Facebook Group as an Educational Platform for Foreign Language Acquisition

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Abstract: In the research the educational potential of Facebook for language acquisition is studied. The methodological experiment and survey were conducted aimed at studying the efficiency of Facebook-assisted teaching in the Facebook group for the development of students' vocabulary, listening and writing skills. Quantitative and qualitative analysis, observation, interpretation, control and measuring were applied in the research. The Facebook group was viewed as an educational environment where a set of specially organized learning materials of different formats was accumulated. The research outlined the useful features and capabilities of the Facebook group for facilitating the learning process and increasing motivation and engagement. The findings proved that the Facebook group learners outperformed the participants of the control groups regarding all three aspects taken: vocabulary (breadth and depth of knowledge), listening skills (listening for general and specific information) and writing skills (content, organization and clarity, vocabulary, spelling and grammatical accuracy). The reasons for the better results of the experimental group participants were identified, including the repeated exposure of the experimental groups students to the target vocabulary, up-to-date and controversial nature of the study content, and visual and interactional nature of the Facebook environment. The survey revealed the positive evaluation of studying in the Facebook environment by the Facebook learners.

Keywords: *Facebook group; language acquisition; teaching a foreign language; vocabulary; listening; writing skills development.*

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1. Introduction

1.1. The research problem

Social networking sites (SNSs) have significantly penetrated all areas of modern society. Nowadays they represent a huge potential for the education of contemporary learners often called ‘digital-age learners’, ‘digital natives’ or ‘the net generation’ who are characterized by specific ways of absorbing, retaining and applying information. Facebook is one of the largest and most popular social networking platforms in existence (the global number of Facebook users is expected to reach 1.69 billion people in 2020). The incorporation of Facebook into foreign language teaching can be of immense value from the pedagogical point of view as it can enhance engagement and motivation promoting learning through active interactions between teachers and students in the well-known virtual online environment. From the linguistic perspective practising with specially posted learning materials, expressing and sharing academically-related ideas, exchanging inbox messages etc. can promote students’ communication and language skills.

In this vein, to modernize the process of language acquisition which will consider the educational and personal needs of learners, it is necessary to develop new methodologies that will focus on the capabilities of SNSs. The researchers hypothesize that Facebook-assisted teaching via a specially created and moderated Facebook group where the course-related content is accumulated can benefit students in developing foreign language skills. The teaching potential of a Facebook group can be explained by the fact that for modern learners it is an authentic environment and as a kind of social learning group it can naturally invite more frequent interactions and discussions thus stimulating both intentional and incidental learning.

1.2. The research purpose

The purpose of the research is to study the efficiency of Facebook-assisted teaching via the Facebook group for the development of students’ vocabulary, listening and writing skills. The objectives of the study are:

- to analyze the educational potential of Facebooking for language skills development;
- to conduct a quasi-experiment to check the impact of the suggested methodology on language acquisition in three aspects: vocabulary, listening and writing skills development;

- to process the data acquired in the quasi-experiment and to analyze the results;
- to study the attitude of students to learning in the Facebook environment.

2. Literature review

The analysis of the studies on the issue in question shows that the educational potential of Facebook is studied in two main aspects. Firstly, in the *general pedagogical context* where Facebook is recognized as an educational tool because of its beneficial qualities such as enabling peer feedback, goodness of fit with social context, and interaction tools (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Mason, 2006; Sturgeon & Walker, 2009). It is stressed that Facebook 'technological affordances' (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012) support a diverse range of interests and practices. Facebook introduction into the learning process influences academic settings for both teachers and learners (Villano, 2007) changing the nature of the educational environment by removing limitation of communication (Elliott et al., 2010), fostering positive student relationships, providing constructive educational outcome and opportunities to interact and collaborate with peers, instructors and native speakers (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). The latter impacts cultural relations and eliminates the cultural gap (Birky & Collins, 2011; Harrison, 2013; Harrison & Thomas, 2009). Blattner and Fiori (2009) find Facebook helpful for improving students' socio-pragmatic competence. All these features of the new reliable learning environment enhance students' participation (Mazman & Usluel, 2010) and influence motivation (Faryadi, 2017; Mills, 2009; Polok & Harezak, 2018). It is stated that Facebook can be of value supporting both classroom assignments (Roblyer et al., 2010) and homework (Kitsis, 2008).

