topic.	Entries show comprehensive evidence of understanding and reflection on the topic.
Post Frequency	Post frequency is far below expectation.	Post frequency is a bit below expectation.	Post frequency is at expectation.	Post frequency is a bit above expectation.	Post frequency is well above expectation.
Post length	Post length is far below 250 words.	Post length is a bit below 250 words.	Post length is at 250 words.	Post length is a bit above 250 words.	Post length is well above 250 words.
Voice	Entries do not reflect the writer's personality.	Entries reflect a bit of the writer's personality.	Entries reflect some aspects of the writer's personality.	Entries reflect many aspects of the writer's personality.	Entries reflect the writer's unique personality.

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audience	Entries show no awareness of the audience.	Entries show a bit of awareness of the audience.	Entries show more awareness of the audience.	Entries show much awareness of the audience.	Entries show full awareness of the audience.
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**Appendix B: Questionnaire**  
**Post FB-writing questionnaire**

إستبيان ما بعد الكتابة بـفيسبوك

<u>Questionnaire</u>	<u>إستبيان</u>
<b><u>Answer the following questions in detail. Give as many reasons and examples as you can from your Facebook (FB) writing experience:</u></b>	<b><u>أجب على الأسئلة التالية بالتفصيل . اذكر الاسباب والأمثلة على قدر استطاعتك من خلال تجربتك في الكتابة عن طريق فيسبوك:</u></b>
1- What are your perceptions of the use of FB for out-of-class ESL writing? ..... ..... ..... .....	1- ما هي وجهة نظرك في استخدام فيسبوك للكتابة (باللغة الانجليزية كلغه ثانيه) خارج الفصل الدراسي؟ ..... ..... ..... .....
2-What are your perceptions of the benefits and advantages of FB in ESL writing? ..... ..... ..... .....	2- ما هي فوائد واجبايات فيسبوك في الكتابة (باللغة الانجليزية كلغه ثانيه) من وجهة نظرك؟ ..... ..... ..... .....
3- Why does FB motivate you to write? If you do not think so, why not? ..... ..... ..... .....	3- لماذا يحفزك فيسبوك للكتابة؟وإذا لا تعتقد ذلك لماذا لا؟ ..... ..... ..... .....
4- How does FB make you collaborate with your colleagues outside the classroom? If you do not think so, why not? ..... ..... ..... .....	4- كيف يجعلك فيسبوك تتعاون أكثر مع زملائك خارج الفصل الدراسي؟ وإذا لا تعتقد ذلك لماذا لا؟ ..... ..... ..... .....
5- Why is FB effective for improving writing? (i.e., with time make writing better) If you do not think so, why not? ..... ..... ..... .....	5- لماذا الفيسبوك وسيله فعاله لتحسين الكتابة؟ (مع الوقت تجعل الكتابة أفضل) وإذا لا تعتقد ذلك لماذا لا؟ ..... ..... ..... .....

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..... .....	
6- Why do you prefer the less formal nature of FB to the more formal atmosphere of the classroom? If you do not prefer so, why not? ..... ..... ..... .....	6- لماذا تفضل الطبيعه الأقل رسميه للفيس بوك على الجو الأكثر رسميه فى الفصل الدراسى؟ و اذا لا تفضل ذلك لماذا لا؟ ..... ..... ..... .....
7- What are your perceptions of the drawbacks and disadvantages of using FB in ESL writing? ..... ..... .....	7- ما هى مساوئ وسلبيات فيس بوك فى الكتابه (باللغه الانجليزيه كلغه ثانيه) من وجهه نظرك؟ ..... ..... .....
8- How do you sometimes waste your time on gaming and chat while FB-writing? If you do not think so, why not? ..... ..... .....	8- كيف تضبيع وقتك أحيانا فى الألعاب والشات بينما تكتب عن طريق فيس بوك؟ و اذا لا تعتقد ذلك لماذا لا؟ ..... ..... .....
9- Why do you sometimes use impolite language while writing or commenting via FB? If you do not think so, why not? ..... ..... .....	9- لماذا تستخدم أحيانا لغه غير مهذبه اثناء كتاباتك أو تعليقاتك عن طريق فيس بوك؟ و اذا لا تعتقد ذلك لماذا لا؟ ..... ..... .....
10- Would you prefer to use FB for ESL writing outside class in the future? Why/why not? ..... ..... .....	10- هل تفضل استخدام فيس بوك مستقبلا فى الكتابه (باللغه الانجليزيه كلغه ثانيه) خارج الفصل الدراسى؟ لماذا/لماذا لا؟ ..... ..... .....

