

## **Students' Perceptions of Flipped Model on Facebook for Educational Purposes**

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**Abstract:** *Flipped instruction is quite new in language education, but it is growing rapidly in popularity (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) to help teachers maximize the time for students' practices. Although a number of studies have concluded the positive effects of flipped classroom in teaching content subjects, little research has been done to examine its effects in language teaching and learning. This current study is; therefore, an attempt to investigate non-majored English students' perceptions of this alternative teaching method utilizing Facebook as a platform to deliver learning material. The data are collected through a mixed method approach using two main tools e.g. questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. The results show that the students have considerably positive perceptions towards the flipped model and the Facebook platform in all aspects investigated. Given positive results, the flipped classroom via Facebook platform could be a potential dimension considered for language teaching and learning in EFL contexts.*

**Key words:** *Flipped classroom, Facebook platform, blended learning, perception*

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### **I. Introduction**

In recent years, advancements in technology have been resulting in significant changes in teaching paradigms, in which blended learning is becoming an emerging trend thanks to its productive benefits. According to Shih (2011), blended learning that integrates online and face-to-face instruction could create an effective teaching and learning experience for both instructors and students. One of the prominent methods of blended learning is the flipped model also known as the inverted classroom or reversed instruction which follows the learner-centered and active learning approach. With this method, the students can access learning materials and complete a certain assignments a few days before the class meetings via a specific platform so that they will have plenty of time for practices and teacher feedback in face-to-face classes. Consequently, the flipped model brings about a great deal of educational value such as the enhancement of class preparation, classroom interactivity, and academic performance (Hung, 2015). Besides, flipped teaching provides students with opportunities to develop higher order thinking under teacher guidance and with peer support (Berrett, 2012).

In the current era of technology, there are a number of social networking sites which can be utilized as educational platforms. In the context of Viet Nam as well as others in Asia, Facebook is one of the most common and frequently used sites. According to McCarthy (2010), a large number of students would already be familiar with Facebook's layout and operation, and would be comfortable with it during a term. Selwyn (2007) also stated that Facebook has quickly become the social media of choice by university students. Therefore, employing Facebook as a platform to deliver learning materials is quite aligned with the current trend.

In this respect, incorporating Flipped Classroom Instruction with a Facebook platform to increase learning time and reinforce learning English is essential because this model provides opportunities both inside and outside the classroom for students to be exposed to significant inputs and practices. According to Rivero (2013), most educators who experiment with this method found positive results in academic achievement and student attitudes. Research has also indicated that students perceive the flipped classroom as a positive learning experience, with increased motivation and self-perceived knowledge and performance (Avdic & Akerblom, 2015). However, much of research on flipped instruction has focused on teaching content subjects; little research has been conducted with regards to English learning and teaching. Therefore, the current study was an attempt to examine the students' perceptions on this alternative teaching method for English language learning. This study concentrates on two research questions (1) What are the students' perceptions of the flipped classroom in learning English? (2) What are the students' perceptions of Facebook platform for educational purposes?

### **II. Literature Review**

#### **Blended Learning and Flipped Model**

Blended learning (BL) has been an innovation in education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century thanks to the great advancement of technology, which has significantly impacted language teaching and learning in different ways throughout the world. BL is one of the prominent applications so far that has created a facilitative learning environment (O'Flaherty & Philips, 2015). The flipped classroom is generated from the rotation model of

blended learning (Heather & Michael, 2012). Brame (2013) proposed four design principles for a flipped classroom including (1) providing an opportunity for students to gain exposure prior to class; (2) providing an incentive for students to prepare for class; (3) providing a mechanism to assess student understanding; and (4) providing in-class activities that focus on higher-level cognitive activities.