Secondly, Facebook is studied from the *language learning perspective*. Lampe et al. (2011) state that language acquisition through sharing and exchanging language abilities by Facebook users is both conscious and unconscious process. Scholars stress its ability to ease learning foreign languages (Abidin et al., 2010; Mills, 2011), to be a strong resource for language instruction (Kabilan et al., 2010), to have positive effects on learning different language skills (Ching, 2012; Depew, 2011; Derakshan & Hasanabbasi, 2015; Mahmud, & Kamnoetsin, 2014).

The positive impact of the Facebook environment on learners' vocabulary development is proved in the research by Sim and Pop (2014), Kabilan and Zahar (2016). Expósito and Martín-Monje (2016) declare that Facebook can enhance the acquisition of specialised vocabulary in the

context of a Massive Open Online Course. Güvendir and Gezgin (2015) find a positive relationship between vocabulary development and playing education integrated Facebook games.

The development of writing skills via Facebook was studied by Kabilan et al. (2010) who stressed Facebook groups' ample opportunities to practice and improve writing by responding to posts and participating in the discussion. Yunus and Salehi (2012) examined the importance of brainstorming ideas in Facebook groups before the actual writing. Ahmad (2016), Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) investigated grammar discussion and writing skills. Godwin-Jones (2008) highlighted the Facebook potential for linking informal and academic writing.

Special attention is given to the strengths and weaknesses of using a Facebook group (Hamidah, 2017) and Facebook Live (Kobylnski, 2018) in teaching listening.

This research appears to be a comprehensive study on the effectiveness and advantages of Facebook in developing several language skills and it provides the analysis of the set of learning materials that can be used effectively in the Facebook environment for language acquisition.

3. Methodology

The general research methods of the analysis and synthesis were used with the aim to study the existing theoretical and methodological researches concerning the educational potential of using Facebook for educational purposes in general and their language learning potential in particular. In the course of the quasi-experiment quantitative and qualitative analysis, observation, interpretation, control and measuring (pre-experimental and post-experimental assessment), were applied. The survey was used to study students' attitude to Facebook-assisted learning.

The quasi-experiment was carried out during the first semester of the 2018/2019 academic year at the Personnel Training Institute for the Bodies of Justice of Ukraine of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University.

The main stages of the research included the pre-experimental assessment, experimental teaching, post-experimental assessment and survey.

During the first *pre-experimental stage* all first-year students (13 academic groups) of the Personnel Training Institute for the Bodies of Justice of Ukraine took the obligatory placement test aimed at checking their English proficiency level. According to the scores obtained at the test, 6 academic groups that showed approximately the same level of knowledge

were selected as subjects for the quasi-experiment from which 3 academic groups were taken as experimental groups (EG1, EG2, EG3) and 3 as control groups (CG1, CG2, CG3). Totally – 102 first-year Bachelor's degree students – 51 of the experimental groups and 51 of the control groups.

At the stage of ***experimental teaching*** students of experimental and control groups learnt the same academic material recommended by the syllabus and they were aimed to develop the same competences and reach the same results outlined in the programme. The control groups were taught in the traditional education environment while the students of the experimental groups were added to the Facebook group where previously selected and properly designed teaching materials were downloaded. The quasi-experiment was concentrated on the three aspects: vocabulary, listening and writing skills development.

Post-experimental assessment was conducted in the form of the final test divided into 3 parts: vocabulary, listening and writing.