**Appendix C**

**Semi-structured interview**

مقابله	
<b>Answer the following questions in detail, give as many reasons and examples as you can from your Facebook (FB) writing experience:</b>	أجب بالتفصيل على الأسئلة الآتية وأذكر الأسباب والامثلة قدر استطاعتك من خلال تجربتك في الكتابة بـفيسبوك:
1- What are your perceptions of the use of FB for out-of-class ESL writing?	1- ما هي وجهة نظرك في استخدام فيسبوك للكتابة (باللغة الانجليزية كلغه ثانيه) خارج الفصل الدراسي؟
2-What are your perceptions of the benefits and advantages of FB in ESL writing?	2- ما هي فوائد واجابيات فيسبوك في الكتابة (باللغة الانجليزية كلغه ثانيه) من وجهة نظرك؟
3- What are your perceptions of the drawbacks and disadvantages of using FB in ESL writing?	3- ما هي مساوئ وسلبيات فيسبوك في الكتابة (باللغة الانجليزية كلغه ثانيه) من وجهة نظرك؟
4- Would you prefer to use FB for ESL writing outside class in the future? Why/why not?	4- هل تفضل استخدام فيسبوك مستقبلا في الكتابة (باللغة الانجليزية كلغه ثانيه) خارج الفصل الدراسي؟ لماذا/لماذا لا؟
<b>Open-ended prompt</b>	<b>سؤال مفتوح</b>
5- If you have any other comments on using out-of-class FB for ESL writing, add these please.	5- اذا كانت لديك اى تعليقات اخرى حول استخدام فيسبوك خارج الفصل الدراسي للكتابة (باللغة الانجليزية كلغه ثانيه) أضفها من فضلك.

**Appendix D Translation of questionnaire answers to items 1 2 7 10**

Student number	1- What are your perceptions of the use of FB for out-of-class ESL writing?	2-What are your perceptions of the benefits and advantages of FB in ESL writing?	7- What are your perceptions of the drawbacks and disadvantages of using FB in ESL writing?	10- Would you prefer to use FB for ESL writing outside class in the future? Why/why not?
S1	I believe FB writing is an innovative and excellent medium for writing. It was useful for me; however, it needs to be more organized/controlled by the instructor.	Writing with speed and in a better and easier way via computer (than paper and pencil).	There is no drawback. I wish there were more options where examples of writing are shown related to the writing prompt /assignment.	Yes because it is a useful medium for collaborating and sharing essays with the group (classmates); this is an interesting and sociable activity.
S2	I consider FB writing to be a very good idea.	FB provides an opportunity and a space to practice writing outside class. It has	FB may be used sometimes by some users to offend/flame others with impolite language or	Yes as it motivated me to write; but not always because of other commitments to other study subjects