In the current study, these principles were selectively adopted to prepare the lesson plans. Prepared videos and supplementary learning materials were purposefully delivered to the students through a Facebook platform one week prior to each class meeting so that they had sufficient time to learn and practice at home. The videos contained sample conversations, vocabulary and grammatical lessons which assisted students to prepare similar conversations in order that they could be ready and confident to engage into the classroom activities. The Facebook platform was also served for posting announcements and teachers' feedbacks on the students' questions if they had any difficulties related to the lessons. In classes, the teacher briefly reviewed, answered the students' questions, and facilitated students' practices.

### **Facebook as a platform for educational purposes**

There have been a great number of social networking sites available and researched in the field of education comprising of Zalo, Twitter, What's app, Facebook as well as different types of online platforms such as Google Drive, Moodle, Edmodo, Nicenet and so on. The current study was favorable of using Facebook platform because of the Vietnamese students' preferences. According to Boyd & Ellison (2007), Facebook is a popular website that allows users to interact and collaborate within a pre-defined virtual community. It allows users to make connections, share comments and interests. Motivated by such benefits, the majority of high school and university students use this site on a daily basis for both academic and social goals (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).

Actually, Facebook can be a practical tool to engage students in different EFL learning activities to share ideas, information, knowledge, and resources, especially for shy students who prefer online interactions to face-to-face ones. According to Godwin-Jones (2008, p.8), "tools and platforms such as Facebook are useful to improve communication, human interaction, and language learning". However, it was also found that Facebook users spent less time studying and achieve lower academic results compared to Facebook non-users (Leveritt et al., 2012). Teachers, therefore, need to be careful not to overuse Facebook to replace face-to-face instruction and practice.

With such a conflicting result, it is quite important to have more research on the use of Facebook platform to assess the potential use of this social networking site for educational purposes.

### **Research on flipped model and Facebook**

Nguyen (2014) reviewed a number of studies in content subject and concluded that flipping the classroom has shown to promote students' motivation, learner active learning as well as learning achievement in many subjects. However, empirical studies on student perceptions and the effectiveness of a flipped classroom have been under-investigated until now. Avdic & Akerblom, (2015) attempted to find out the effects of the flipped classroom on students' learning strategies. They found that most students enjoyed mobility and accessibility of recorded lectures, a feeling of increased activities and responsibilities when participating in classroom activities. Li et al. (2015) also conducted a study on integrating MOOC content and flipped classroom to examine its effectiveness on students' experience and perceptions. The participants were 15 undergraduate students majoring in education. The results indicated that the students were generally satisfied with many aspects of the design course comprising of instructor response timeliness, instructor attitude toward technology, e-learning course flexibility, and technology and Internet quality. Meanwhile, the students were not satisfied with interactions with others.

There have been also several studies on Facebook platform found recently. An example is Ainin et al. (2015) examining the impact of Facebook use of Malaysian public university students. The result indicated a significant positive relationship between Facebook usage intensity and academic performance. Duncan and Barczyk (2013) also indicated that students had favorable impressions of Facebook for classroom use. In contrast, other studies like Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) found a conflicting result. This study investigated the relationship between Facebook use and academic performance. The result showed that Facebook users had a lower GPA and study fewer hours than non-Facebook users and a negative relationship existed for the time spent in the social media and their study results. Hew (2011) also confirmed little support for Facebook's educational value.

Generally, flipped instruction is an innovative and interesting teaching method which has been researched and implemented in both language teaching and content subjects around the world. However, in the context of Viet Nam in general and in the Mekong Delta in particular, flipped instruction is completely new and understudied. With contradictory results of previous research on the effectiveness of Facebook as a tool for educational value, the current study seems significant.

### III. Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative instruments were employed to collect data for the current study. Specifically a 32 item questionnaire adapted from Hsieh et al's (2015) was administered in person to survey the students' perceptions toward the Flipped Classroom Instruction model in terms of Motivation, Effectiveness, Video, Flexibility, Engagement, Interaction, and Overall satisfaction; and to examine how students perceived using Facebook platform to deliver learning materials with reference to their attitude towards the use (whether they liked using Facebook for educational purposes or not), its usefulness to enhance students' learning outcomes and interactions with teachers and peers, ease of use and system characteristics. The interview questions were generated basing on the categories addressed in the questionnaire to gain further insight into the students' perceptions.

