

## **OMG (*Oh My Grade*)! Social Networking Sites Ruin My Academic Grades?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The future generation's competency in the English language is highly dependent on the performance of our very own TESL students as they are the future English language teachers who can make all the differences. Hence, any issues that might jeopardise their performance can never be taken lightly. This research was carried out to investigate whether TESL students' addiction to social networking sites (SNSs) influences their academic performance. A survey questionnaire method was used to gather data from 93 Semester 8 TESL students from the Faculty of Education, UiTM Shah Alam. The SPSS version 16.0 was used to analyse data. Despite initial prediction that student addiction towards SNSs is related to their academic performance, this study found no significant relationship between the two aforementioned variables. The finding contradicts several other studies on the relationship between SNSs addiction and academic achievement.

*Keywords:* Social networking sites (SNSs), internet addiction, academic performance

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social networking sites (SNSs), as defined by Boyd & Ellison (2008) are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1)

construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. In particular, SNSs are websites or applications (app) that can be accessed on various devices that allow users to get instant updates from anyone in their contact list, be it in the form of newsfeed, tweets, status updates, picture uploads,

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comments on the 'Wall' and the list goes on.

It has been observed that students tend to be logged on to SNSs while doing any tasks or assignments through the multiple devices they possess. Despite the common scenario where students would browse through their smartphones to check for the latest updates on their SNSs accounts while listening to lectures, we do not know whether academic grades are affected, particularly that of TESL students. The SNSs could serve as a tool to enable instructors and students to communicate virtually regarding academic matters. The website edudemic.com provides useful information on the positive use of social media in education. Any academic-related announcements and information could be made available on the SNSs, especially Facebook.

However, heavy usage of SNSs could have an adverse effect on students' academic performance. This claim is supported by several studies that have been conducted previously (Karpinski & Duberstein, 2009; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Ahsan ul Haq & Sohail Chand, 2012; Junco, 2012; Glass *et al.*, 2013). Nevertheless, there are always two sides of a coin; there are studies that show use of SNSs does not have negative effects on academic performance (Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Martin, 2009; Syarif Husin *et al.*, 2011; and Moon, 2011) which means addiction to SNSs is not related to Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA).

In any case, when it concerns TESL students and their academic grades, the stake is higher. TESL students are future English teachers who *must* perform well and

to become effective English teachers. They are responsible for imparting good English language skills to our young generation. In 2013, it was reported in the news that two-thirds of the English language teachers in the country are not competent to teach English (*The Star*, 11 Sept 2013). This was not a finding from armchair research but information gleaned from the Education Ministry. Of the 60,000 English language teachers who took the Cambridge Placement Test in 2012, only 20,000 passed the test. Passing the test in this context means that the teachers possess the accepted standards to teach English. The findings of this study are for relevant parties such as the scholarship providers and the Ministry of Education.

This study aims to examine the relationship between students' addiction to SNSs and their academic performance. In particular, the study is conducted to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To investigate the frequency of SNSs usage among TESL students
2. To investigate the level of SNSs addiction among TESL students
3. To investigate the influence of SNSs addiction on TESL students' academic achievement or performance

The hypothesis of the present study is, students who spend too much time on SNSs tend to possess lower Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) compared with those who do not spend as much time on SNSs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a likelihood students who are obsessed and addicted to SNSs tend to neglect studies although they do not intend to do so in the first place. That is due to the fact that sometimes, students tend to get carried away with everything that SNSs have in store for them leading to the negligence of everything else that is outside of their online world. Being overly obsessed with SNSs has somehow made people to become out of touch with reality to such an extent that everything around them is affected, including job as well as school performance (Brick, 2008). In addition, students also tend to avoid academic affairs when they are connected to SNSs. According to CBS News (2008), University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) reported students busily typing on their laptops and logging onto Facebook are a very common scenario. By getting connected to the site, students are more likely to avoid or neglect their academic matters. According to Dr. Jerald Brock, a psychiatrist who treats patients who use the Internet excessively, this is because people are trying to extend their sense of identity and their sense of self by being connected to Facebook.

In an exploratory study conducted by Karpinski & Duberstein (2009), it was found that Facebook use negatively affects students' academic performance in that higher usage leads to lower academic performance as measured by grades and hours spent studying per week. Using the same data set, Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) noted a similar finding in which Facebook

use affect students' academic achievement and this is measured using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the study, the examination results of Facebook users are significantly lower than nonusers and this is evident through their CGPA. In this study, the users' GPA average is 3.06 while the nonusers' average is 3.82. It is clear the GPA gap is significant (0.76) which could determine whether a particular student will be graduating with First Class honours or Second Class honours. Researchers have also found that Facebook users spend fewer hours per week studying on average than non-Facebook users. Interestingly, according to qualitative data, a majority of students reported that Facebook use does not have a negative impact on their academic performance. Others on the other hand reported its use impacts on their academic performance which include procrastination, poor time management skills and the tendency to put off studying.