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		features such as ease of editing and correcting your text (writing).	comments.	that take much time.
S3	FB writing is a beautiful and convenient medium for writing as it allows me to choose the suitable time to write my essay.	FB has many benefits for writing as it is convenient, easy to use and allows students to pick the best time for them to write.	I see no drawback in FB writing.	It is very possible because it improved my writing. If I need to write, I'll choose FB without hesitation.
S4	I think FB writing is an amazing idea as I benefit from others' (classmates') writing and their ideas.	FB does not have formalities or pressures of the class. I can log in FB at anytime I choose and it is very easy to use and there is no time limit for writing.	There are no disadvantages in FB writing. I think some chat invitations may distract me sometimes. Also, twitter became more wide-spread (in Saudi Arabia) than FB.	Of course, I will use FB for writing if I need to. It made me motivated to write under no pressures outside class.
S5	FB writing is very good and useful especially for students.	FB writing helps a lot with increasing students' ideas via collaboration and exchanging ideas with classmates and helps me and other students organize our writing.	No disadvantages; sometimes FB takes a long time to write.	Yes, I prefer to use FB for writing in the future as it improved my writing.
S6	FB writing is a great idea in higher education (universities) as it helps me and my classmates improve our writing and English proficiency. It is considered one of the best apps to learn and improve writing.	FB has many benefits for writing; it helps improve my writing and develops my English generally and provides me with an opportunity to practice writing in English.	There are no disadvantages for FB writing.	Yes because FB provides me with a chance to practice writing in English.
S7	FB writing makes me participate, collaborate and share (ideas and writing) with my classmates. I can	I think FB writing makes me get and exchange various ideas and collaborate with classmates. FB	No drawbacks for FB writing.	Yes because FB allows for participation, collaboration and practice in writing.

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	use FB at any time and place as it is on the Internet.	provides a less formal and so less pressured environment (than in class) and the idea of creating open writing groups is very good.		
S8	FB writing is a good and somehow new medium for writing. It is also amusing and easy to use. I and other students can get to know and exchange many ideas.	FB offers many benefits for writing for example I can write at the time I choose with no time limits (as in class). Moreover, I can read my classmates' essays to benefit from these and improve my own writing. Finally, it is very easy to use FB for writing especially via the mobile phone.	I see no drawbacks. However, some students who are not honest with themselves can copy and paste their essays from the Internet or ask another person to write the essays for them.	Yes I will use FB for writing in the future and I prefer to because I have enough time to write (no time limit as in class). In addition, I can choose the right time for me to write. Finally, I can read others' essays and benefit from these.
S9	I believe FB writing is an excellent medium for writing. I can participate and share ideas with others. FB has a spell-check feature too.	FB has many benefits for writing such as collaborating and sharing ideas and information with classmates. It helps a lot to see my classmates' essays as examples for me before I write; this developed my writing and made it better and more organized.	I do not think FB has any disadvantages for writing.	Yes I strongly support using FB for writing in the future because it helps learn and improve writing quickly. Moreover, I can write whenever I like and I can read my classmates' writings as examples for me before I write.
S10	In my point of view, FB writing is a new and innovative medium for writing. Moreover, it helps develop writing and English in general.	FB writing has many advantages such as reading essays for other students and learning from these which improved my writing.	In my view, I think the only disadvantage is that FB is not widely used for writing and education; it is more used for social purposes.	Yes, I prefer to use FB for writing in the future as it developed and improved my essay writing.

**Appendix E Summary of questionnaire answers items 3,4,5,6,8,9**

Questionnaire item	Summary of students' answers
3- Why does FB motivate you to write? If you do not think so, why not?	FB motivate me to write more because it is easier than using paper and pencil and is a social media app that is more fun than the class.
4- How does FB make you collaborate with your colleagues outside the classroom? If you do not think so, why not?	FB encourages me to collaborate and interact with my classmates to exchange ideas and vocabulary expressions related to the writing topic.
5- Why is FB effective for improving writing? (i.e., with time make writing better) If you do not think so, why not?	FB is effective for improving writing because I read my classmates' essays first and know my mistakes by comparing my essay to theirs. I also learn new ideas and how to organize my writing better.
6- Why do you prefer the less formal nature of FB to the more formal atmosphere of the classroom? If you do not prefer so, why not?	FB writing outside class put me under no pressure; there is no time limit for writing, I can write whenever and wherever I want. However, in class, it can be boring, I have to wear the college uniform and the instructor requires us to finish writing in a specific time period.
8- How do you sometimes waste your time on gaming and chat while FB-writing? If you do not think so, why not?	Eight students denied wasting their time by chat or games and they said the reason was they focused on the writing assignment to finish it. Only two students admitted they sometimes get distracted and waste their time by chat and games.
9- Why do you sometimes use impolite language while writing or commenting via FB? If you do not think so, why not?	Students denied using impolite language while on FB and said this depended on one's upbringing. One student said some users of FB offend others with impolite language sometimes because their real identity is not known on FB.