The participants volunteered in this study were 30 undergraduate students in a General English class at Can Tho University. Their majors varied considerably and studied English as a minor. They were low learners at around the upper elementary level as judged by a placement test at the start of their entry into the university. Their ages were between 19 and 21. None of them had experiences with flipped teaching prior to this study and were skillful Facebook users. All students responded to the questionnaire and four students were invited for the interviews, which lasted around 15 minutes each.

As regards the procedures of the Flipped model employed in the study, the teachers first planned and prepared videos and reading or grammatical lessons for a whole course in advance so that a week prior to each class meeting, the teacher sent these materials to the students via the Facebook platform. The students were assigned to watch these videos and prepare similar conversations in terms of speaking skills, practice pronunciation and so on. Sometimes, the teachers posted announcements, shared information and gave feedbacks on the students' inquiries. In class, the teacher briefly reviewed vocabulary and grammatical points, answered the students' questions, and facilitated students' practices.

### IV. Data Analysis And Results

The questionnaire result showed that the scale reliability coefficient was rather high ( $\alpha = .811$ ,  $n = 30$ ), which means that the questionnaire was sufficiently reliable, and so were the data obtained from it.

#### Students' Perceptions on the Flipped model

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics of the students' perception on the Flipped model Instruction

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MEANFLIPPED	30	3.16	4.43	3.81	.32428
Valid N (listwise)	30				

The students' overall perceptions of the Flipped Model were presented in Table 1. The general mean score of the students' perceptions in the questionnaire was  $M = 3.81$ . Although the one sample t-test results indicated a significant difference from scale 4 ( $t = -3.254$ ,  $df = 29$ ,  $p = .003$ ), it is by far higher than scale 3 on the five-point scale of the questionnaire. This result suggests that students had considerably positive perceptions towards the flipped model. Further exploration into students' perceptions on specific aspects revealed the results as illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2** The students' perceptions on the Flipped model according to categories

Categories	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	N of items
Flexibility	30	2.5	5.0	4.1	.60	2
Overall satisfaction	30	3.0	5.0	4.0	.56	1
Motivation	30	2.0	4.5	3.8	.47	4
Effectiveness	30	3.0	4.8	3.8	.43	4
Videos	30	2.8	4.8	3.8	.44	5
Engagement	30	2.0	4.5	3.5	.64	2
Interaction	30	2.0	5.0	2.9	.83	1

It is notable from Table 2 that most of the participants were satisfied with the flipped classroom instruction with the highest mean score of  $M = 4.1$  for the flexibility of this model since the students could easily access materials any time and places, even as many times as they wanted. The second most positive was their overall satisfaction, at  $M = 4.0$ , which was the most important figure showing how satisfied the students were with the course design, specifically the flipped model.

The students' report on their motivation, effectiveness of employed videos shared the same mean score, each with  $M = 3.8$ , which was quite high to indicate that the students were rather motivated in their learning with this model; they also perceived Flipped classroom to be effective to learn more and better; the videos were considerably useful and helped them understand the lessons better.

The remaining two categories were not perceived as positive as the previous ones. However, with a mean score of  $M = 3.5$  (by far higher than the average scale) for students' engagement, it showed a relatively positive perceptions of the students. In other words, they also appreciated the Flipped model in getting them engaged in the lessons. The students' perception on interaction had the lowest mean score,  $M = 2.9$ . Percentage analysis revealed that more than 70% of the participants chose the "neutral" and "disagree" scales. Only one student, which accounted for nearly 4 %, perceived the flipped model to be useful in encouraging interaction among the students and the teacher.

Analysis of interviews provided further information about the students' overall flipped classroom learning experiences. The interview comments were analyzed for several themes including motivation, effectiveness, engagement, flexibility, videos, interaction, overall satisfaction, benefits and drawbacks of the flipped model accompanied with the students' ideas on how to improve the instructional design.