A study supports the claim that the use of social networking sites has an adverse effect on students' academic performance (Glass *et al.*, 2013). In the study, students self-report the number of hours they spend on Facebook a day. The study involved 255 freshmen and junior college students at a private university in the northeast United States. It yielded a similar finding as the preceding studies (Karpinski & Duberstein, 2009; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010) in which the amount of time students spent on Facebook was found to negatively affect their self-reported academic performance. It was consistent with the findings by

Ahsan ul Haq & Sohail Chand (2012) who found an adverse effect of Facebook use on students' academic achievement and it appear to have a more negative effect on male students. Congruent with findings by the studies above, the research conducted by Junco (2012) also found that the time spent on Facebook is strongly and significantly negatively related to overall GPA.

Conversely, Kolek & Saunders (2008) reported contradictory findings . In this particular study, they found that correlation does not exist between Facebook use and students' GPA. Martin (2009) has conducted similar research and found no significant relationship between the amount of time spent by students on social media and their grades. In the study, the grades of heavy Facebook users as well as light Facebook users were measured. It is found that among the heavy Facebook users, 62% received high grades and 38% received low grades, and the grade percentage among light users showed an exact similar pattern. A similar finding was reported by Syarif Husin *et al.* (2011) among 78 third-year Biomedical Science students in Faculty of Health Sciences, University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in which they conclude that the students' CGPA is not significantly associated with the time spent on Facebook. Likewise, Moon (2011) who studied 400 undergraduate students using a Web-based survey reported that there is no strong relationship or correlation between Facebook use and students' academic performance. In Moon's study, Facebook use is measured by hours spent on the site and

academic performance is measured using students' GPA. Given the two contradictory findings, this paper is keen to investigate how the TESL students' academic grades are influenced by the use of SNSs.

## METHODOLOGY

The target population of this study is TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) students at the Faculty of Education, UiTM Section 17, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. The sample was chosen using purposive sampling. In a purposive sample, researchers knowingly select individuals based on their knowledge of the population and in order to elicit data in which they are interested in (Mackey and Gass, 2005: 122). For this study, the participants selected were Semester 8 TESL students of the Faculty of Education, UiTM. The researcher's insider knowledge of the population was that they were computer literate and have at least one SNS account.

This research is quantitative in nature and data was obtained through survey questionnaire method. The purpose of the questionnaire is to elicit information regarding the samples' demographic data, their level of addiction towards SNSs as well as their current academic performance. The questionnaire is divided into three sections or parts. Section 1 was related to Demography consisting of three questions on gender, CGPA range and specific CGPA results. Section 2 consisted of four questions aimed at eliciting the respondents' frequency of SNSs usage. The respondents were required to tick the appropriate boxes provided.

Section 3 consisted of 20 questions meant to elicit student information pertaining to their levels of addiction towards SNSs. Questions from this section were adapted from The Internet Addiction Test (IAT) (1998), the first validated measures for Internet addiction developed by Dr. Kimberly Young.

The information on total number of students in the population was obtained from the main office of the Faculty of Education, UiTM Section 17, Shah Alam and 120 questionnaires were distributed; only 93 were returned. The respondents took three weeks to complete and return the questionnaires.

Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0 was used to analyse the quantitative data obtained in this study. The demographic details and the SNSs usage frequency were analysed using descriptive statistics in order to obtain both the frequency and percentage for data. Data pertaining to the influence of SNSs addiction on students' academic achievement was analysed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Pearson correlation coefficient functions as a tool that is used to analyse the relationship between variables in a research. Using Pearson correlation coefficient, both the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables were determined. The variables' relationship strength was determined by the Pearson correlation value. Values ranging between .10 to .29 indicate the relationship as "Small". Values ranging between .30 to .49 indicate the relationship as "Medium", and for values ranging

between .50 to 1.0 indicate the relationship as "Large". Regardless of the sign in front of the value, whether it is a negative or a positive, the strength for both  $r = .5$  and  $r = -.5$ , for example, is the same. The positive and negative signs in front of the value will determine its direction (Cohen, 1988).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses salient findings from data presented in table forms.

TABLE 1  
CGPA

	Frequency	Percent
3.50-4.00	27	29.0
3.00-3.49	60	64.5
2.50-2.99	4	4.3
2.00-2.49	2	2.2
Total	93	100.0

From the table above, it can be seen that 27 students (29%) have CGPA ranging from 3.50-4.00. It is also very apparent that the CGPA range of 3.00-3.49 is the one with the most number of students, which are 60 (64.5%). There are four students (4.3%) who possess CGPA ranging from 2.50-2.49. The least number of students, which is only 2 (2.2%), possesses CGPA ranging from 2.00-2.49.