**Appendix F Translation of interview transcripts**

Student number	1- What are your perceptions of the use of FB for out-of-class ESL writing?	2-What are your perceptions of the benefits and advantages of FB in ESL writing?	3- What are your perceptions of the drawbacks and disadvantages of using FB in ESL writing?	4- Would you prefer to use FB for ESL writing outside class in the future? Why/why not?	5- If you have any other comments on using out-of-class FB for ESL writing, add these please.
S1	FB writing is an excellent medium for writing. It was beneficial for me.	FB helped me write with speed using the keyboard than using	There is no drawback. However, I believe FB features can be improved to	Yes as this medium enabled me to participate, collaborate and share	FB is a good medium for writing. In addition, there is another

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		paper and pencil. Moreover, keyboard writing looked clearer (more legible) than my handwriting and easier to use.	include more options where examples of writing are shown based on the writing assignment.	essays with my classmates.	social media application that can be used for writing called blogs.
S2	I think FB writing is a very good practice and helped me enrich my ideas about writing.	FB writing gave me a chance to compare myself to my classmates and evaluate my writing in relation to theirs. This made my writing improve. Moreover, FB features enabled editing and correcting my writing.	Some users of FB may use provocative or impolite language or write provocative and personally offensive comments on your writing.	Yes because it motivated me to write; but not for extended time because I have other subjects to attend to.	FB is used for writing and can be used to discuss other beneficial topics and subjects as well.
S3	FB writing is a suitable and convenient medium for writing as it allows me to choose the right time and place for me to write my essay.	FB is a good medium for writing as it allows students to pick the best time for them to write. In addition, there is no time limit for writing as in class. If you are not active socially on FB, you can use it for	Frankly, I see no drawback in FB writing.	It is very possible to use it as it improved my writing. However, people are using it more for social purposes.	No comment.

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		educational purposes such as writing without distraction by chat invitations from family and friends.			
S4	I think FB writing is a great and excellent idea that was of huge benefit for me and my classmates and made us write at ease without pressure.	I learned a lot from FB writing as I practiced writing and read my classmates' essays to learn more ideas and expressions from them. This improved my writing. Moreover, I could write via FB at anytime and anywhere as well.	Generally, there are no disadvantages but sometimes some users send invitations for chat, upload videos and other similar things that may distract me.	Of course, I will use FB for writing as it is useful and gives me good writing practice outside class.	No comment.
S5	FB writing is a very convenient medium for writing as it takes me and other students away from the atmosphere of the class (sometimes boring) and gives us positive energy.	FB helped enrich my ideas via collaborating and discussing topics of writing with my classmates. In addition, FB made me read their essays. I learned how to organize paragraphs and essays from my classmates' writing. My	I faced no problems while writing via FB; I believe there are no disadvantages.	Yes, I will use FB for writing in the future as it developed and improved my writing.	No comment.

