

14<sup>th</sup> ICLEHI 2019 Bangkok 022-016 Nualpen Puangpunsi

## FACEBOOK AS A LEARNERS' ASSISTANT IN EFL CLASSROOM

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### ABSTRACT

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites among users worldwide. It is commonly used by various groups of users to meet their different purposes. In term of education, Facebook can be an effective tool to facilitate the process of face-to-face teaching and learning in a classroom. This study aimed to investigate the capability of Facebook for encouraging better performance of English language skills among students (n=149) and enhancing English language learning environment in a classroom. As a result, an individual "Facebook group" was created by teacher and was used as a major channel of communication between students and teachers who were taking in "Agricultural Science English" course throughout the semester. And, every students was required to be a member of the Facebook group. Both pre-test and post-test on English achievement were used to evaluate students' performance at the beginning and end of studied period. Related English learning resources from various online media, together with in-class- assignments, were gathered and posted on the Facebook group. The students were assigned to learn and give their feedback to posted topics/ materials. After 15 weeks of the semester, the study revealed that students' achievement in English was significantly higher ( $p < 0.01$ ) than the beginning of semester, especially the performance in grammatical structure, vocabulary, reading and writing skills. Moreover, the students expressed positive satisfaction toward the uses of Facebook as a tool in EFL classroom which promote their awareness in English learning and developing English skills by themselves.

*Keywords* : Facebook, English skills, EFL classroom, learning environment

### Introduction

Since Facebook firstly introduced to the world in 2004, it has been rapidly well known by people around the world. In 2017, there were 2 billion active users worldwide (Facebook,2017) which make Facebook the largest social app in this digital age. The reason that makes Facebook spread over various groups of people is its function that enables them to meet the different purposes, include entertainment, social relationship, communication, education and so on. In term of education, Facebook plays a role as an effective tool to support the process of teaching and learning in a classroom, especially in countries (e.g. Thailand, Cambodia and Japan) where English is mainly taught in a school as a foreign language. It is somewhat difficult for students to experience the authentic communication skills, in English outside classroom. Therefore, Facebook is the alternative choice for learners to access the virtual language learning from this familiar technology. This technology also connects people together and destroys the barrier in global communication.

Many educators have conducted the studies to identify both advantages and disadvantages of using modern technologies in enhancing better quality of living. For instance, Alavi (1994) revealed that web-based learning promotes cross-cultural

interaction among learners which allow them to the internationally authentic experiences of leaning. Learners have opportunities to experience English language learning from online authentic resources which allow them to get connect to people around the world. In addition, language learning via Facebook promotes unlimited learning channel to students. This means that they are able to start learning whenever possible and wherever they are. Legaree (2015) stated the benefits of social media networking sites, Facebook, in education are; a) enhance communication between teachers and learners, b) increase opportunity for networking or collaborations among students, c) sharing of resources, d) access to course materials after class, e) provision of alternative platform to the official learning management systems, and f) exposure of student to technology and skills. In a classroom, Facebook helps teacher create interesting and up-to-date learning activities and motivate student to be more enthusiastic about learning. In other word, Facebook is the beneficial digital technology that shows the positive effects in learning of digital-aged learners. With the miscellaneous features of Facebook, it stimulates learners to travel in real world of communication and motivate self-awareness in keeping learning and practicing.

### **Objective**

This study aimed at the investigation into capability of Facebook in enhancing better performance in English language skills and promoting the English language learning environment in a classroom.

### **Research Questions**

1. Does the use of Facebook enable EFL learners increase their performance in English skills?
2. What skill in English do students satisfy with its improvement after the use of Facebook in learning activity?
3. What are the students' perception in the power of Facebook in English language classroom?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

The participants were 149 undergraduate students, 26 males and 123 females, who enrolled *Agricultural Science English* course at Silpakorn University, Phetchaburi Campus. Students took this course as the third English course of their study plan. Each participant has an individual Facebook account which is used daily for the different purposes and all of them were requested to be a member of the created Facebook group by teacher. This Facebook group is used as a key channel into communication in English class throughout the course. Students must complete their personal profile by giving information in English and write a short paragraph to introduce themselves to other members of Facebook group.