As a whole, the interviewees shared considerably positive attitudes or perceptions towards issues investigated. When asked whether the flipped model motivated them to learn English, one student said, "The interesting and lively motions in the videos gave me more motivation to learn". Another student reported that as I saw other people speaking English fluently, they motivated me to learn more and more; I felt excited and motivated with this learning method." Regarding the effectiveness of the flipped model, most of the participants asserted that there were positive effects to some extents. One student particularly commented, "the flipped model helped improve learning considerably; it assisted in preparing and understanding the lesson more effectively."

Regarding engagement in learning, the students also shared very positive ideas. Most of the respondents answered that they felt more engaged and confident in their learning with this new teaching method. One stated that the sample videos got them more involved and enthusiastic to study to fulfill the task requirements. They did not also refuse the flexibility of the Flipped classroom; instead, the students confirmed that with easy access to materials on the Facebook platform, they become more active and flexible in their learning because they could watch the videos any time and any place, and as many times as they wanted.

With reference to the instructional videos, the students reported that they were very much relevant to the lessons. This was not surprising because the teachers already selected these videos in purposes. One student said "The videos were very useful to provide them with knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and helped enhance their listening and speaking skills." However, the students did not approve of the interaction which Flipped model classroom brought to them. It could be because of the time limit of the course in an only-five-week summer semester, and the teacher had to fulfill the course requirements so she did not spend sufficient time on meditating interactions.

In terms of the benefits of the flipped model, the interview data revealed a very productive result. The students shared more ideas on the effectiveness of the course including enhancing their vocabulary related to the topics, getting them familiar with native speakers' pronunciation and intonation. More importantly, it helped them improve their English speaking and listening skills, communication or conversational strategies as well. One student stressed that although the summer semester was too short, the combination of learning modes both outside and inside the classroom which the flipped model featured helped enhance the effectiveness of their learning.

However, some drawbacks of this model were also indicated. The students complained the fast speed of the talks posted, with the speakers' reduction of sounds causing difficulties in understanding the content. One student said "because of low English proficiency, I needed more help from the teacher." They also suggested English subtitles should be provided so that it would be easier for them to understand the materials. Even one student asked for a Vietnamese subtitle accompanied with videos.

### **Students' Perceptions on the Facebook platform for educational purposes**

There were three main themes that assessed the students' perception of the use of Facebook platform. The descriptive statistics of the mean score was presented in Table 3.

**Table 3** *Descriptive statistics of the students' perception on the Facebook platform*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MEANFACE	30	2.8	4.7	3.83	.38
Valid N (listwise)	30				

As can be seen from Table 3, the overall mean score of the students' perceptions of using Facebook as a platform to deliver learning materials was also very high,  $M = 3.83$ . Similarly, the One-sample t-test was calculated, comparing to scale 4 which is a very high scale in the five-point Likert scale. Surprisingly there was no significant difference ( $t = -2.332$ ,  $df = 29$ ,  $p = .027$ ) indicated by the test result, which means that the

students' perceptions towards the use of Facebook platform for educational purposes were very positive. Further exploration into students' perceptions on specific aspects revealed the results as illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4** The students' perceptions on the Facebook platform according to categories

Categories	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	N of items
Perceived of ease of use	30	2.6	4.8	4.0	.44	5
Perceived of usefulness	30	2.5	5.0	3.9	.53	2
Attitude towards usefulness	30	2.5	5.0	3.9	.53	2
System characteristic	30	2.5	4.5	3.8	.40	4

As a whole, the students had very positive perception on all issues examined, with the mean score ranging from 3.8 to 4.0. It is noticeable that the participants approved the ease of using Facebook to study, with the highest mean score of  $M = 4.0$ . More than 70% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that they could receive a clear guidance via Facebook. The item which investigated the convenience and ease of using Facebook to interact with the teacher and peers also received a very high percentage of agreement, nearly 93%.

