

FACEBOOK AS A PROMOTIONAL TOOL FOR LEARNER AUTONOMY: THAI PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' VOICES

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Abstract: Facebook has not only opened up new opportunities for social networking, but has also been recognized as an educational tool for language learning beyond the classroom. However, little is known as to what extent Facebook can promote learner autonomy among English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers (PSTs). This study explores the voices of EFL PSTs with regard to their use of Facebook as a tool for promoting their autonomy in learning English, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing upon Betts and Kercher's (1996) Autonomous Learner Model (ALM), this study gained deeper insights into the EFL PSTs' attitudes, perceptions, and ideas concerning the opportunities and challenges Facebook offers them. This qualitative study was based on a purposive sampling of twenty EFL PSTs from a university in northern Thailand. The findings reveal that Thai EFL PSTs experienced all five dimensions of ALM, namely, orientation, individual development, enrichment, seminars, and in-depth study. They also viewed learning English on Facebook positively during the lockdowns since they simultaneously acquired English and enjoyed edutainment resources despite some limitations concerning this platform. Pedagogical implications of this study suggest that Facebook is a suitable platform for ELT professional development and life-long learning, particularly amid the global disruption caused by COVID-19.

Keywords: learner autonomy, Facebook, Thai pre-service EFL teacher, professional development, COVID-19

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v33i2/292-309>

According to Deslandes-Martineau et al. (2020), the COVID-19 crisis has challenged educators to develop digital literacy among language teachers and learners in order to discover new ways and skills for promoting learner autonomy in language learning and teaching outside the classroom. Learner autonomy is considered a key concept for successful language learning, which mainly depends on the learner's own responsibility (Chang, 2020). Given that distance education is primarily based on the use of digital technologies such as emails, online courses and document-sharing platforms, the pandemic has highlighted the need to develop teachers'

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digital literacy. While the use of digital tools is an integral part of the professional skills expected of teachers, and some have already been using these tools (e.g., video), others still lack the required knowledge, skills and tools to design quality online learning material. Similarly, a number of students cannot independently use technologies. As a result, during the crisis, teachers have had to play the dual role of both teaching students and learning about certain social media and educational technologies at the same time.

Learner autonomy is recognized as valuable for successful language learning and teaching (Chang, 2020; Tayjasanant & Suraratdecha, 2016). This concept consists of various aspects. Firstly, learners take responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1981). Secondly, learners explore suitable learning content and strategies as their learning goals are identified by the learners themselves (Benson, 2011; Oxford, 2003; Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). In this study, Thai EFL PSTs' autonomy was explored in terms of their self-discipline and self-direction as the initial points. Strong learner self-discipline is vital for developing their skills and knowledge beyond the teachers' input, and learners need to master the art of setting activities, practice, and tasks independently. It is interesting to note that the learner autonomy approach also extends towards a life-long learning skill. Through a better sense of self-control in learning, learner autonomy has the potential to augment new language acquisition.

Regarding self-learning strategies, learner autonomy has been promoted through the use of online learning platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, providing edutainment resources students can access anytime and anywhere (Darasawang & Reinders, 2015; Reinders et al., 2022). Social media have extremely become significant teaching and learning materials for all learners in this digital age (Zhanda et al., 2020). Being one of the best-known social media websites, Facebook is particularly recognized for its self-directed learning content (Chik & Briedbach, 2014; UNESCO IITE, 2020). According to Rao (2018), learner autonomy has been well-documented in foreign language learning by motivating learners to be in charge of their independent learning through the use of technology and online sources outside the classroom rather than relying on teacher-centered traditional classroom teaching.

As a virtual platform for online communities and resources, Facebook was originally created as a Harvard social network (Shaw, 2017). Today, it dominates the Internet worldwide (Iqbal, 2022). Regarding its multifunctional use in higher education, a number of previous studies have explored the online English language learning environment offered by Facebook (see, e.g., Ibrahim et al., 2018; Inpeng & Nomnian, 2020; Ulla & Perales, 2021). Moreover, EFL students' attitude, motivation and confidence appeared to be positively affected by an online environment such as Facebook (AbuSa'alek, 2015). As such, Facebook poses opportunities and challenges for education, but the benefits are clear as far as English language acquisition through self-development and learner autonomy are concerned. This highlights Facebook's potential for use in online EFL classes during lockdowns enforced by the government as a result of COVID-19.