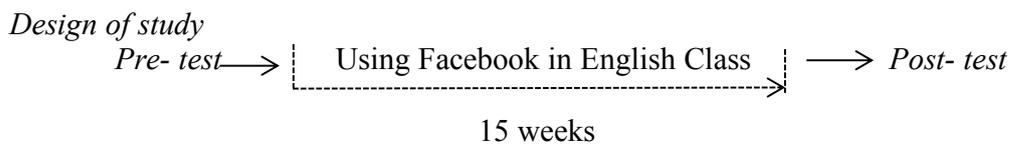
#### **Instruments**

The instruments used in the study were as follow. First, a pre-test and a post-test English achievement tests. Both objective and subjective test were derived from English Proficiency Test by Oxford University Press (2008) which emphasizes the students' improvement in language skills. The achievement test consists of 5 main parts – grammatical structure, vocabulary, reading, listening and writing. In this current study, the tests were used to evaluate students' achievement in English both before and after they have participated in the English learning activities by using Facebook as the

supplementary tool in learning process. Second, survey on students' satisfaction toward the use of Facebook in English learning process was introduced to assess their feedback at the end of the course. The survey consists of six items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

### Study Design and Data Analysis

The design of this study was quasi-experimental with non-equivalent experimental group pre-test and post-test. The MS Excel 2010 version was used to carry out the demographic data, described by frequency and percentage. A series of paired t-test analysis was used to compare students' achievement in English from pre-test and post-test which were given in the beginning and end of learning process.



### Procedure

This current study focused on the use of Facebook as platform for students in their English skills improvement. Firstly, to introduce Facebook in the English classroom, an individual Facebook group was developed by instructor since the beginning of the semester, and then, students who enrolled the Agricultural Science English course were requested to participate as a member of this Facebook group. Since the created Facebook group was used as the English learning platform throughout the course, various types of English learning resources (e.g. news articles, VDO, flashcards, cartoons, and etc..) published on the social network, together with discussion topics and in-class assignments were introduced to the “*Wall*” of Facebook group. It was not only the teacher, but students also shared their interested materials in English learning to their classmate. Definitely, everyone who was the member of this Facebook group was able to access to the posts and give their feedback, like “*reply*” and “*comment*” to the posted materials. Teachers or teaching assistants were in charge of showing response to the feedback from students as much as they could. Furthermore, Facebook wall is used as the space to stimulate skills of communication through topic discussion activity by setting the topic and asked members of the group to express their opinion to the given topic. These kinds of activities on Facebook were run throughout 15 weeks of learning procedures.

### Literature Review

Facebook, popular social networking, is used widely in various aspects. It is well-known for its role in communication of global population. Madge et.al (2009) indicated that Facebook is like “social glue” which connect people everywhere together and support them to adapt themselves. With Facebook, he found new university students were able to adapt quickly to college life. For people in this digital age, they spend most of their leisure in the world of internet and Facebook is the best popular destination of users worldwide. Aldhelei (2010) pointed out that 97.10 percent of students in University Teknologi Malaysia use Facebook rather than other types of social media. In 2007, Ellison and his team noted that the college students spent an average of 10 to 30 minutes daily on Facebook, in addition, Junco (2012) revealed that students spent 100 minutes every day on touring the Facebook world. This can guarantee the popularity of Facebook which is increasing continuously.

Barrot (2018), summarized the five main ways which Facebook is used for educational goals; 1) supporting discussion and interaction among students, 2) developing multimedia content, 3) sharing resources, 4) delivering content, and 5) supporting self-directed learning. Some educators believed that Facebook could increase student-efficiency in learning when it is used as an online platform in language learning. According to Alias et al. (2012), they conducted the study to investigate the potential of using Facebook Notes as language learning strategy (LLS) training tool and revealed that the use of Facebook Notes as LLS could promote the use of indirect LLS among college students at Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia. Facebook provides a variety of authentic materials, innovative interaction, and increases communication opportunities to classroom and it also help reduce anxiety in making conversation among students and professor (Bowers & Campbell, 2008, Kabilant et al., 2009). In 2018, Chugh and Ruhi explored that Facebook has the potential in improving student performance, student interaction and engagement in learning, which is consistent with Al-Dheleai et. al. (2017) who did a survey to investigate the students' perception towards the use of Facebook for course-related online interaction and its effect on academic performance found that interactions on Facebook are able to enhance students' academic performance and encourage students' willingness to continue their learning task and work with friends through Facebook.