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		writing improved as a result to this.			
S6	FB writing is the best app/program for writing as it helped me and my classmates improve our writing as it gave us more practice of writing than in class.	FB gave me a chance to practice writing in English outside class. Moreover, I collaborate with my classmates and exchanged points of view and ideas on the different writing topics. Also, it is a good opportunity to learn about writing in a better way (than in class).	In my opinion, there are no drawbacks for FB writing.	Yes, if I want to get a good practice writing in English, I will use FB.	No comment.
S7	FB shakes the atmosphere of class, provides a more comfortable medium for writing where there are no pressures; no time limits for writing. I can choose the time and place for FB writing such as at home or in my favorite café or near the cornice or even in the street.	FB enabled me to collaborate, exchange and get various ideas from my classmates. Moreover, my classmates' writings were good examples for me to learn from especially new vocabulary and	No drawbacks for FB writing. However, I hope to see more features in FB such as auto-correcting indentations, spaces between paragraphs, etc to make writing even easier.	Yes it is possible to use FB for writing in the future as it allowed for collaboration and sharing ideas with classmates; however, in Saudi Arabia, it is not commonly used for educational purposes such as writing in English.	FB will continue to be used for writing but I think other apps/platforms maybe created for writing with more collaboration/interaction features.

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		expressions. This eventually developed and improved my writing.			
S8	FB writing is a new medium for writing. It is easy to use. I learned other useful ideas from my classmates' writings that helped me in my writing.	The best FB benefit is that I can write at any time and place I choose. Moreover, I can read my classmates' essays to benefit from them which made my writing better. Finally, it is very easy to use my cell phone to write via FB.	The only drawback is that some dishonest students use the Internet (copy and paste essays from websites) or ask another person to write the essays for them.	Yes because I can choose the best time to write and I can read others' essays to benefit from them. Moreover, FB is a very convenient and easy medium for writing.	No comment.
S9	I think FB writing is fun and useful. It breaks the routine (of class). Moreover, it helped me know more ideas and vocabulary for writing topics via my classmates' writings.	FB made me collaborate with classmates to share ideas about the writing topics. By reading their essays, my writing improved and became more organized. Moreover, FB writing is more comfortable and poses no pressures for me, no time limits	I think FB has no disadvantages for writing.	Yes I will because, as I said, it breaks the routine of the class and enabled me to participate and share ideas and learn about my classmates' ideas expressed in their writings.	No comment.

		for writing as in class.			
S10	FB helped me develop and improve my writing as I read and learned from my classmates' essays. As I read those essays, I realized and corrected the mistakes in my writing.	FB writing is better than writing in class as the class atmosphere is more formal and has time limits for writing while FB is less formal and has no time limits for writing. Moreover, I can interact, collaborate and consult with my classmates about the writing topics in a relaxed atmosphere	There are no drawbacks. However, FB is not widely used for writing and education (in Saudi Arabia); it is used more for social purposes.	Yes, I will because it provided me with good practice for writing and as a result, my writing improved.	No comment.

**Appendix G Some participant observations notes**

**Sunday Jan 28, 2018:** All the students in this English III composition ELC 103 class are familiar with Facebook (FB) and are motivated to use it. However, they used it for social rather than educational purposes. We think of holding a training session for them this week to familiarize them with FB for ESL writing and to show them how to join our already created open writing group. We will ask them to name this group as well.

**Tuesday Jan 30, 2018:** the training session for FB ESL writing was held today at the ELI lab 101 on the first floor. The students were motivated to use FB for ESL writing. They love social media especially FB for connecting with each other. This can give them positive energy to connect together and collaborate in exchanging ideas and expressions about the writing topics. They also liked the idea of writing outside class as this will free them from class formalities and time limits for writing. They chose the name “ELC 103 writing” for the FB open writing group; similar to the name of the course!

**Wednesday February 7, 2018:** Today, we gave students some feedback on their FB writing and they gave us their feedback on this FB writing experience in the first week of eight weeks where they participate in weekly FB writing outside class. Generally, they are enthusiastic about this experience; one student said “ FB is a new and good medium for practicing writing”. Another one said “FB writing is fun and a break away from the class pressure”.