The students' perceptions towards its effectiveness and usefulness shared a similar mean score,  $M = 3.9$  each. Specifically, nearly 70% and more of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that learning through Facebook platform provided beneficial outcomes to this class and improved their English ability. Besides, more than 95% of the participants agreed that using Facebook to study English was a good idea, which revealed a very positive attitude to using Facebook for educational purposes.

Although the students perceived the Facebook system characteristics less positive than other aspects ( $M = 3.8$ ), it was still a very promising figure. Percentage analysis revealed that 85% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that they could use Facebook to effectively interact with the teacher and peers. More than 90% of the respondents approved that using Facebook to make comments was more comfortable than face-to-face ones; and more than half of the participants perceived Facebook as a stimulating and realistic English learning environment.

The students' perceptions towards the use of Facebook for educational purposes were also deeply investigated in the interviews. Their ideas and comments were analyzed in four main themes such as its ease of use, its effectiveness, the system characteristic and the students' attitude. As a whole, the students' feedback on Facebook platform was very productive and promising. One student said, "I like using Facebook to study very much. Today, everyone uses Facebook so it is easy and convenient to share ideas, inform, and comment on learning activities and the lessons." Most of the interviewees reported using Facebook to study was easy and effective since they could discuss and share ideas with the teacher and classmates much more confident than face-to-face interactions. Thus, with the convenience of Facebook, the teacher and student interactions were much easier and effective. Besides, they could flexibly access any time and places. One student even reported that using Facebook to learn helped avoid wasting her time wandering around on Facebook. In short, the students had very positive perceptions on the use of Facebook for educational purposes.

## V. Discussion

### The students' perceptions on the Flipped model Instruction

As a whole, the students showed considerably positive perceptions towards the flipped instruction in every specific aspect investigated with the exception of interactions between the teacher and the students and among students having an indecisive response. The outcomes of the current study were compatible with Rivero (2013) in that most educators who experiment with this method found positive results in test scores and student attitudes as well as other studies in the field. Now that, research on the flipped models in language teaching is quite little, the finding of this study can be relatively significant to contribute to the literature of flipped instruction in the South of Vietnam and similar EFL contexts.

To be more specific, most of the participants highly appreciated the flexibility of the flipped classroom, which allowed them to easily and actively access materials on the Facebook platform at any time and places, even as many times as they wanted. With the flipped model, the students could approach the lessons through interesting, lively and authentic videos at home. As a result, they became more excited and motivated to learn. The flipped model helped prepare and understand the lessons more effectively so that they were more confident and engaged in the classroom activities. This result was very harmonious with Avdic & Akerblom (2015) and Li et al. (2015) showing students' positive learning experience, increased motivation, performance and their enjoyment of mobility and accessibility of learning materials. Schultz et al. (2014) also stressed that most students had a favorable perception about the flipped classroom noting the ability to pause, rewind, and review lectures. Additionally, from the students' perspectives, the effectiveness of the flipped instruction was asserted in enhancing the students' vocabulary related to the topics, pronunciation, intonation and English communication skills via sample conversational videos. This suggests that the flipped model was not only effective to teach content subjects but also languages. However, the interaction which flipped classrooms

brought to them was perceived reluctantly. The explanation could be due to the course limited time within a five-week summer semester. The teacher had to cover the condensed course content and lacked time for the students to interact with their peers. This outcome; however, was in agreement with Li et al. (2015), which showed the students' dissatisfaction with interactions with others. Last but not least, beside productive and fruitful results, some drawbacks of the course design were also indicated including the students' complaint of the fast speed of the speakers' talk. Since the participants of this study were mainly low-level learners, it was not surprising if they encountered problems catching up with the native speakers even though English subtitles were provided.

