

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING FACEBOOK GROUP ON IMPROVING WRITING SKILL

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, learning languages has gone beyond the limits of the classroom due to the widespread use of social networking sites. The study was conducted as a pre-experimental research to investigate the effectiveness of using Facebook group on improving writing skill for students at Thainguyn University of Agriculture and Forestry by finding out there were any significant differences on learners' performance in writing as a result of using Facebook group. The results of the study showed that there were effective and obvious effects in using Facebook group on improving writing skill for students in terms of discourse, syntactic and lexical characteristics. Hopefully, the use of Facebook group will be widely implemented in learning English in general and writing in particular for students in the age of Internet.

Key words: *Investigating, Facebook (FB), Facebook group, improving, writing skill, effectiveness*

INTRODUCTION

Information technologies has come to play a very powerful role in society, influencing the way people communicate, work, entertain and learn. Currently, social networks are used by millions of users, most of whom are students and adolescents, for a variety of purposes but with a heavy emphasis on social needs. Some of the examples of social networking sites are MySpace, Friendster, Twitter and Facebook. Although Facebook started out in early 2004 as Harvards-only social networking site as Boyd, D.M. & Ellison, N.B. (2006) [1] cited, the Facebook phenomenon is currently happening all over the world. According to the Facebook statistics, its users spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook. In Vietnam, some newspapers have claimed that the number of Facebook users is ranked seventh among the countries in the world in 2018, with a number of 58 million Facebook users. Undeniably, the young generation now is spending more and more time online using Facebook so teachers should consider this issue for educational purposes. Besides, of all the four skills, writing is one of the most complex activities as Dion, M.C.(2011)[2] stated. In details, learning writing causes learners a lot of problems and consumes teachers a lot of time because it requires learner's competency to receive the information, process it, and then, produce it. Hence, it requires more time, more effort, as well as more guidance. More seriously, learning writing is inadequate if only it relies on the - two hours or four hours- learning in the classroom. Therefore, the researcher hypothesized that FB group will benefit the students in learning writing process. In order to facilitate the study, the following research question is conducted:

What is the effectiveness of using FB groups on improving the advanced programme students' writing skill?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Facebook and its affective influence

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes in 2004. The name of the social networking site stems from the colloquial name for face and book. Browse (2009)[3] defined Facebook as a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send messages and keep in touch with family, friends and colleagues. Besides, Facebook users can create and join groups within this online community. According to Selwyn, N (2007) [4], Facebook can be seen as a platform for students to value the benefits of collaborative learning that are both social and academic in nature. Kabilan et al. (2010) [5] conducted a research investigating if FB can be a useful and meaningful learning environment that could support or enhance language learning in English. Overall, FB has been shown to boost confidence, motivate and foster a positive attitude towards English language learning.

B. Writing and its characteristics

According to Mourtaga (2004) [6], writing provides a means for students to proceed new information in their own words. It is particularly effective in large classrooms where breaking students into pairs or groups maybe prohibitive. It also appeals to individuals who prefer to learn independently.

Breland & Johns (1982)[7] cited in *The Assessment Of Writing Ability: A Review of Research* that writing characteristics were classified as being either a discourse characteristic, a syntactic characteristic, or lexical characteristic as followed in Table 1.

Table 1: Writing characteristics

Discourse Characteristics	Syntactic characteristics	Lexical characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Statement of thesis - Overall organization -Rhetorical strategy -Noteworthy ideas - Supporting material -Tone and attitude -Paragraphing and transition - Sentence variety - Sentence logic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pronounce usage -Subject-verb agreement - Parallel structure -Idiomatic usage -Punctuation -Use of modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of diction - Range of vocabulary - Precision of diction -Figurative language -Spelling

In the study, these characteristics in Table 1 will be covered in the research to suit for students at higher education. By this way, some of the characteristics of discourse will be focused containing statement of thesis, overall organization, paragraphing and transition, sentences variety, sentence logic; syntactic characteristics include pronounce usage, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, punctuation, use of modifiers; and lexical characteristics deal with range of vocabulary, spelling. Therefore, the experimental group of the study was practiced and suggested corrections to each other's mistakes in the field of studying writing so that they could use some of the characteristics of writing mentioned above properly and suitably and could consequently create effective pieces of writing which are able to some extent, free of mistakes and in a good organization and paragraph.

C. The effectiveness of using FB on improving students' performance in writing

Yancey, K.B. (2009) [8] then proposed the use of FB in helping students make that link in order to make them better writers. The researcher then also believes that FB, and specifically FB groups, has the potential to improve students' writing skills by being the link between academic "writing" and outside "communication", providing learners with an authentic and personalized context in which to aid their writing. 'FB groups' also provide ample opportunities for students to practice and improve their writing skills. In addition, studies show that students feel obliged to respond to their peers' comments or opinions posted, thus are actively "posting" and "commenting" on the application. Kabilan M.K. et al. (2010)[5] asserted that they take every opportunity to practice their writing skills. Students also discover new sentences or writing structures by reading the comments and posts from their peers. He also stated that while sharing views, exchanging messages and comments on FB, students certainly develop a confidence in writing in English as a byproduct of their online socialization. Hence, these show that writing skills have been much emphasized in FB group participation and thus had a high potential of enhancing and improving students' writing skills.

SUBJECT AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry with thirty advanced program students. These were chosen in the experimental group which was taught online using FB group to learn writing skill. All of these students have not achieved the IELTS score 4.5, so they wanted to join the group to improve their English, especially writing skill. It is confirmed that each respondent had a FB account. 89% respondents logged in '2-3 hours a day' and 'more than 3 hours a day'. The rest of the respondents, 11% selected the options of 'one or twice a week' and 'less than an hour daily'. All them are familiar with FB groups and are involved in more than one FB group other than "Learning Writing Group". After six weeks of learning writing through FB group, they were each required to take a writing test to explore how FB groups improve their writing skill.