Empirical studies show that Facebook enhances various aspects of English language education such as general English, English for specific purpose, oral communication, listening, literacy, attitude, motivation, perception, self-confidence, and satisfaction (AlSaeem, 2018; AbuSa'alek, 2015; Aydin, 2017; Linh & Suppasetsee, 2016; Mirza, 2020; Sirivedin et al., 2018; Slim & Hafedh, 2019). Kanthawongs et al. (2016) confirmed that Facebook was regarded

positively in Thai higher education. It is evident that Facebook has practical implications for learner autonomy that can be applicable for pre-service teacher education at a tertiary level in Thailand as it offers an effective online environment for self-directed learning of EFL during this difficult time.

This study explored Thai EFL PSTs' learner autonomy with regard to language learning strategies, attitudes, and the challenges they encountered in learning English through Facebook. These EFL PSTs should emphasize their English language development because they will potentially become in-service professional EFL teachers upon their graduation (Inpeng & Nomnian, 2020). Furthermore, this group partook in a number of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) courses designed to develop proficient language teaching professionals who can contribute to Thai education. Due to the widespread use of Facebook, it would be appropriate to find out whether the Thai EFL PSTs had become autonomous in their English proficiency and language teaching professional development by using Facebook during the COVID-19 crisis.

Learner Autonomy

The term "learner autonomy" was coined by Holec (1981, p. 3), defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." Little (1991) further explained that autonomy is related to the learners' psychology, which is the capacity for independent action, critical reflection, and decision-making without the control of others. Moreover, Benson (2000) noted that autonomy is the learner's right to decision-making within the educational system. Thus, learner autonomy in this study refers to taking one's own responsibility for learning by setting and managing one's objectives, content, progress, methods, language acquisition strategies, evaluation, and assessment of language learning by oneself.

Learner autonomy is very useful for foreign language acquisition. As mentioned by Little (1991), linguistic development and social freedom are aspects of autonomy. Social interaction constructs the need for communication, and learners' inputs and efforts are made in order to engage in communicative exchanges through target language. Therefore, at the outset, learner autonomy is crucial for the target language acquisition.

Empirical studies have focused on learner autonomy in various contexts. In one case, the overall English grades of Chinese students improved as a result of the use of the autonomous inquiry model (Zhang, 2014). However, there were some limitations on the learner. Zhang (2014) illustrated that this learning method requires time to learn English and cultivate learners' motivation and interest. In another study, Turkish pre-service teachers were found to be driven to autonomous learning by academic self-efficacy and motivation, and their improved grade point average (GPA) results were significantly related to autonomous learning (Alkan & Arslan, 2019). It has also been found that blended learning integrated with an extensive reading instructional model can potentially supplement learner autonomy in EFL undergraduate students (Chanthap & Wasanasomsithi, 2019). Furthermore, cooperative learning has been found to enhance non-English students' learner autonomy according to attitude, interest, and motivation (Shi & Han, 2019). Teachers generally agree that cultivating learner autonomy is an important part of language learning for students (Chang, 2020).

Regarding Thai university students, for instance, they developed intercultural communicative strategies and language awareness through internships that enabled them to gain a better understanding of cultural differences and the varieties of English (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian, 2020). Thai doctoral students also became active and agentic in academic and social contexts while studying in Australia (Nomnian, 2018). It can be concluded that language learner autonomy refers to the responsibility and effort learners exert when they are learning any target language and how to learn it by setting their learning objectives, determining ways and means to achieve those learning targets, and reflecting on and assessing their own learning outcomes. In this way, autonomous learning is individually based on a clear emphasis on their personal needs and preferences. Teachers are instrumental in employing technology in English language teaching to make teaching flexible and accessible to learners, and their knowledge and skills in using technology in and out of the classroom should be enhanced (Rao, 2018). This study, therefore, addresses the promotion of Facebook as an alternative educational technology to better equip Thai EFL PSTs, whose experience using it can potentially benefit their future students.

This study employed the concept of autonomous learner model (ALM) created by Betts and Kercher (1996). There are five dimensions included in this model, as shown in Figure 1.

