

ENGLISH USAGE ON FACEBOOK AMONG FAST-TRACK ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS IN VIETNAM: HABITS AND EFFECTS ON LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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Abstract: This study investigates the habits of using English on Facebook among fast-track English major students at a Vietnamese university and examines the perceived effects on their language proficiency and academic performance. Employing a mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected from 55 students through a structured questionnaire, while qualitative insights were obtained via semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. The findings indicate that Facebook functions as an informal digital learning environment that significantly supports vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and learner confidence. However, the platform demonstrates limited effectiveness in improving speaking skills and formal academic writing. Additionally, the overuse of informal language and exposure to non-standard forms present notable challenges. The study concludes that while Facebook can serve as a valuable supplementary tool for language learning, its effectiveness depends on learners' awareness and pedagogical integration. Implications for learners, educators, and curriculum designers are discussed.

Keywords: Facebook, English language learning, informal learning, social media, Vietnamese students, language proficiency

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed language learning environments worldwide. Social media platforms are no longer used solely for entertainment and communication; they increasingly function as informal learning spaces where students interact with authentic language materials and global online communities. In Vietnam, university students spend a considerable amount of time on social networking sites, making these platforms highly influential in shaping language learning habits.

Among various social media platforms, Facebook remains one of the most widely used in Vietnamese higher education contexts despite the growing popularity of TikTok, Instagram, Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Unlike short-video platforms that primarily emphasize entertainment and passive viewing, Facebook combines multiple functions such as academic groups, long-form posts, Messenger communication, comment interaction, and content sharing. These features enable learners to engage with English through both social interaction and educational participation. In addition, many university classes, student communities, and English-learning groups in Vietnam still rely heavily on Facebook for communication and academic exchange.

Although previous studies have explored social media and English learning among Vietnamese students, limited research has specifically focused on fast-track English major students. Existing Vietnamese studies mainly investigate general university students or focus only on vocabulary and writing development. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the imbalance between receptive and productive language skills in social-media-based learning.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by examining the habits of using English on Facebook among fast-track English major students and analyzing how such usage influences their perceived language proficiency.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- How frequently and in what ways do fast-track English major students use English on Facebook? What effects do students perceive Facebook usage to have on their English language proficiency?
- What challenges do students encounter when using English on Facebook?
- How can Facebook be utilized more effectively to support English language learning?

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2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks related to language acquisition and digital learning environments.

First, Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes the role of social interaction in language development. Learning occurs through participation in socially mediated activities, and Facebook provides opportunities for interaction through commenting, messaging, and participation in online communities.

Second, Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis highlights the importance of comprehensible input in second language acquisition. Facebook exposes learners to authentic English materials in the form of videos, articles, comments, memes, and discussions, thereby increasing incidental language exposure.

Third, Interactionist Theory (Long, 1996) emphasizes negotiation of meaning and interaction as crucial components of language development. Facebook allows learners to communicate with peers and international users, potentially supporting communicative competence.

Finally, principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) support authentic communication in meaningful contexts. Social media platforms naturally create communicative environments where students can use English for real purposes rather than artificial classroom exercises.

2.1.2. Previous Studies

Previous international studies have demonstrated that Facebook can support vocabulary acquisition, learner motivation, and engagement in English learning (Kabilan et al., 2010; Shih, 2011). Social media has also been associated with increased learner autonomy and collaborative learning opportunities.

In Vietnam, Le (2020) found that Facebook contributed positively to vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. Nguyen (2021) examined the sociolinguistic aspects of English use on Facebook and emphasized identity construction and online communication practices among Vietnamese university students. Similarly, Thao and Huong (2022) reported that social media supported students' English writing development but also encouraged the overuse of informal language. Tran (2023) highlighted the role of Facebook in improving communication confidence among Vietnamese learners.

However, the present study differs from previous Vietnamese research in three important ways. First, it focuses specifically on fast-track English major students, a group that faces higher academic expectations and intensive language training. Second, the study investigates both benefits and challenges associated with Facebook use rather than focusing on only one language skill. Third, it examines the imbalance between receptive and productive language use in social-media-based learning.

Despite growing research on digital learning, limited studies have explored how intensive English-program students in Vietnam utilize Facebook as an informal learning environment. This gap justifies the need for further investigation.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. The integration of both methods allowed the researchers to obtain broader statistical patterns as well as deeper insights into learners' experiences and perceptions.

2.2.2. Participants

The participants consisted of 55 students enrolled in fast-track English major programs (K44 and K45 cohorts) at the School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University. Additionally, 10 fourth-year students participated in semi-structured interviews.

Purposive sampling was used because all participants needed to satisfy two criteria:

They were enrolled in fast-track English major programs.

They regularly used Facebook and had prior experience using English on the platform.

Although the sample size is relatively modest, the selected participants represent students with intensive English-learning backgrounds and extensive exposure to digital learning environments.