### **The students' perceptions on the Facebook platform for educational purposes**

In the era of great advancement in technology, Facebook becomes popular worldwide; especially its application in enhancing education has been paid much attention and researched. Actually, Facebook is a form of constructivism because it gives students the opportunity to work collaboratively, learn together and from each other, build learning communities, and construct knowledge through the interaction of members of the communities (Kabilan et al., 2010). In this study, the students had very positive perception towards the Facebook platform for educational purposes in all issues examined. Specifically, the participants approved of the ease of using Facebook to study and to interact with the teacher and peers. This is quite consistent with Godwin-Jones (2008, p.8), "tools and platforms such as Facebook are useful to improve communication, human interaction, and language learning." The students' perceptions towards its effectiveness and their attitude towards its use were also very productive and promising. Facebook became a part of their life in a daily basis and they expressed the love of using Facebook for studying as it was quite convenient to share ideas, inform, and comment on learning activities and the lessons, especially for shy and quiet students, Facebook was turned into a very effective tool as in the low English proficiency participants of this current study. According to Stacey and Gerbie (2007), struggling learners who were not able to follow the fast-paced class discussion prefer online activities which they perceive to be much easier to comprehend. Besides, Facebook was also considered as a stimulating and realistic English learning environment since the students had real interactions with their teacher and peers in English even though Vietnamese was still often used to make clarifications. To some extent, Facebook was quite favorable thanks to its convenient and natural characteristics. Together with the advancement of the society nowadays, Internet connections could be easily accessed at any places from schools to public places, which made the great potential of this platform for educational purposes. Manan et al. (2012), they found out that Facebook was a powerful pedagogical tool that helped students to improve their English language skills in ESL contexts. Interestingly, the current study revealed the benefit of Facebook in helping the students avoid wandering around Facebook without any purposes. Instead, they could make use of time for studying. This was relatively inconsistent with Hew (2011) who found little support for Facebook's educational value or with Leveritt et al. (2012) that Facebook users spend less time studying and achieve lower academic results compared to Facebook non-users. Despite the lack of focus on students' academic achievement via Facebook platform, the students showed very positive perceptions of its effectiveness for educational purposes.

Generally, the students had very positive perceptions of the flipped classroom instruction in employing Facebook to deliver learning materials which once again emphasized the effects of blended learning, especially the potential of flipped instruction in language teaching, which was quite new and in need of research confirmations and the prospect of Facebook use to enhance English teaching and learning.

## **VI. Conclusion**

It cannot be denied that English proficiency is becoming an urgent need for all students in the United States nowadays. Accompanied with the great advancement of technology, its applications have been potentially and effectively exploited to enhance and reinforce English learning and teaching in form of blended learning. In the range of this current study, the implementation of the flipped model via Facebook experienced relatively productive results to teach general English courses at Can Tho University. Specifically, the students perceived very positively in all aspects including the flexibility of the flipped classroom, its effectiveness to enhance the students' vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation and English communication skills via sample conversational videos, and the increase of motivation in learning thanks to access to lively and interesting videos at home, making them even more engaged in classroom activities later all. Except for interaction, the students still appreciated the flipped model in assisting them to access materials in advance so that they could learn more effectively and compensate for a short time of a five-week summer semester. Similarly, Facebook also had very positive perceptions from the students' perspectives such as its ease of use, convenience to interact with the teacher and peers especially for shy students and positive attitudes of Facebook use in learning English as a realistic and interesting learning environment to improve students' English competences.

In addition to productive and promising findings, some recommendations are also suggested. First, depending on students' competences, teachers should seek for videos not only relevant to the topics of the lessons but also appropriate to their levels. Even mother-tongue subtitles accompanied with English one can also be considered if the students are very weak, but it is not really recommended. Besides, the teachers should conduct more activities in the classroom for the students to practice what they have learnt and prepare at home in order to reinforce the interactions with their classmates. Next, though the students had very positive perceptions towards Facebook use for learning, it should not be overused to replace face-to-face classroom, but there should be a combination of outside and inside learning environment in form of blended learning. Last but not least, experimental studies should be conducted in similar contexts and other studies should last for a longer time and get more participants involved to assert the effectiveness of Flipped model as well as the Facebook platform for educational purposes.

## VII. Author Note

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