The final stage of the research included ***the survey*** which consisted of 9 questions given to experimental groups students as for their attitude to using the Facebook group for learning English. These questions concerned four aspects: 1) the use of the Facebook group as a method of improving vocabulary; 2) the use of the Facebook group as a method of improving writing skills; 3) the use of the Facebook group as a method of improving listening skills; 4) the general attitude to the educational process via the Facebook Group. The questions were dichotomous with two possible responses ('agree' and 'disagree'). The results are expressed as percentages of the students who gave a particular answer.

4. Results

4.1. *The quasi-experiment basis*

To conduct the quasi-experiment a set of specially selected and designed materials for developing vocabulary, listening and writing skills was organized and downloaded to the Facebook group. The assignments were given as in-the-class and out-of-the-class activities.

4.1.1. *Facebook potential for vocabulary development*

Designing the content of the learning material for the vocabulary section of the quasi-experiment, the researchers took into consideration vocabulary teaching techniques summarized in the work by Oxford and Crookall (1990): 1) de-contextualising; 2) semi-contextualising; 3) fully contextualizing; 4) adaptable.

Depending on the vocabulary learning strategies that are steps which students had to take to discover the meaning of new vocabulary items, to expand the knowledge of these lexemes, to retain them in the long-term memory, to recall them and to use in productive activities the researchers divided the learning material into two groups.

1) *Materials for intentional vocabulary learning* aimed at teaching target vocabulary and useful word-learning strategies and interactive activities to motivate and engage students in learning new words.

This group included the material for conscious learning firstly of de-contextualized and secondly of semi-contextualized basic legal terms and law-related vocabulary which were systematically taught. The assignments concerning this material were to aid primarily noticing, recognition and retention of the given lexemes by plentiful exposure to them. Previous researches state that a word has to be encountered in different settings 10-16 times before it is put in the long-term memory. That is why plenty of tailored materials or specially made assignments to work were downloaded or the links to them were given.

1. *Visual displays of words or word mappings* that help to introduce new words, to find their meanings, draw connections to associated words (charts, maps, wordlists, infographics, flashcards, word clouds, etc.). To produce these visualized learning materials or to work with them the following online digital tools were used: word cloud generators (Tagxedo, Tagul, Word It Out, VocabGrabber, Wordle, WordSift, etc); visual dictionaries or thesauruses (Visuwords, Visual Thesaurus, etc.). The vocabulary presented using these data visualization tools was structured and easier to understand. The students were either exposed to the readymade material or had to produce them themselves and perform a set of tasks related to them.

The examples of the visually represented vocabulary are given below in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1. A word cloud created using Wordart

Figure 2. A word map generated by the visual thesaurus Visuwords

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The screenshot of the test prepared on the Quizlet platform is shown in Figure 3.

Source: Online test - authors own conception

Figure 3. A Multiple choice questions test created using Quizlet

3) *Online vocabulary games* (Vocabulary, Quizlet, etc.). Being fun, relaxing and motivating, games were used for independent or whole-group practice. Some of them contained themed word lists, test preparation items, and activities on prefixes and suffixes. The screenshot of the *Vocabulary Jam* game played by students in two groups is shown in Figure 4.

Source: Online test – authors own conception

Figure 4. A *Vocabulary Jam* game created using Vocabulary.com

4) *Multimedia format materials* (audio, video, animation). Taken from different sources (e.g., Business English Pod - Learn Business English, Study

Legal English, engVid, Cambridge Law Studio, Learn ELS with Drew, etc.), they provide audio and visual images that reduce cognitive overload and maximize retention, increase learner engagement and participation. According to Gorman (2019), a learner is likely to remember only 10% of textual content, 65% of visual content, but 95% of audio-visual content. Multimedia content makes connections between verbal and visual representations of content, leading to a deeper understanding, which in turn supports the transfer of learning to other situations.

The screenshot of the Facebook group page with the posted vocabulary development video unit is shown in Figure 5.

Source: Post from Facebook research group

Figure 5. A post on the Facebook group page with a video unit for vocabulary development.