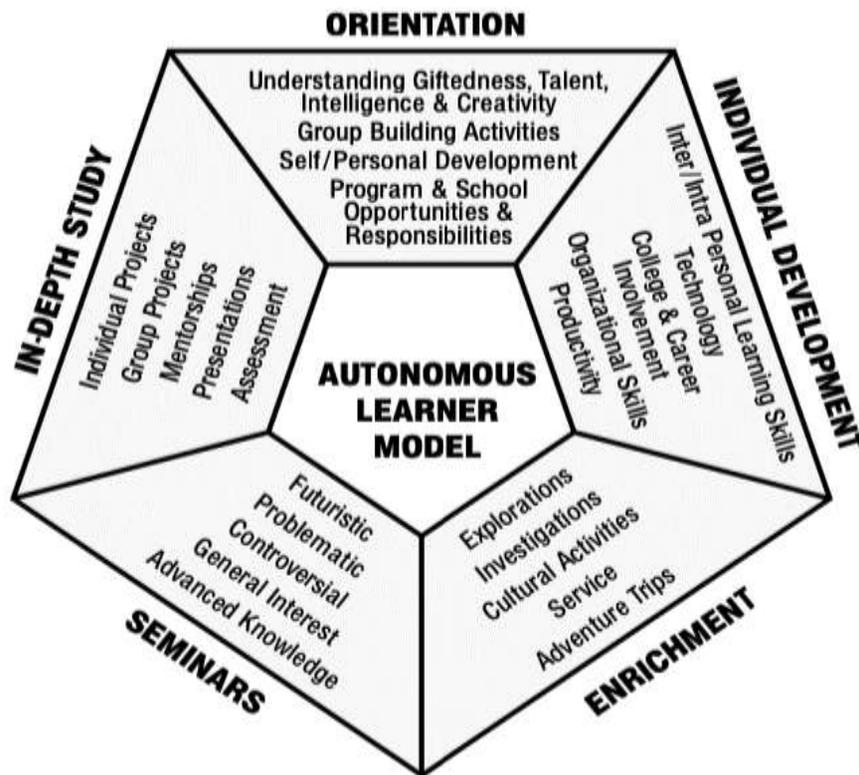


Figure 1: Autonomous Learner Model (Betts & Kercher, 1996, p. 39)

Figure 1 depicts the five dimensions of ALM, each of which is explained as follows:

Orientation

This dimension is related primarily to self-understanding, working-group importance, life-long learning process, and general individual development. There are four specific areas included in orientation: 1) understanding giftedness, talent, intelligence, and creativity; 2) group building activities; 3) self/personal development; and 4) program and school opportunities and responsibilities.

Individual Development

Appropriate skills, concepts, and attitudes are taught to students in order to develop individual life-long learning. This dimension consists of six specific areas: 1) inter/intra personal learning skills; 2) technology; 3) college and career; 4) involvement; 5) organizational skills; and 6) productivity.

Enrichment

Learner-based content is the main feature of this dimension, based on content, process, and product. The five specific areas are: 1) explorations; 2) investigations, 3) cultural activities; 4) service; and 5) adventure trips.

Seminars

In this dimension, an important topic is selected for a seminar in which students participate. The seminar is designed to demonstrate students' ability to work in small groups. Through such activities, students transform to learners and teachers to facilitators. The seminars address five topics: 1) the future; 2) problems; 3) controversies; 4) general interest; and 5) advanced knowledge.

In-depth study

This concept leads life-long learning through an autonomous learning model, with five specific areas that promote learner autonomy: 1) individual projects; 2) group projects; 3) mentorships; 4) presentations; and 5) assessment.

Although each dimension individually consists of its own specific aspects, they are not mutually exclusive. All of them are interrelated and overlain with one another, and this helps identify relevant factors related to language learner autonomy. For example, concerning English skill enhancement, AlSaleem (2018) determined that students' oral communication skills improved when engaging in Facebook activities, and this success would likely be replicated with other English skills such as reading, listening, and writing. Exploring satisfaction and attitudes towards using Facebook, Slim and Hafedh (2019) found that business administration students were more satisfied with Facebook-based group work than with traditional classroom-based lessons in terms of vocabulary learning. Nevertheless, some studies have found risks and limitations of Facebook use in education. In general use, online bullying and indecent content might be encountered by students in cyberspace, so students need to be aware of such risks when using it for academic purposes (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Huffman, 2013). Furthermore, concerning educational contexts, most Facebook users appear less likely to use it for educational purposes rather than entertainment, and this is especially the case for teenage users (Kirschner

& Karpinski, 2010; Leveritt et al., 2012). EFL PSTs tend to access social media for interpersonal communication, and this point can be turned into an opportunity for educational activities in the EFL classroom (Espinosa, 2015; Inpeng & Nomnian, 2020).