For the analysis of the data, Mean (M) and Standard deviation (SD) were to check the differences between pre-test and post-test; pair sample T-tests were to check the impact of the treatment and correlation coefficients were to find out the significant correlation between the pre-test and the post-test.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: The total average of the Pre-test and the Post-test Grades distributed by the experimental group

Students	Pre-test	Post-test
Average	5.67	7.37

To answer the main question of the study which is related to the effectiveness of using Facebook on improving writing skill, Table 2 indicated that the total average of the post-test was higher than the pre-test. The total average of the pre-test for the experimental group was 5.67 and the total average of the post-test was 7.37. It means that the students worked better in the post-test after learning writing through Facebook group. Therefore, this findings indicated that the use of social network technique had a positive effect on students' writing skill. This progress could also mean that the students participated, shared ideas and opinions and comments through FB, which had good results in their writing performance.

In order to investigate the effectiveness of using Facebook on improving students' writing skills, paired Sample T-test was used to investigate the significance of the differences according to the three dimensions and the total average grade for the tool of the study by measuring the mean of the students' grade on the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group, which was illustrated as followed.

Table 3: Paired Sample T-test of the students' grade mean on the Pre-test and the Post-test of the experimental group according to the dimensions and the total average

Sig. (2-tailed)	T	Degrees of freedom	Standard Deviation	Mean	Exam
0.00	-10.661	29	1.23	5.52	Pre-test discourse
			0.91	7.30	Post-test discourse
0.00	-10.053	29	1.28	7.17	Pre-test syntactic characteristics
			0.99	7.53	Post-test syntactic characteristics
0.00	-8.41	29	1.38	5.77	Pre-test lexical characteristics
			0.88	7.43	Post-test lexical characteristics
0.00	-10.891	29	1.25	5.67	Pre-test total average
			0.99	7.37	Post-test total average

The table showed that there were statically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the effectiveness of using Facebook on improving students' writing skills according to the three dimensions and the total average between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group. Testing this question showed that using FB for improving students' writing skill of the experimental group had a positive result on the achievement of the students in favour of the post- test grades according to the three dimensions and the total average. The statically significant differences in Table 3 indicated that there was an effectiveness of using FB group on improving writing skill for the students. In terms of the total average, the mean of the total average of the post-test was higher than the one of the pre-test. It means that the students made an achievement in the post-test compared with the pre-test. According to the mean of three dimensions of the two tests, the mean of the discourse characteristics of the post-test was 7.30, which was higher than the one of the pre-test, 5.52. Besides, the mean of the lexical characteristics of post-test was 7.43, which was also higher than the one of the pre-test ($M=5.77$, $SD=1.38$). This means that the students made a big progress in terms of discourse and lexical characteristics after learning writing through Facebook group. The mean of the post-test syntactic characteristics ($M=7.53$; $SD=0.99$) was relatively higher than the one of the pre-test syntactic characteristics ($M=7.17$; $SD=1.28$). There was only a little improvement between the two tests although this dimension in the pre-test was rather high. It can be explained that the students focused more on the discourse and the lexical characteristics than on syntactic ones. However, it can be concluded that the students interacted actively while learning writing via FB group. Their discussion, reading, correction helped them a lot to get better results on writing skill.

To find out there was a significant correlation between the pre-test and the post-test or not in order to examine the effectiveness of using FB on learning writing skill, the correlation for each of the three dimensions and the total average of the grades before and after applying the tool were calculated.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficients Distributed by the three dimensions before and after applying the tool.

Correlation	Number	Description
0.669	30	Pre-test discourse & Post-test discourse
0.720	30	Pre-test syntactic characteristics & Post-test syntactic characteristics
0.619	30	Pre-test lexical characteristics & Post-test lexical characteristics
0.735	30	Pre-test total average & Post-test total average

The results showed that there were correlation coefficients between the pre-test and the post-test according to the total grades (0.735) and the three dimensions of the test which was from 0.619 to 0.720. The correlation coefficient is used to affirm the correlation between two variables. The results in Table 4 displayed that there was a positive correlation between the pre-test and the post-test in terms of the total grades and the three dimensions of the test. Therefore, it can be confirmed that there was a positive effect of using Face book group on improving writing skill.

CONCLUSION

The conducted study examined the effect of using Facebook group on improving writing skill for Advanced Programme students at TUAU, Thainguay University. The results of the study shed some light on concerning issues using social networking sites in general and using Facebook in particular in the academic field of teaching languages, especially in teaching writing skill. In details, the study showed that there were effective and obvious effects in using FB group on improving writing skill for students in terms of discourse, syntactic and lexical characteristics. The main results can be summarized as followed:

- There were an obvious effect of using Facebook on improving the students' writing performance.
- There were statistical differences in using Facebook on students' writing skill between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group.
- There were correlation coefficients between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group.

Therefore, some suggestions are highly recommended to improve students in learning writing by using FB group such as: (1) set the daily specific time for learning through FB group; (2) explain to the students the criteria which are using for assessing their writing; (3) give the deadline so that students can concentrate and spend time to complete the task.

It is unavoidable that there exist some limitations of the research due to the limited scope, the time constraint and other objective factors. The limitation found in the number of participants of this study is that it used only the limited subjects at a single university which could be insufficient to ensure the reliability of the findings of the study. Besides, the findings of the study mainly focused on one group of the research because of the limited subjects as well. Therefore, further research should include testing subjects on a larger scale and in other universities.

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