2.2.3. *Data Collection Instruments*

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire consisted of 28 items divided into four sections:

Frequency of Facebook use

Types of English-learning activities

Perceived effects on language skills

Challenges and attitudes toward English usage on Facebook

Most questionnaire items employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Examples of questionnaire items include:

“I often read English posts on Facebook.”

“Using Facebook helps me improve my English vocabulary.”

“I feel nervous when posting in English publicly.”

Before the official survey, a pilot study involving 15 students was conducted to improve clarity and reliability. The questionnaire achieved a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

The semi-structured interviews explored students’ motivations, learning experiences, and challenges in greater depth. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted in Vietnamese to ensure participant comfort and accuracy of responses.

2.2.4. *Data Collection Procedure*

The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms over a two-week period. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was guaranteed.

Interview participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and their active use of English on Facebook. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed for analysis.

2.2.5. *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. In addition, correlation analysis was used to examine relationships between English usage frequency and perceived language improvement.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework. The researchers conducted coding in several stages:

Familiarization with interview transcripts

Initial coding of recurring ideas

Identification of themes and subthemes

Review and refinement of themes

To enhance reliability, representative participant quotations were included to support thematic interpretation.

2.3. *Findings*

2.3.1. *Frequency and Patterns of English Use on Facebook*

The findings indicate that Facebook is deeply embedded in students’ daily routines as both a social and linguistic environment. A substantial proportion of participants (78%) reported using English on Facebook on a daily basis, suggesting that exposure to English through social media is frequent and sustained. However, the nature of this engagement varies significantly.

Most participants demonstrated a preference for receptive activities, such as reading English posts (86.7%) and watching English-language videos (77.8%). These activities require relatively low cognitive effort and allow students to absorb language passively. In contrast, productive activities—such as writing status updates (66.7%) or commenting in English (35.6%)—were less frequent, indicating a gap between exposure and active language production.

Messenger communication in English represented the least common activity (22.2%). Interview responses suggest several explanations for this pattern. First, students reported feeling anxious about making grammatical mistakes during real-time interaction. Second, many students perceived Messenger primarily as a tool for maintaining personal relationships rather than practicing English. Third, asynchronous activities such as reading posts allow learners more time to process language and avoid immediate pressure.

One participant explained:

“I usually read English posts and watch videos because it feels comfortable. But chatting in English makes me nervous because I am afraid of making mistakes.”

These findings suggest that students prefer low-risk language engagement where comprehension is prioritized over spontaneous production.

2.3.2. Perceived Effects on Language Skills

The results demonstrate that Facebook usage has differential impacts across language skills. The most significant improvement was observed in vocabulary acquisition (88.9%), followed by listening skills (86.7%), which can be attributed to frequent exposure to multimedia content such as videos, reels, and live streams.

Moderate improvements were reported in writing (57.8%) and reading comprehension (51.1%), suggesting that while Facebook provides opportunities for engagement with written language, these interactions are often informal and lack depth. The most limited improvement was found in speaking skills (13.3%), reflecting the platform's limited support for real-time verbal interaction.

Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.48$) between frequency of English exposure on Facebook and students' self-reported vocabulary improvement. However, no strong relationship was identified between Facebook use and speaking development.

These findings indicate that Facebook functions primarily as a receptive-input environment, where learners benefit from exposure rather than structured practice. The imbalance between receptive and productive skill development suggests that informal digital learning alone is insufficient for comprehensive language acquisition.

2.3.3. Motivations for Using English on Facebook

The data reveal that students are not passive users of English on Facebook but demonstrate a degree of intentionality. A large majority (92%) reported using English to improve their language skills, indicating awareness of the platform's educational potential.

Additionally, habitual use emerged as a key factor, suggesting that English usage has become integrated into students' daily digital practices. Communication with international users also serves as a strong motivator, reinforcing the role of Facebook as a global communication platform that facilitates authentic language use.

However, motivations related to identity construction (e.g., appearing professional or fashionable) were relatively weak. This implies that students' engagement with English is primarily functional and instrumental, rather than symbolic.

2.3.4. Challenges and Constraints

Despite the benefits, several challenges were identified. A major concern is the transfer of informal language into academic contexts, reported by 71.1% of participants. This indicates that frequent exposure to slang, abbreviations, and non-standard grammar may influence students' formal writing.

Another key challenge is psychological barriers, particularly the fear of making mistakes in public. Many participants expressed reluctance to post in English due to concerns about negative evaluation, which limits opportunities for active language use.

One interviewee stated:

“I often check grammar many times before posting in English because I worry that other people may judge my mistakes.”

Furthermore, the lack of structured feedback on Facebook restricts learning effectiveness. Unlike formal classroom environments, social media interactions rarely provide corrective input, which is essential for developing accuracy. Additionally, the presence of distractions reduces learners’ ability to engage in sustained, focused learning.

2.4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the role of Facebook as an informal language learning environment and can be interpreted through established theoretical frameworks.

First, the high frequency of English exposure supports Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. Facebook offers a continuous stream of authentic input, enabling incidental learning. However, the predominance of passive activities suggests that input alone does not guarantee balanced skill development.