Online learning promotes learner autonomy and agency. Online learning not only provides the students quick access without the need to travel, but also facilitates the creation of high-quality learner-centred interactive education. It is important to empower the students to digital transformation in university teaching through three dimensions: motivations, digital pedagogy, and student autonomy as they can choose to study according to their own preferences (Díaz-Noguera et al., 2022).

This framework is suitable for this study as the dimensions of the ALM model not only provide conceptual understanding, but also suggest pedagogical implications that can serve an in-depth analysis into Thai EFL PSTs' autonomy in English language learning through Facebook. In line with this model, this study aims to address the strategies, attitudes, and challenges faced by Thai EFL PSTs to develop their autonomy in English language learning through Facebook.

METHOD

Research Setting and Participants

This study was undertaken at a university in northern Thailand that offers a bachelor's degree in TEFL aimed at producing graduates who were equipped with English language teaching skills and licensed to become English language teachers nationwide. The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education in TEFL program in the academic year 2019. There were 176 EFL PSTs in total. This study, however, focused on gaining insights into their attitudes and opinions on the use of Facebook with regard to learner autonomy. Thus, a qualitative approach was employed because, according to Dornyei (2007), it provides an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon under investigation of particular groups of people. Therefore, the participants were recommended by their English lecturers because they were the top-five academic achieving students with excellent social media literacy in each academic year between 2016 and 2019 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Research Participants

Groups	Interviewee Identification Code
1st year pre-service EFL teachers	A1-A5
2nd year pre-service EFL teachers	B1-B5
3rd year pre-service EFL teachers	C1-C5
4th year pre-service EFL teachers	D1-D5
Total	20

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to the data collection, this study obtained ethics approval from IPSR-Institutional Review Board (IPSR-IRB) committee and the Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences)

of Mahidol University under project No. IRB0001007 and COA. No. 2019/11-451. Following the granting of permission by the dean of the Faculty of Education at the university where the study was conducted, the participants were contacted and an appointment made for the focus-group interviews at a mutually agreed date, time, and location. All participants were provided with research information and a written informed consent form to ensure research ethics. Following the participants' approval, the focus-group interview was then conducted with each cohort.

The focus-group interviews concerned the ways the participants learnt English autonomously through Facebook as well as the challenges (see interview questions in Appendix). It took approximately 40 minutes with the participants from each academic year. Thai was used as a language of the interview because the participants and the researchers were all Thai nationals and Thai was their mother tongue, making communication more effective. Welch and Piekkari (2006) claim that the use of mother tongue can potentially enhance data accuracy and authenticity, build researcher-participant rapport, and create a shared understanding. Each focus-group interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts were returned to the participants for cross-validation to increase the quality of the study. According to Rowlands (2021), interviewee transcript review (ITR) is a form of respondent validation that not only increases participants' confidence but also promotes their active involvement. The cross-validated transcripts were then manually coded according to thematic analysis based on Betts and Kercher's (1996) ALM.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

These participants utilized Facebook for more than five years. They spent more than seven hours a day on this platform for contacting with friends and family. However, they used it not only for communication, but also for seeking self-developed channels, such as fanpages and closed groups in line with their interests.

Drawing upon Betts and Kercher's (1996) ALM, the findings for each dimension are as follows.

Orientation

This dimension enables individual learners to recognize their abilities to develop themselves and explore their potential through closed-groups and fanpages, where common interests in language learning such as grammar and exams could be shared and exchanged.

Extract 1

I join closed-group TOEIC sessions because people share information about exams and techniques. (Student D1)

Extract 2

I mostly join in closed-group sessions where people share grammar and tense knowledge. Another way is that I change from Thai language mode to English mode on Facebook. (Student A1)

These two extracts illustrate that the participants were not only highly motivated when joining closed-groups for grammar and exams, but they could also develop a sense of belonging within these virtual communities that shared similar interests. Switching from Thai to English also suggests that the participants wished to learn and write in English by reading and commenting through posts. Some also had foreign friends whose Facebook interaction encouraged them to communicate in English.