**Findings**

For demographic data of the study, 149 participants were 123 females (82.6%) and 26 males (17.4%). Each participant has a personal Facebook account and majority of them (86.6%) have accessed to the Facebook every day. In this current study, it found the main purposes motivate students to spend their time on Facebook account were; to keep themselves relaxed (92.6%), to keep up with family and friends (90.6%) and to update and check the issues around the world (71.8%). According to gathered information, it can imply that Facebook is an important hub for people in this generation. This is to say, Facebook connects users with the world and brings them to meet their different purposes wherever they are.

Table 1  
*Demographic data*

		Categories	Percentage
1. Gender		1.1) Female	82.6
		1.2) Male	17.4
2. Frequency in using Facebook		2.1) Every day	86.6
		2.2) 3-5 days/week	8.0
		2.3) Less than 2 days/week	3.4
3. Purposes in using Facebook		3.1) To relax / Entertainment	92.6
		3.2) To keep up with family and friends	90.6
		3.3) To update the issues around the world	71.8
		3.4) To search for interested topic/ knowledge	59.7
		3.5) To share individual interests / opinion to others	32.2

**Question 1: Does the used of Facebook group in the learning process enable learners to increase their performance in English skills?**

To address the answer of this question, both pre-test and post-test were used to evaluate the students' achievement in English skills. The study revealed that Facebook

empowered students in increasing the ability of learning English language skills, including the performance in grammatical structure ( $\bar{x}$ =18.56), vocabulary ( $\bar{x}$ =18.18), reading comprehension ( $\bar{x}$ =8.70), and writing ( $\bar{x}$ =1.71). Whereas, skill in listening and pronunciation ( $\bar{x}$ =11.25) had not been improved much in this study. Students showed higher score in the post-test after they spent 15 weeks on learning posted materials via Facebook group.

Table 2  
*Mean score for pre-test and post-test*

Skills	Pre-test		Post-test		<i>t-test</i>	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Grammatical Structure	14.16	4.62	18.56	4.57	13.22	0.000*
Vocabulary Competence	13.32	4.64	18.18	4.60	15.56	0.000*
Listening and Pronunciation	10.73	4.18	11.25	2.93	1.44	0.151
Reading Comprehension	7.33	3.14	8.70	2.95	4.57	0.000*
Writing	0.58	1.02	1.71	0.98	13.64	0.000*

n=149, p<0.01

### Question 2: What skill(s) in English do students satisfy with its improvement?

According to the improvement of skills in English which was promoted by use of Facebook in learning activity, participants expressed the best satisfaction level in the improvement of vocabulary skill (mean=4.48), follow by listening and pronunciation (mean = 4.12), reading comprehension (mean=4.02), writing paragraph (mean=3.51), and grammatical structure (mean= 3.38), respectively. Overall, participants showed the positive feedback to the improvement of all five English skill by the use of Facebook as a tool in English classroom.

Table 3  
*Satisfaction level in English skills improvement*

English Skills	Mean Score
1. Vocabulary	4.48
2. Listening and pronunciation	4.12
3. Reading comprehension	4.02
4. Writing paragraph	3.51
5. Grammatical structure	3.38

### Question 3: What are the students' perceptions in the power of Facebook in English learning classroom?

Since the beginning until the end of using Facebook in English classroom, students have showed more positive attitude toward learning English. They discovered that the posted/shared materials on Facebook group motivated them to learn more and felt eager to improve their English skills ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.57). In other words, students agreed that those posted/shared materials were more interesting than the paper version ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.51). Students also found that they felt more confident and noticed that the use of Facebook in classroom could promote better improvement in English skills ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.45). In addition, the study showed that learning and practicing English from the use of Facebook as a supplementary tool could enable students feel more comfortable and lessen the pressure in learning procedure ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.24).