**Thursday February 15, 2018:** Students' feedback in their second week of the weekly writing via FB outside class is positive. One student said: "It's a great idea for shy or introvert students who don't participate in class as they are afraid to do so before their instructor and classmates. Now, FB offers these a wonderful chance to participate and write without being shy". Another student said: "I like the fact that the writing topics have three options to choose from, we have to write on one topic of our choice out of three".

**Tuesday February 20, 2018:** this is week 3 of the students' writing on FB outside class. One student commented on FB writing by saying: "Don't get me wrong I like FB writing; however, I think you (the instructors/researchers) need to organize and control it more; I feel you leave everything to students to collaborate, ask each other and write all by themselves. I think you (instructors/researchers) should also provide examples of good essays written by you and include these with the writing assignment on FB, to guide the students more in their writing". We think this student just likes things more structured and controlled by teachers! Bit by bit, he will get used to working more autonomously. We will encourage him and give him positive feedback to continue writing and collaborate with his classmates outside class without depending on us.

**Wednesday February 28, 2018:** this is week 4 of the students' writing on FB outside class. In class, we give students feedback on their outside-class writing and they also give us feedback on their writing experience. One student said: "I believe FB writing is a very interesting idea but I think only us in this class use FB for ESL writing; everyone else in Saudi Arabia uses FB for connecting with family and friends".

**Tuesday March 6, 2018:** this is week 5 of the students' writing on FB outside class. One student commented on FB writing by saying: "I try to be focused and finish writing in one hour but some friends send me chat invitations and I talk with them and I discover that I spent three hours on FB and still didn't finish the writing assignment".

**Wednesday March 14, 2018:** this is week 6 of the students' writing on FB outside class. One student said: "I like FB writing outside class as it allows me to write whenever and wherever I choose. I use my smart phone to write as I have the FB app on my phone. I can also write quickly on my mobile keyboard. I like writing in Sarbucks café in Galleria Mall here in Jubail".

**Thursday March 22, 2018:** This is week 7 of the students' writing on FB outside class. One student said, in comment of the weekly writing outside class "I will continue to use FB for ESL writing even after we finish this composition course because FB writing gave me more ideas by reading my classmates' essays and developed and improved my writing. I feel my writing now is better and more organized than my writing two months ago before I start the FB weekly writing".

**Thursday March 29, 2018:** this is week 8 (the last week) of the students' writing on FB outside class. One student commented: "FB writing made me participate and exchange ideas and vocabulary about the writing assignment with my classmates via FB chat. This made my writing improve. Also, I read my classmates' essays and learned from these how to write better and organize my writing too".

**Appendix H Student consent form**

**Letter of Informed Consent**

Dear Student,

My name is Ahmed Al-Shlowiy; my research partner's name is Khaled Layali. We are completing a research study in the area of teaching and learning English. This study involves understanding the perceptions of the students of the English Language Institute (ELI) of Jubail Industrial College (JIC) on the use of Facebook (FB) in ESL writing outside class.

As part of your regular English course, you will be asked to complete a 10-item questionnaire on your perceptions of the use of FB in ESL writing outside class after completing eight weeks of out-of-class FB ESL writing. You will also be interviewed individually after completing the questionnaire via an audio-recorded interview.

It will take you approximately 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire and 15 minutes each to complete the interview. Your responses to these measures will be completely anonymous. Your name will not be on any of the documents. You will be identified only by a number. Only I and my research partner will have access to these measures, and they will be destroyed after the study is completed.

There is no risk to you greater than what you would experience when you take any other test of English. There is no direct benefit to you other than the fact that this is a part of your English learning experience. Although you are required to attend your regular English course, you may request that your information from these measures not be used in the research if at any time you feel uncomfortable.

You may request a summary of the aggregate results of the study once the study has been completed. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at [shlowiy\\_a@jic.edu.sa](mailto:shlowiy_a@jic.edu.sa); alternatively, you may contact my research partner at [klayali@alliant.edu](mailto:klayali@alliant.edu).

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have read and understood this consent form, and that I will receive a copy of the form.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_