Extract 3

I follow my favorite fanpages for using English, and I also have foreign friends on my friend list, so at least I have to try to read their Facebook posts and reply to them in English. (Student C2)

Extract 3 demonstrates how the orientation dimension enables the participants to be part of Facebook communities who were self-confident and motivated, and this led to learner autonomy. Facebook allows the creation of a space where English communication can be promoted between Thai EFL PSTs and other members in these virtual communities.

Individual Development

Learner autonomy among these participants was supported by interpersonal communication, language learning skills, technology, and productivity. They knew what they wanted to learn, which resources to explore, and with whom they wanted to communicate. For instance, video clips on Facebook were useful learning resources that they could use in classroom teaching, as revealed in Extracts 4 and 5.

Extract 4

I choose the video menu bar on Facebook. There are various kinds of English lessons teaching clips. I can watch whatever and whenever I want to. (Student B1)

There were also other language tools on Facebook such as video calls that the participants could employ for borderless interpersonal communication in English with Thai and non-Thai speakers.

Extract 5

Every week I text messages and make video calls to my sister who lives in America. I always interact with her in English. (Student B5)

It is interesting to note that one participant learned English by joining the fanpages of Korean singers because English was used as the medium of communication among fans. The participant had high integrative motivation to be part of these music communities where fan clubs could interact and share information about their favorite singers. This was a very productive way to learn English for entertainment purposes (see Extract 6).

Extract 6

Following fanpages of Korean singers is a way I learn English. These communities provide opportunities to use English. For example, I have to communicate in English with other fans to be updated with our favorite Korean singers. (Student D3)

This dimension highlights the benefits of Facebook functions, including video clips, video calls, and fanpages which address the particular interests of the participants. These are effective tools for interpersonal communication and individual development beyond the physical space.

Enrichment

Resources for learner-based content are abundant on Facebook. There are various features that enable the participants to explore and investigate through cultural activities and virtual adventure trips.

For example, one participant used Facebook settings such as ‘See First’ as a way to be notified whenever their favorite news feed appeared. News feed features up-to-date stories, photos, videos, and links from people, organizations, and includes resources such as English learning related to what the participants would like to learn and explore on a regular basis. Extracts 7 to 10 describe this feature.

Extract 7

I am following fanpages for vocabulary every day and also noted on the menu bar the ‘See First’ setting. All fanpage sharing shows up on my news feed. I not only learn vocabulary but I also collect techniques for English use and usage from the video options on fanpage. (Student B2)

Extract 8

When English content appears on my news feed, I sometimes try to learn new English words. It is also very convenient for me to learn whenever I want. (Student C3)

Extract 9

It is not bad using Facebook for learning English because everyone can share information or their feelings through it. It is a nice way to find out about events and news immediately as well as learn slang words and new metaphors. (Student C4)

Extract 10

Every day, I catch up on the news and events conveniently because of Facebook, including English quotes, short clips, and friends’ status by my mobile phone. Facebook is easy to use, and I can learn new English words by accident. (Student D4)

The enrichment dimension allowed the participants to explore interesting topics and receive favorite news feed with updated resources on English learning. This way facilitates their language learning promptly and conveniently in addition to attending the class. Self-directed learning can be enhanced and individualized through learner-centered news feed.

Another participant learned how to cook with the help of English subtitles in video clips on Facebook that not only supported English learning but also offered cooking techniques.

Extract 11

I follow fanpages where foreigners cook and use English. They show the subtitles of what they are saying in the videos. I can learn food recipes and English language at the same time. (Student B4)

Facebook could be highly engaging when the participants used for a purpose that was relevant to their interests in terms of both content and language. This double benefit highlights the increasing value of integrating Facebook into the classroom.

Seminars

In this dimension, although there was no physical seminar for the participants to attend, they could join fanpages which featured general interest and advanced knowledge that attracted groups of Facebook users with similar interests such as English inspirational quotes, language skills, language learning, and English usage.

Extract 12

I follow quotes and inspiration fanpages. I have learned idioms, phrases, vocabulary, and writing structure. Listening to videos is my favorite way of learning. I have improved my listening skill from videos and my reading skill from friends' Facebook status the most. (Student A3)

Extract 13

Some fanpages teach English through songs, and I enjoy this kind of learning. It improves all my skills such as listening, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing, and reading. (Student B2)

Facebook provides a wide variety of attractive resources, including games that entertained some participants. They also learned English in these closed-group communities, as shown in Extract 14.

