

The changing world and the digital student

Example essay

Examine the use of Facebook in learning and teaching for tertiary level students and teachers. **Discuss** the impact of Facebook on tertiary education by **outlining** both positive and negative effects. **State** your overall **position**. (Write 1200 words)

Paragraph parts

Example Essay (1,113 words)

Introduction paragraph

Introduce the overall topic

Identify the sub-topic

Define key terms

State the relevance (why it is important)

State the main aim of the essay in one clear sentence.

Outline the order of the content

The social networking website Facebook has become increasingly popular with over 1.8 billion people using Facebook on a monthly basis (Facebook, 2017). As a result, there is discussion within the tertiary education sector about the ways in which websites like Facebook can be used in learning and teaching. Social networking websites can be defined as online spaces where individuals “present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others” (McCarthy, 2012, p. 758). The use of social networking sites within universities is of interest because of their potential for both positive and negative impact. Therefore, learners and teachers need to critically evaluate the educational value of such sites. This essay discusses both the positive and negative effects of using Facebook at tertiary level. It identifies benefits related to online community building, engagement and collaboration. It also identifies concerns about its potential to distract students, and problems of safety and privacy.

Body Paragraph 1

Identify topic/focus of paragraph

Bring in research

Explain and apply

Reconnect to topic/focus of paragraph

One key benefit of using Facebook in teaching and learning is its capacity for online community building. As Duffy (2011) argues, Facebook can connect students with peers and teachers, involving them in communities: a vital component of student success. For example, in Australia and Singapore, first year undergraduate students participated in virtual discussions, which helped them to connect with their peers and reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation. In addition, the students appreciated having time to create and reflect on their responses before they posted them (McCarthy, 2013). This time to respond may be beneficial for quieter students, who sometimes avoid vocalising their opinions in a face-to-face learning environment. When students are seated in large lecture theatres or classrooms, it may also be difficult for them to get to know one another. Research shows that socialising and connecting to others is a crucial component of a satisfying tertiary experience (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Thus, Facebook can provide a valuable mode of social interaction for students.

Body Paragraph 2

Identify topic/focus of paragraph

Bring in research

Explain and apply

Reconnect to topic/focus of paragraph

Another advantage of Facebook in the tertiary setting is that it can increase student engagement with course content. Research shows that students who participate actively in their learning, and in their overall tertiary experience, are more likely to succeed (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, in one study, many students were permanently signed into Facebook, so they could frequently engage with posts related to their course content, assignments and activities (Irwin et al., 2012). An additional dimension of their participation is that students may use Facebook comments to critique their experience. For instance, Rambe (2012) found that students felt empowered to voice concerns about teaching methods, course materials and institutional processes. They were also relieved to find that their classmates shared their difficulties. As a result of students' critique, lecturers were made aware of issues that affected learning and were able to address these problems. This type of online interaction demonstrates how Facebook can be used to access, engage with and critique course content.

Body Paragraph 3

Identify topic/focus of paragraph

Bring in research

Explain and apply

Reconnect to topic/focus of paragraph

Linking sentence

A further benefit of Facebook is student collaboration. Students are often required to do group work or projects where they need to meet outside of class, but it may be difficult for them to find a suitable time and place to meet. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2011), online collaboration promotes "innovation and productiveness", because people "learn, create and innovate in the company of others" (p. 215). Additionally, students may feel more at ease when learning in this "informal and flexible environment" (Mazman & Usluel, 2010, p. 451) because it is easy for them to exchange information (Sanchez & Javed, 2014). This flexibility and ease of use means that students are able to contribute to an assignment from their homes on opposite sides of a city at a time that is convenient and without the expense of travelling to meet face to face. The ability to work at home may also decrease the capital expenditure of educational institutions as the need to provide spaces for group work is reduced. These examples illustrate the potential for social networking sites to support collaborative learning. However, there are concerns about Facebook, which need to be considered.

Body Paragraph 4

Identify topic/focus of paragraph

Bring in research

Further evidence from research

Reconnect to topic/focus of paragraph

One negative impact of Facebook is its capacity to distract students from their studies. For instance, Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) question whether students are able to engage with academic writing or listening while using Facebook at the same time. Studies have found that students who use Facebook have a lower Grade Point Average (GPA) and spend less time studying than students who do not use Facebook (Junco, 2012; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). A reduction in the time spent on activities particularly seems to occur when students are feeling under time pressure (Janković et al., 2016). Even as little as five to ten hours per week on social media is likely to have a negative impact on students' engagement with assignments (Rouis et al., 2011). These studies all point to a negative relationship between Facebook use and academic performance.

Body Paragraph 5

Identify topic/focus of paragraph

Bring in research

Explain and apply

Reconnect to topic/focus of paragraph

A second issue with Facebook concerns safety and privacy. Although it is possible for Facebook users to control access to their own profiles and data, Facebook does not make this an easy process, and a large proportion of students are unclear about how to do this effectively (Jordaan & Van Heerden, 2017). Students are then vulnerable to online predators, who may have access to contact details, personal information, and photographs. Photographs and videos are a particular concern because of their potential to cause embarrassment and distress (Kolek & Saunders, 2008). For example, in New Zealand, photographs of young girls being sexually assaulted when drunk were posted on a Facebook page causing immense harm to the victims (Quillam, 2013). Students are also increasingly concerned about the marketing tools being deployed on Facebook and feel a loss of control over their personal data (Jordaan & Van Heerden, 2017). Therefore, in tertiary teaching and learning contexts, students should be supported to learn how to protect their profiles and data, and use social networking sites safely.

Conclusion paragraph

Restate main aim

Summarise key points from body paragraphs (paraphrase)

State overall position

In summary, this essay has considered the positive and negative aspects of using Facebook at a tertiary level. Research has identified how Facebook can facilitate social interaction and rich collaboration between peers. Therefore, it has the potential to complement face-to-face modes of delivery. However, if Facebook is going to be effectively and safely used in tertiary teaching and learning, then students and teachers need careful guidance. Concerns about use centre on the tendency of Facebook to distract students, as well as the need to support students to better control privacy settings. In conclusion, although the use of any online tool comes with inherent challenges that need careful consideration, the benefits exemplify how the integration of technology offers new approaches to teaching and learning.

References

- Start list on a new page
- Centre the **References** title on page
- Include **only references cited in essay**
- List **alphabetically according to first author's last name**
- **Hanging indent** each reference
- List each **reference according to APA style** (examples of different reference types in APA style below)

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