Based on Table 2, the mean of Semester 8 TESL students' CGPA is 3.38, which falls under the second CGPA range, 3.00-3.49. Nevertheless, the mean is based on only 74 out of 93 participants as the remaining students did not indicate their specific CGPA.

TABLE 2  
Mean of CGPA

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CGPA2	74	2.47	3.78	3.3836	.27558
Valid N (listwise)	74				

TABLE 3  
SNSs Ownership

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	93	100.0

It is found that 93 students (100%) own at least one SNS account. This shows that SNSs are widely used among Semester 8 TESL students. Facebook seems to be the most popular SNS as all the respondents have a Facebook account.

TABLE 4  
Weekly Usage

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Everyday	78	83.9
	2-3 times per week	13	14.0
	once a week	2	2.2
	Total	93	100.0

From the above table, it is shown that 78 students (83.9%) log in to any of their accounts every day. It can also be seen that 13 students (14%) log in to any of their accounts 2-3 times per week. Only two students (2.2%) responded that they only log in to any of their accounts once a week.

TABLE 5  
Usage Duration Per Session

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	21-24 hours	5	5.4
	17-20 hours	3	3.2
	13-16 hours	7	7.5
	9-12 hours	5	5.4
	5-8 hours	22	23.7
	1-4 hours	38	40.9
	<1 hour	13	14.0
	Total	93	100.0

As for the usage duration per session, it was found that it ranges ranging between 1-4 hours, with a total of 38 students (40.9%). The number of students whose usage duration ranged between 5-8 hours was 22 (23.7%). There were 13 students (14%) whose usage duration was less than one hour per session. There were seven students (7.5%) whose usage duration per session ranged between 13-16 hours, five students (5.4%) for both durations ranging between 9-12 hours and 21-24 hours, and finally, there were three students (3.2%) whose usage duration ranging between 17-20 hours per session.

TABLE 6  
Level of Addiction

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	low	51	54.8
	average	37	39.8
	high	5	5.4
	Total	93	100.0

Twenty items were outlined in the questionnaire in order to determine the respondents' level of addiction towards SNSs. There were three scales for the 20 in which the first scale was labelled 'Rarely/ Does not apply', the second was labelled 'Frequently' and the third was labelled



'Always'. The maximum score a respondent could get was 60 while the minimum was 20. Thus, in order to determine the level of addiction, the difference between the maximum and minimum score was calculated, which was 40, and it was further divided into three categories representing three different levels of addiction. As for those who scored between 20 and 33, they fell under 'Low addiction' group. For those who scored between 34 and 46, they fell under 'Average addiction' group, and for those who scored between 47 and 60, they fell under 'High addiction' group.

In the table above, it is apparent that a majority of Semester 8 TESL students were not severely addicted to SNSs because more than half, 51 out of 93 students (54.8%), possessed low addiction to SNSs. Thirty seven (37) students (39.8%) possessed average level of addiction. Remarkably, only five students had high addiction level towards SNSs.

TABLE 7  
Correlation between Addiction and CGPA

		addict
CGPA2	Pearson Correlation	-.167
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.154
	N	74

The correlations between students' CGPA and their addiction towards SNSs were calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Addiction in this case was treated as ratio variable using students' total mean score summed from the 20 items in the questionnaire. From the above table, it is shown that the correlation

coefficient between CGPA and addiction is .167, indicating that there is no relationship between students' CGPA and their addiction level to SNSs. The strength is obviously insignificant with the total score of 0.154. Hence, it can be concluded that there is no relationship between SNSs addiction and students' academic achievement, and the level was also insignificant.

This study has succeeded in achieving all the research objectives. As for the first research objective which was to investigate the frequency of SNSs usage among TESL students, it was found the student usage is moderately frequent based on the moderate duration per session of a majority of the students despite the fact that they log in to their accounts on a daily basis. In particular, a majority of students connect only between one and 4 hours per session and a minority connect for long hours (17-20 hours) per session. Other than that, the number of students who log on to their accounts once a week is very small. This finding showed that the TESL students' usage of SNSs is moderately frequent as a majority of them get connected to SNSs for short hours only. This could imply that a majority of the students do have their limitations when it comes to getting connected on the SNSs.

As for the second objective which was to investigate the level of SNSs addiction among TESL students, it was found a majority of the TESL students are not severely addicted to SNSs, indicating that only a minority is highly addicted. It can be concluded the majority of the TESL students in this study are not addicted to the SNSs

despite the fact that more than 80% of them use it daily. This usage may be to fin family members' status in the Facebook. Although a majority of these students do use SNSs on a daily basis, they are not addicted to them implying these students could still manage their time pretty well.