Extract 14

I follow games on Facebook fanpages. They share game news in English. I have also joined a closed-group of the gaming community. People in the group communicate in English. I don't like to study English directly. It's boring. (Student D2)

Instead of attending seminars in person, the participants could virtually join closed-groups featuring topics and activities of interest to them. This stimulated their language learning, as they found it both practical and enjoyable simultaneously.

In-Depth Study

The participants were able to conduct self-study and assessment based on their personal learning goals. They could develop alternative ways to learn English and practical strategies to accommodate different language needs that were not taught in class, such as TOEIC, grammar, and vocabulary (see Extract 15).

Extract 15

I follow the TOEIC fanpage where tutors have recorded video classes for personal learning. I like watching rather than reading it because it helps me improve my listening at the same time. (Student A2)

Due to their positive experience of using Facebook during their teacher education, the participants could discuss with their mentors whether Facebook could be a potential learning resource for their future students, who could also benefit from using it (see Extracts 16-18).

Extract 16

I think Facebook is an easy way to support informal learning when I am a teacher trainee at school. So, I will recommend it to my students for learning outside the classroom. (Student C5)

Extract 17

I will ask my teacher trainer of the school practicum course whether Facebook should be adopted for the class because its functions are already sufficient as learning materials. (Student D5)

Extract 18

We always prepare a learning plan for doing something in closed-groups and on fanpages (Students A4 and A5).

Facebook can be viewed as an effective supplementary resource outside the classroom to promote learner autonomy and metacognitive learning strategy teacher training. The participants engaged in in-depth study through personal learning management and consultation with their teacher trainers.

One interesting issue that did arise concerned the challenges and constraints caused by instability of the internet, as noted in Extract 19.

Extract 19

During live streaming, the internet connection is sometimes erratic, and this results in me missing interesting points. I have to replay that part again, so I have to spend more time and even more money to pay for high-speed internet. (Student B4)

It became apparent, however, that Facebook was not considered a suitable online learning tool by some participants who were not keen on using it in the classroom.

Extract 20

I am sometimes confused about what content is correct. When I am studying by myself, I am not sure whether what I learn is right or wrong, such as accents, structure or specific words. (Student D2)

Extract 21

If I don't use Facebook, I can't imagine which other platforms are best to use. (Student C5)

The other issue was the participants' short concentration span, as they tended to pay too much attention to other distracting clips on TikTok and other sites. They knew they needed to be more focused on their learning, but this was sometimes a challenge.

Extract 22

I often spend time watching TikTok. This causes us to lose concentration on studying English. We have to keep motivating ourselves all the time (Students A4 and A5)

To summarize, the Thai pre-service EFL teachers experienced all five dimensions of Betts and Kercher's (1996) ALM: orientation, individual development, enrichment, seminars, and in-

depth study. They focused on English structure for tests and also learned English from the Facebook video options. They also turned the language setting on Facebook to English as another way of learning and carefully noted English teaching techniques for examinations such as TOEIC. They used Facebook fanpages and closed-group sessions based on their different interests. They preferred to study in a relaxed atmosphere by focusing on what inspired and interested them such as quotes, games, songs, cooking, and singers. They also stated that academic style learning was boring, and Facebook provided them more interesting opportunities to use English.

Discussion

This study raises three key points of discussions. Firstly, the participants needed to develop their digital literacy and language learning strategies in terms of English accent, usage, and vocabulary on Facebook. Similarly, Bailey et al. (2017) found that Facebook is a viable platform to supplement communication skills and language learning outside normal class. Concerning the Thai participants' interests and interactions with foreign friends on Facebook, the results also support Kasuma (2017), who revealed that Malaysian university students preferred selected learning strategies involving language development using Facebook.

Moreover, the participants mostly focused on Facebook fanpages and closed-group functions to learn aspects of English that were relevant to their own interests. They were familiar with learning from video clips and texts shared with others. As for learning styles, they focused on academic patterns (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and tests), user-friendliness (e.g. writing comments, quotes, games, songs, cooking, and singers), and interpersonal and intergroup communication. The findings are similar to the results of Shafie et al. (2016) in that language learners participated in Facebook activities: writing comments, reading news feeds, and joining in closed-group activities. They also correspond to Chang (2020), who revealed that learner autonomy is linked to students' motivation and their awareness of potential learning challenges.