Second, from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), Facebook facilitates learning through social interaction. Students engage with peers, communities, and global users, which can enhance their communicative competence. Nevertheless, the limited use of interactive features such as commenting and messaging indicates that the potential for collaborative learning is not fully realized.

The relatively low use of Messenger communication can be explained by several factors. Real-time interaction requires immediate language production, which increases anxiety and cognitive pressure. In addition, students tend to associate Messenger with personal communication rather than academic practice. These findings align with Tran (2023), who observed that Vietnamese learners often demonstrate greater confidence in passive digital interaction than in spontaneous communication.

Third, the findings align with the Interactionist Theory (Long, 1996), which highlights the importance of negotiation of meaning in language development. The relatively low engagement in real-time communication suggests that students miss opportunities for feedback and interaction, which are critical for developing accuracy and fluency.

The findings further correspond with Thao and Huong (2022), who reported that social media exposure may negatively influence academic writing through overreliance on informal language forms. The present study extends this argument by showing that 71.1% of fast-track students are concerned about informal language transfer despite their relatively advanced proficiency.

A significant contribution of this study lies in highlighting the dual role of Facebook. On the one hand, it increases learner autonomy, motivation, and authentic language exposure. On the other hand, it creates challenges related to distraction, informal language habits, and limited feedback mechanisms.

These findings suggest that informal learning environments alone are insufficient for balanced language development. Pedagogical integration is therefore necessary to help students transfer digital language experiences into academic contexts more effectively.

3. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the habits of using English on Facebook among fast-track English major students and examined the perceived effects of such usage on language proficiency.

The findings demonstrate that Facebook functions as a valuable informal learning environment that supports vocabulary acquisition, listening exposure, reading comprehension, and learner confidence. However, its contribution to speaking skills and academic writing remains limited.

The study also reveals a significant imbalance between receptive and productive language activities. Students consume English content far more frequently than they actively produce language.

In addition, concerns regarding informal language transfer and lack of corrective feedback remain important challenges.

Overall, Facebook should be considered a supplementary learning resource rather than a replacement for formal language education. Its effectiveness depends largely on learners' awareness, self-regulation, and pedagogical guidance.

Future studies should employ larger sample sizes, include comparative analysis across multiple social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, and investigate long-term effects of digital language learning on academic performance.

Implications and Recommendations

For Students

Students should engage more actively and critically with English content on Facebook, focusing on accuracy as well as fluency.

For Educators

Teachers are encouraged to integrate social media into instructional practices, such as assigning tasks that involve online interaction and reflection.

For Institutions

Educational institutions should promote digital literacy and provide guidance on the effective use of social media for academic purposes.

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VIỆC SỬ DỤNG TIẾNG ANH TRÊN FACEBOOK CỦA SINH VIÊN CHƯƠNG TRÌNH CHẤT LƯỢNG CAO NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH TẠI VIỆT NAM: THÓI QUEN VÀ TÁC ĐỘNG ĐẾN NĂNG LỰC NGÔN NGỮ

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát thói quen sử dụng tiếng Anh trên nền tảng Facebook của sinh viên chương trình chất lượng cao ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam, đồng thời phân tích những tác động được nhận thức của hoạt động này đối với năng lực ngôn ngữ và kết quả học tập của người học. Nghiên cứu được triển khai theo phương pháp hỗn hợp, trong đó dữ liệu định lượng được thu thập từ 55 sinh viên thông qua bảng hỏi có cấu trúc, kết hợp với dữ liệu định tính thu được từ các cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc với 10 người tham gia. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy Facebook có thể được xem như một môi trường học tập số không chính thức, góp phần đáng kể vào việc phát triển vốn từ vựng, khả năng đọc hiểu, cũng như nâng cao mức độ tự tin trong việc sử dụng tiếng Anh của người học. Tuy nhiên, nền tảng này bộc lộ những hạn chế nhất định trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng nói và năng lực viết học thuật mang tính chuẩn mực. Bên cạnh đó, xu hướng lạm dụng ngôn ngữ không trang trọng và việc tiếp xúc thường xuyên với các dạng ngôn ngữ không chuẩn cũng đặt ra những thách thức đáng lưu ý đối với quá trình học tập ngôn ngữ. Từ những kết quả đạt được, nghiên cứu đi đến kết luận rằng, mặc dù Facebook có thể đóng vai trò như một công cụ hỗ trợ hữu ích trong việc học tiếng Anh, hiệu quả của nó phụ thuộc đáng kể vào mức độ nhận thức của người học cũng như sự tích hợp có định hướng trong hoạt động giảng dạy. Trên cơ sở đó, nghiên cứu đề xuất một số hàm ý đối với người học, giảng viên và các nhà thiết kế chương trình đào tạo.

Từ khóa: Facebook; học tiếng Anh; học tập không chính thức; mạng xã hội; sinh viên Việt Nam; năng lực ngôn ngữ

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