Table 4  
*Students' satisfaction of using Facebook in English learning*

Categories	Satisfaction Level					$\bar{x}$
	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	
1. Materials posted on FB group motivated you to improve your English skills.	61.7%	36.2%	1.3%	0.7%	0	4.57
2. Online learning materials shared in FB are more interesting and up-to-date.	54.4%	41.6%	4%	0	0	4.51
3. Learning through activities on FB makes you more comfortable.	36.9%	51%	12.1%	0	0	4.24
4. Activities on FB could develop your English skills.	45.6%	49%	4.7%	0.7%	0	4.45
5. Learning by using FB support your flexible learning schedule.	35.6%	48.3%	16.1%	0	0	4.20
6. You feel more positive in using FB as English learning channel.	37.6%	53%	9.4%	0	0	4.28

### Discussion

Results from the current study showed that Facebook has the potential for language learning improvement. It can be used as a facility to support both teacher and learners in a classroom. In English achievement test, the study found that Facebook could able to promote higher scores in vocabulary competence and reading comprehension. In consistent with Junco (2012), he stated that when students use Facebook for activities in education such as searching and gathering information and it results in a positive academic outcome. Other researchers, Naghdipour, Eldridge and Rodliyah (2016) identified that students could improve the knowledge in vocabulary after online materials have been engaged on Facebook and perceived improvement in journal writing after the used of Facebook in e-dialogue, especially in vocabulary and grammar content. By the integrating of uploaded materials on Facebook into face-to-face learning in a classroom, it extends the better performance of learners and enhance in lifelong learning.

With respect to learner perception in the use of Facebook in learning process, most studies revealed the positive reactions from respondents. One significant characteristic of Facebook that supports the improvement in English skills is its flexible opportunity in learning. In other words, there is no limitation (e.g. time, place, economic condition,

distant) when learn something online via Facebook. Due to its friendly way to get connect, Facebook motivates learners to participate with millions of online activities which can be searched and retrieved. According to Nenthien and Loima (2016), the learners' attitude towards the learning of English language using Facebook was very positive. Students seemed excited and happy. According to Al-Dheleai (2017), students showed the positive perception and significant relation between students' interaction via Facebook and their academic performance. They believed that discussions in Facebook can help them to the better understanding in course content. Additionally, students agreed with the active role of Facebook as a supplementary tool in motivation of English learning and encourage continue learning (Faryadi, 2017).

With a number of academic studies in the roles of Facebook as a supplementary tool in classroom, most studies showed positive feedback from students in using Facebook to support language learning activities in a common classroom. Additionally, many studies found out helpful improvement in both academic performance and students' perception from the use of Facebook in language classroom.

### **Limitation**

Major limitation is from the use of paper interview instrument which could not portray enough feedback from students. In this survey, participants were required to check the satisfaction level upon to the listed items so it was quite limit in giving the response. Another limitation is from posted/uploaded materials on Facebook. Those online materials were taken from opened social medias, it's sometimes difficult to guarantee their accuracy and fluency in material presentation.

### **Recommendation**

According to the limitation of this study, it is recommended that orally opened ended interview should be applied in a focus group which could bring several dimensions of the students' opinions to support the well-organized activities in teaching and learning. Moreover, teacher should assure the precision of any materials before uploading/ sharing to public channel and verify that those materials are appropriate for learners.

### **Conclusion**

As this study aimed to investigate the power of Facebook in English language learning. Findings indicated that Facebook has the efficiency in promoting better performance in English skills. Particularly in vocabulary learning, the virtual photos of vocabulary and uploaded authentic materials motivated learners to the real understanding and it is easy for them to memorize word meaning into short term memory. An implementation of Facebook in EFL classroom does not only increase learning ability, but Facebook also encourages the positive attitude and eagerness to learn and develop English language when it is possible. And, this kind of social network is familiar with people in the current generation, especially young learners in the digital age.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research study was financially supported by Silpakorn University Information Technology Campus's fund for Research and Development. The author wishes to acknowledge support from all the participants and Faculty of Animal Sciences and Agricultural Technology, Silpakorn University.

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