Secondly, the participants positively revealed Facebook as a platform which facilitated self-learning. It provided them with multi-functional and accessible varieties of interpersonal interests. This point is related to the study of Almohtadi and Aldarabah (2021), which suggests that students had positive and high attitudes toward Facebook in terms of its relative advantage, ease of use, compatibility, trialability, and observability. Similarly, Moghadam and Shamsi (2021) found that their participants rated Facebook as an appropriate teaching tool. Their primary reasons for using Facebook were to share their interests with friends, to develop social group relationships, to find native speakers for chatting purposes, to download multimedia content, and to learn English vocabularies through the liked or subscribed pages.

Lastly, despite the benefits contributing to the five dimensions of learner autonomy, there were challenging issues, namely, internet infrastructure, costs, digital literacy, and concentration span that needed addressing by the program. This result was also found in an empirical study by Boontham (2017), who reported that lack of internet reliability was a concern for students learning English on Facebook. This study, therefore, sheds more light on the challenges faced by the pre-service EFL teachers with regard to internet speed, money, digital literacy, and motivation, which can potentially constrain their language learning.

Thai higher education in the post-COVID-19 era must consider viable solutions to challenges that arise from “new normal” instructional practices, which should include institutional support in terms of academic, sociopsychological, and technological dimensions for students (Nomnian, 2022). Moreover, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), influenced by effective learning experiences and supportive learning environments via digital technologies, should integrate social, cognitive, and psychological aspects, and alternative assessment approaches to learning should be applied in the post-pandemic era (Rapanta et al., 2020). It is also important to encourage a close and positive relationship between students and their teachers by supporting the students’ mental health during the pandemic (Nash, 2021).

With support, both faculty members and students should be able to adjust their mindset and develop digital literacy for virtual instruction and effective online communication (Waller & Waller, 2021). Perceptions of teachers and students towards digitally-enhanced instruction are, therefore, valuable as optimism and positive attitude can develop a mindset focused on growth, guide behaviours to seek opportunities to overcome the current crisis, and signal risks and uncertainties for the future (El-Sakran et al., 2022). Higher education administrative authorities and policy makers must be ready to face dilemmas and conflicts during this critical period of institutional challenges, changing institutional policies and practices, and declining resources in order to ensure equitable access and distribution of resources for students, faculty, and supporting staff (Kruse et al., 2020). Continual professional development (CPD) should also be offered to assist teachers in delivering effective online courses, as well as recognising the future potential for distance education in the post-pandemic era.

CONCLUSIONS

Informed by Betts and Kercher’s (1996) ALM, this study revealed that most participants had high internal interest in following Facebook fanpages and closed groups by themselves, without a need for reinforcement. Moreover, they mostly focused on enjoying a relaxing atmosphere in both local and foreign contexts, with activities such as songs, games, famous people, comedy, and variety shows. A reciprocal exchange of knowledge between experienced teachers and pre-service teachers should thus be created and encouraged to maximize the potential benefits of alternative ways of language learning through social networks such as Facebook that can meet the increasing demand for online teaching and learning. Facebook provides wider opportunities for social networking and virtual lifelong learning for pre-service EFL teachers and teacher trainers, who can employ it as a means for continuous professional development and English language education. Both parties not only improve English skills but also develop digital literacy during this “new normal” era. The integration of educational technologies and online media should therefore be promoted for the quality teaching and learning especially during the global pandemic crisis.

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APPENDIX

The main interview questions were as follows:

- 1) Please introduce yourself.
- 2) How often do you use Facebook in a day?
- 3) Which Facebook pages do you often visit?
- 4) Do you think Facebook can help you improve your English? Why? Why not?
- 5) Have you noticed any improvement of your English skills? If so, how?
- 6) How do you develop your autonomy in learning English?
- 7) How do you evaluate your learning process?
- 8) How and to what extent does Facebook help you improve your English learning?
- 9) Have you encountered any challenges learning English on Facebook?
- 10) How do you overcome such issues?
- 11) Would you recommend using Facebook to improve English to others? Why? Why not?