2. *Materials for incidental vocabulary learning* which were given to students to acquire target vocabulary incidentally via indirect exposure to lexical material in listening and reading tasks. This group consisted of the material for unconscious learning of fully contextualizing lexical units without students being aware of the goals of vocabulary learning. Students were to hear or see the words used in many different contexts and to notice or guess the meanings of the vocabulary, grammatical structures and collocations.

4.1.2. Listening skills development via Facebook

The choice of the study material for developing listening skills was based on the listening strategies which are traditionally classified into *the top-*

down (listener-based) and bottom-up (text-based) strategies (Sharma, 2011). The first strategies activate listeners' perception through background information (general knowledge of the topic, context, the type of listening material, etc.). They include: 1) listening for the major idea; 2) prediction; 3) drawing assumptions. The second type of strategies focuses on listeners' comprehension at a sound or word level. They are: 1) listening for specific information; 2) recognizing cognates; 3) recognizing word-order patterns.

Accordingly, the Facebook learners were suggested to process two groups of assignments for listening development.

1) *The assignments intended to develop and test comprehension of general information implementing top-down strategies.* The learners anticipated the content answering pre-listening questions, used keywords to build the content scheme, inferred the setting of the content, causes and effects, etc. These assignments tuned the learners to realize the topic of the content in general and resulted in better and conscious comprehension.

Some of the assignments of this group were in the form of a dialogue where the learners were suggested to listen to a speaker and derive the prediction of the second speaker's response. This task was diversified with listening to the beginning of the story and further contemplating the ending of it; pre-listening reading of news headlines on the Facebook page (redirected from www.bbc.co.uk, www.cnn.com, etc.) and predicting the content.

The screenshot of the Facebook group page with the posted video unit used to develop listening skills according to the top-down strategies is shown in Figure 6.

Source: Post from Facebook research group

Figure 6. A post on the Facebook group page with a video unit for listening skills development using top-down strategies.

The benefits of using the Facebook group for the mentioned assignments was in the possibility for groupmates to share their assumptions, possible questions and information through group messaging. Moreover, messaging teamwork generated more ideas which supported those students whose level of the second language was not high and who needed assistance and encouragement.

2) *The assignments intended to develop and test comprehension of specified information implementing bottom-up strategies.* The learners had to identify keywords and word order, pronoun referents and time references, sequence markers, etc. thus activating the lexical knowledge of the vocabulary they recognized, which helped them to move to the semantic and syntactic level of the text. Bottom-up exercises demanded from the learners to apply, broaden and demonstrate their lexico-grammatical knowledge of the language.

English subtitles added to some of the utilized videos posted on the Facebook page facilitated better content comprehension by learners providing extra clues of information. Visual perception combined with listening itself greatly stimulated the learners' interest to listening activity and completing related tasks which resulted in their message discussions on the group page where the participants could share their opinions about the content.

The screenshot of the Facebook group page with the posted listening skills developing video according to the bottom-up strategies is shown in Figure 7.

Source: Post from Facebook research group

Figure 7. A post on the Facebook group page with a video unit for listening skills development using bottom-up.

The study materials of authentic and educational character (news, listening and video units, speeches, parts of lectures, film clips, song, etc.) were taken from different sources (Free Legal English Videos, Educational Legal Videos, Legal Videos from Justice Pays, Legal Videos - Seltzer Film & Video, Video news – Vox, etc.). By nature, the selected content was of two types: informative – for gaining new information and critical – for raising discussion.

4.1.3. Using Facebook for enhancing writing skills

As a separate part of the research, the potential of Facebook for developing and enhancing writing skills was investigated. The Experimental Facebook group users performed various types of assignments aimed at developing their writing skills.

1. *Writing based on a template.* This activity was usually easily performed by the students as they could imitate, the content of writing was to be changed according to a teacher's instruction. This activity was suggested to be more motivating if it involved visual images.