Finally, the third research objective, which was to investigate the influence of SNSs addiction on TESL students' academic achievement, has also been achieved. It was found SNSs addiction has no influence on student achievement. This was proven through the calculation using the Pearson correlation coefficient in which it could be clearly seen that there was relationship between student addiction and their academic achievement. Additionally, the strength was also insignificant which demonstrates that the two variables are not related in any way. A finding which can further support and solidify this are the students' mean of CGPA, which is 3.38, and the CGPA range possessed by a majority of the students is between 3.00-3.49, and only a minority possesses CGPA ranging from 2.00-2.49. Semester 8 students are already students in their final semester and, in this context, over 90% of the students managed to retain CGPAs over 3.00. This suggests the students are academically successful as well as connected on their SNSs of choice. Their academic grades are not negatively affected by the amount of time they spend on the SNS.

Based on the discussion above, the findings of this are not parallel to the researcher's initial hypothesis. In fact, the

findings contradict other research which show SNSs use has an adverse effect on the student academic achievement (Karpinski & Duberstein, 2009; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Ahsan ul Haq & Sohail Chand, 2012; Junco, 2012; Glass *et al.*, 2013). The finding of this study that indicates an insignificant relationship between SNSs use and academic achievement is instead parallel with previous researches such as Kolek & Saunders (2008), Martin (2009), Syarif Husin *et al.* (2011), and Moon (2011). In these studies, the researchers found that SNSs use has no significant relationship with student academic achievement. This study clearly shows a similar finding and contributes to the literature, particularly in the context of TESL students, which, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, is not yet available. Based on these findings, this study posits that the TESL students' use of SNSs, either as addicted user or non-addicted user, does not influence their academic achievement. In short, the students' Internet addiction per se, is not a factor in their academic achievement. Interestingly, there are several implications that could arise out of the findings of this study.

#### **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

First, instead of putting blame on Internet usage per se, we can look at the student's health as the main cause for his/her poor academic results. Spending hours on the Internet either updating status, checking other peoples' status, chatting with friends or even finding new friends has an effect on a person's stress levels. In their study



of 300 21-year-olds, researchers at the University of Edinburgh Business School found that “the more social circles a person is linked to online the more likely social media will be a source of stress” (Ngak, 2012, CBSNews). In addition, Rosen (2012), author of *iDisorder*, found that teens and young adults become anxious if they cannot check their text messages. It is therefore possible to argue that, compared with Internet addiction, the student’s health status may be a more accurate prediction of achieving academic success (Ickovics *et al.*, 2014)

Secondly, academics can take the opportunity to fully integrate their teaching and learning using SNSs as it is made evident through this study that TESL students do log in to their account on a daily basis. The instructors might specifically set a “Page” or a “Group” in Facebook, for example, which could enable the students to communicate with them virtually in a more fun and less stressful manner. Since a majority of the students do log on to their SNS account every day anyway, the tendency that the students might miss any important academic-related announcements, information or instructions is very small. This will encourage the students to not only keep track with any latest information from their instructors, but it will also provide the opportunity for them to either synchronously or asynchronously discuss their academic matters through the “Chat” feature in Facebook, for instance. In short, university academics can make maximum use of everything that the SNSs have to

offer in order to bring their teaching and learning beyond the formal lectures so that both instructors and students can benefit from them. In addition, students could also make full use of their time while being connected to SNSs to do something much more beneficial rather than just “play” with the SNSs.

Thirdly, more SNS-like Learning Management System (LMS) such as Schoology should be developed in order to encourage online learning. Schoology is a type of LMS that resembles Facebook; however, its use is purely for the purpose of academic work. What we can start to think about now is the appropriateness of the development of SNS-like LMS that enables some non-academic social features. This is because it is proven through this research that the correlation between SNSs use and students’ academic achievement does not exist, so, perhaps students should be allowed to multitask and enjoy the social, non-academic features offered in SNS-like LMS. So far, Schoology is widely known as one of the most popular LMS platforms out there with Facebook-like interface; however, its straightforward academic purpose interface might throw students off the application. Other LMS platforms mostly function purely as academic tools without any resemblance of SNS. Perhaps, other LMS platforms that look like Twitter, or even Instagram could be developed in order to enhance students’ learning.

Since TESL students are studying language, mobile SNSs such as Viber, LINE, and WhatsApp could also be beneficial

for them. This is due to the fact that these applications allow voice recording, and the voice recording might be used to record the students' voice for speaking exercises, pronunciation of phonetic symbols and many others. Mobile SNSs are also downloadable on multiple devices especially smartphones, so TESL students and their instructors might utilise the function so that learning can happen in a more casual and fun manner.

In conclusion, this study found no significant relationship between the levels of SNSs addiction with the TESL students' academic achievement. Thus, TESL students, their instructors and even LMS developers can use this finding to enhance the learning of TESL students. Learning can indeed take place outside of classroom and if SNSs use does not affect student academic achievement, why hesitate to make use of all that it has to offer to create a more fun and creative learning experience?

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