2. *Electronic mail to websites.* This type of assignment obviously and definitely could be better performed on-line. The research showed that Facebook users were more motivated and interested in this activity. Electronic mail is typically used to make connection between students and lawyers, screenwriters, inventors, engineers, celebrities, or legislators. It was far more exciting when Facebook group members received feedback from writing specialists.

3. The most interactive form of electronic communication was *conference activity*. As Facebook can serve as a pad for different conferences and webinars, students could participate in posting their comments, prepare texts and were sometimes engaged in online dialogues with groupmates and other participants of conferences.

4. The benefits of preparing *reports on projects* and *essays* by Facebook group users can probably be explained by the availability of all necessary materials online for a pre-writing stage that took place during the lesson in comparison to a traditional classroom when the teacher can only explain the task, but the bulk of work is to be done at home. Besides, giving comments and exchanging ideas through Facebook was rather helpful and was an essential part of the successful learning process.

5. Preparing *reviews* on the movie trailers, advertising films, articles on social topics, commercials on novelties can be considered one of the most engaging type of work because of the impressive and sometimes intriguing information used in the Facebook group, availability of the material, ability

to exchange ideas, and opportunity to interact correcting each other's mistakes in uploaded files or given comments.

6. Writing *abstracts* was the activity rather often used during the research. Motivation is the dominant characteristic among the factors important for successful learning. Writing abstracts became not so boring activity because it was accomplished with the help of Facebook. Instructions were uploaded to the folder and available any time. Besides, students were more inclined to working with the illustrated authentic material from the site.

Other forms of writing tasks were analysis, reports, fieldwork notes, translations, articles, etc.

The posts provided to the students by researchers for teaching writing were the following. First of all, it was news posts that were used to do projects on articles with related topics, to prepare a critical essay, etc. Disputable publications and videos were a part of posts that were used to comment, annotate, report on, or summarize. Scientific novelties and innovations from the video or articles taken from culture/science columns of journals became the perfect material for preparing emails to websites, reviews, or reports. Creating memes and pictures based on the examples from the Facebook page turned out the most entertaining but rather creative and skill-consuming activity which was regarded as a part of the incidental learning process.

The example of a Facebook post which was used for abstract writing is demonstrated in Figure 8.

Source: Post from Facebook research group

Figure 8. A post on the Facebook group page with the material for abstract writing.

The Facebook group accumulated different types of materials useful for teaching. A wide range of schemes, patterns, and tables uploaded to the group was used to accomplish writing tasks. It was helpful and convenient for students to perform the task having all necessary additional files ready at hand. The screenshot of the Facebook group page with the posted vocabulary for writing an essay is shown in Figure 9.

Source: Post from Facebook research group

Figure 9. A post on the Facebook group page with the vocabulary for essay writing.

During the quasi-experiment the students went through the following steps of writing: pre-writing activities, writing the draft, feedback from teacher or peers, review and revising and editing.

At the pre-writing stage students read, discussed and collected information.

In the drafting stage students dealt with gathering ideas into the draft. The teacher and the students themselves could look at the drafts uploaded through the 'files uploaded' features. This rough draft included information without a proper check of grammar. Students could ask each other to give their opinion as to the prepared a draft. The benefits of using Facebook group messaging were obvious at that stage: by reading other students' outlines, the students could re-arrange ideas for a better paragraph. Besides they had the opportunity to revise their writing before submitting to the lecturer, using critical comments.

At the revision stage, the students were asked to check the rough draft and could add some new ideas. Vocabulary, grammar and the whole paper concerning structure, content, and organization were to be checked.

At the final editing stage, they were asked to fix their writing and submit on the Facebook group.

Giving comments was a part of the students' work. Each student had an opportunity to give comments to their friends' work concerning content and organization. It should be noted that students seldom gave comments on the peers' vocabulary and use of language.

The Facebook group provides an opportunity for students to practice and improve their writing skills through Facebook comments. Ramadhani (2013) shows that the students are interested in a response, their friends' comments posted on the Facebook group. They take every opportunity to practice their writing skills. Students also discovered new writing structures reading the comments from their friends. These show that Facebook comments have a high potential for enhancing and improving students' writing skills.

4.2. Findings

The post-experimental assessment was conducted in the form of the final test (scored max.110 points) divided into three parts: vocabulary (50 max. points), listening (max. 30 points) and writing (max. 30 points).

The vocabulary part included two sections according to the two basic criteria: 1) breadth of vocabulary knowledge (i.e. the number of words a student learnt from the list of the topical vocabulary of the syllabus; 2) depth of vocabulary knowledge. Section 1 contained de-contextualized words which students were supposed to match with their meanings. Section 2 dealt with the following components of the dimension of vocabulary depth: meaning, morphological, syntactic, and collocation properties. The tasks were: 1) to complete the gaps in the text with an appropriate word derived from the words given in the correct form; 2) to match the words to form phrases and to use them answering the questions.

The average results of the control group students' (CG1, CG2, CG3) performance are given in Table 1.

Table 1. The average results of the control groups' performance (Vocabulary part)

<i>Control group</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>	
	Breadth of vocabulary knowledge	Depth of vocabulary knowledge
CG 1	9,36	19,45
CG 2	9,54	20,56
CG 3	10,35	22,78
<i>Mean value</i>	9,75	20,93
<i>Maximum points</i>	15	35

Source: Authors own conception

The average results of the experimental group students' performance (EG1, EG2, EG3) are given in Table 2.

Table 2. The average results of the experimental groups' performance (Vocabulary part)

<i>Experimental group</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>	
	Breadth of vocabulary knowledge	Depth of vocabulary knowledge
EG 1	12,65	28,31
EG 2	13,46	29,74
EG 3	12,45	27,75
<i>Mean value</i>	12,85	28,6
<i>Maximum points</i>	15	35

Source: Authors own conception

The comparative results of the vocabulary part of the experimental and control groups are given in Figure 10.

Source: Authors own conception

Figure 10. The comparative results of the experiment and control groups (Vocabulary part)

The results revealed that the students of the experimental groups outperformed those of the control groups regarding both the breadth and depth of knowledge of the target vocabulary. The difference between the performance of the two groups concerning the breadth and depth of knowledge may be explained by the fact that the work with the lexical material placed on Facebook allowed students to retain more lexical units due to the repeated exposure to the target vocabulary in different contexts and due to the visual and interactional nature of the Facebook environment which helps to develop not only receptive vocabulary breadth but also productive vocabulary breadth generating the target lexical units in writing and speaking while exchanging inbox messages, expressing and sharing academically-related ideas, and posting in their Facebook walls.

The quasi-experiment participants' performance in listening skills development was assessed basing on the criteria of comprehension of general and specific information. While listening the testing assignments included: 1) to find the answers to the questions oriented on content general comprehension; 2) to complete the parts of the utterance and put them into the correct order.

The average results of the assessment of the control groups (CG1, CG2, CG3) are given in Table 3.

Table 3. The average results of the control groups' performance
(Listening part)

<i>Control group</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>	
	General information comprehension	Specific information comprehension
CG1	8,2	7,9
CG2	8,3	8,5
CG3	7,8	7,5
<i>Mean value</i>	8,1	7,9
<i>Maximum points</i>	15	15

Source: Authors own conception

The average results of the assessment of the experimental groups (EG1, EG2, EG3) are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The average results of the experimental groups' performance (Listening part)

<i>Experimental group</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>	
	General information comprehension	Specific information comprehension
EG1	10,2	10,5
EG2	11,1	11,2
EG3	10	10,1
<i>Mean value</i>	10,4	10,6
<i>Maximum points</i>	15	15

Source: Authors own conception

The comparative results of the listening part of the experimental and control groups are given in Figure 11.

Source: Authors own conception

Figure 11. The comparative results of the experimental and control groups (Listening part)

The results of the final assessment demonstrate that the experimental group participants appeared to be more successful in developing both listening for general and specific information skills which resulted in their better comprehension of the listening content gist and ability to identify its lexico-grammatical components as well as their functionality. We can suggest that the visual character of the Facebook group learning material facilitated activation of the learners' imagination and activity, group messaging assisted developing and deepening participants' ideas. The Facebook platform accessibility enabled the learners to complete the tasks at their convenience and independently and to analyze mistakes if necessary.

In the writing part, the students were given the assignment to write an abstract. The task was assessed and evaluated according to the following

criteria: 1) content; 2) organization and clarity; 3) vocabulary richness; 4) spelling and grammatical accuracy.

The average results of the assessment of the control groups (CG1, CG2, CG3) are given in Table 5.

Table 5. The average results of the control groups' performance (Writing part)

<i>Control group</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>			
	Content	Organization and clarity	Vocabulary richness	Spelling and grammatical accuracy
CG 1	8,4	3,8	3,3	3,6
CG 2	7,9	3,5	3,2	3
CG 3	7,3	2,3	2,7	2,9
<i>Mean value</i>	7,8	3,2	3	3,1
<i>Maximum points</i>	15	5	5	5

Source: Authors own conception

The average results of the assessment of the experimental groups (EG1, EG2, EG3) are given in Table 6.

Table 6. The average results of the experimental groups' performance (Writing part)

<i>Experimental group</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>			
	Content	Organization and clarity	Vocabulary richness	Spelling and grammatical accuracy
EG 1	11,2	3,9	3,5	3,9
EG 2	10,3	4,3	4,5	3,8
EG 3	10,6	4,1	4,1	3,7
<i>Mean value</i>	10,7	4,1	4	3,8
<i>Maximum points</i>	15	5	5	5

Source: Authors own conception

The comparative results of the writing part of the experimental and control groups are given in Figure 12.

Source: Authors own conception

Figure 12. The comparative results of the experimental and control groups (Writing part)

Figure 12 indicates that the participants of the experimental groups were successful in preparing meaningful and informative abstracts, apparently it can be explained by the fact that they had the opportunity to discuss, exchange ideas before writing, besides they had access to other different materials and comments of other Facebook agents and peer students. The abstracts of the experimental group members appeared to be more well-organized than those of the control groups. The work on the vocabulary included prior discussion, students got more immersed in the topic, and this fact is demonstrated by higher success in this aspect. Grammatical accuracy was also higher than in the control groups. The data illustrated that the Facebook group and on-line activity could lessen the occurrence of spelling mistakes. The errors made publicly and corrected online will not likely be made in future because they could be easily remembered and reminded.

The results of the quasi-experiment revealed that there were some aspects in which the Facebook group learners had significant superiority over control groups. They are content of the writing and organization and clarity. Vocabulary richness and grammatical accuracy have less significant differences in data. All four criteria attributed to the teaching method in the experimental and control groups come in favour of the experimental groups.

It was found out that pre-writing brainstorming stage helps respondents in getting tips on the format, content and structure of writing and activates prior knowledge. It was also observed that respondents effectively used Facebook group opportunities to correct spelling and

grammar mistakes. During the task performance, students had to correct grammar and spelling errors and used chatting, mobile applications and computer-related programs to correct mistakes online. Without paying much attention to the grammar as an object of control, students benefited from conducting writing assignments and incidentally improve not only their writing skills but general level of knowledge of a foreign language.

The **survey** aimed at assessing experimental group participants' attitudes towards utilizing the Facebook group as a method of language teaching showed the results which are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Students' attitudes towards the Facebook group as a platform for language skills development

Survey questions	Agree	Disagree
1. Materials presented in the Facebook group helped to enlarge my legal vocabulary knowledge.	92 %	8 %
2. Materials presented in the Facebook group extended my knowledge about meanings, forms and usage of the studied vocabulary.	84 %	16 %
3. Materials presented in the Facebook group helped me to understand better general information in video and audio units on studied topics.	86%	14 %
4. Materials presented in the Facebook group helped me to understand better specific information in video and audio units on studied topics.	73 %	27 %
5. Materials presented in the Facebook group helped me to get a better idea on the studied topic before writing.	78 %	22 %
6. Brainstorming in the Facebook group helped me to structure my ideas before writing.	87 %	23 %
7. Materials and tasks completed in the Facebook group helped me to complete writing tasks easier.	82 %	28 %
8. The language learning with the use of the Facebook group was more interesting.	91 %	9 %
9. I devoted more time to English learning using the Facebook group.	60 %	40 %

Source: Authors own conception

The results reveal that the prevailing majority of the students found the learning content to which they were exposed in the Facebook group interesting. Perhaps this is explained by the fact that the provided information was presented in multimedia formats and dealt with new, up-to-date and controversial issues. 60% of students spent more time on language learning. It can be attributed to the fact that the education environment was

not traditional, well-known and not associated with learning. The effectiveness of the Facebook-assisted learning for the development of language skills might be connected with the nature of the presented material, the easy anytime access to them and interactive character of the activities in which students participated.

5. Limits and discussions

The benefits of the technology-rich learning environment have been studied in a great number of works (Abidin et al., 2010; Craig and Patten, 2007; Godwin-Jones, 2008; Lee, 2006; Tashakori & Haghighat, 2019). Lepper and Henderlong (2000) stated that together with a well-prepared teacher, technology can engage students in their learning and, over time, build long-term intrinsic interest in the content they are mastering. The positive results of language acquisition via Facebook have also been reported in the scientific literature (Kabilan and Zahar, 2016; Sim and Pop, 2014).

Accordingly, the researchers hypothesized that Facebook-assisted teaching in the Facebook group could be efficient for the development of students' vocabulary, listening and writing skills. The results of the previous studies conducted by other researchers agree with the data obtained in this research. We considered the Facebook environment to be a unique educational platform where learning materials of different formats could be downloaded. The experimenters took them readymade, specially designed them and provided links to online tools which could be effectively utilized to develop different skills making the learning material easily and quickly accessible. Thus, we not only exploited intrinsic features of this social group (its collaborative and interactive character) but also made our Facebook group technology-intense (links to visualized thesauruses, cloud generators, quiz makers, vocabulary games, etc.).

However, our research concentrated only on the three skills. The development of reading skills was beyond the scope of this study. The number of the participants and the time when the quasi-experiment was conducted (only one semester) can be seen as limitations. The prospects for further research are connected with a comprehensive study of the influence of Facebook-assisted learning on all language skills and development of methodological recommendations on the implementation of this approach into the language teaching process.

It is also worth mentioning that there are certain disadvantages of Facebook learning that should be taken into consideration. One of the major problems that hinder successful teaching and learning process is the

distractions which occur at the time of performing the assignments, messaging and chatting and many features offered by Facebook, in particular.

The other challenge that must be paid attention to, concerns the fact that despite the positive attributes of Facebook group language learning, the certain part of students still prefers traditional classroom because of the possibility to get to teacher's instructions immediately, etc.

These and other matters are to be studied to determine the positive and negative aspects of teaching via Facebook.

6. Conclusions

The quasi-experimental study shows that the Facebook group may be an effective educational platform where diverse format learning content can be accumulated and learning can be organized through communication and interaction, which increases motivation and engagement. It has the potential to facilitate the learning process, which is proved by the findings that the Facebook group learners outperformed the participants of the control groups regarding all three aspects taken: vocabulary (breadth and depth of knowledge), listening skills (listening for general and specific information) and writing skills (content, organization and clarity, vocabulary richness and spelling and grammatical accuracy). We suppose it can be explained by the repeated exposure to the target vocabulary, interesting, up-to-date and controversial nature of the study content and visual and interactional nature (the opportunity to exchange ideas and comments and get quick feedback) of the Facebook environment.

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