# Exploring the use of Facebook in developing EFL skills and student leadership

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**ABSTRACT**

As social media becomes deeply embedded in the lives of young learners, English language educators are increasingly exploring its pedagogical potential. This article examines how Facebook can function as a multifunctional learning ecosystem that supports three key dimensions of EFL development: learner engagement, leadership growth, and humour competence. Drawing on reflective teaching practice and autoethnographic insights, the study synthesizes experiences from multiple classroom contexts in which Facebook was integrated into homework tasks, collaborative projects, and creative, meme-based activities. The findings reveal that Facebook fosters authentic communication, encourages active participation, and enables students to assume leadership roles through managing group discussions, organising challenges, and moderating peer interactions. Additionally, the strategic use of memes helps develop humour competence, a linguacultural and communicative skill often overlooked in language teaching. Despite challenges such as distractions, privacy concerns, and misinformation, the study demonstrates that when guided by clear pedagogical intentions, Facebook can serve as a holistic learning environment that enhances language proficiency, soft skills, and digital literacy. Implications are offered for educators seeking to integrate social media meaningfully into EFL instruction.

## 1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has reshaped how young learners communicate, access information, and participate in digital communities. Platforms such as Facebook are no longer limited to social interaction; they have evolved into multifunctional spaces where users share knowledge, collaborate, and construct meaning in diverse ways (Livermore & Verbovaya, 2016; Lofters et al., 2016; Van Dijck, 2013). For English language teachers, this shift presents both an opportunity and a challenge. While social media offers flexible communication channels, it also requires educators to rethink traditional pedagogical designs and consider how online environments can meaningfully support language learning.

Recent research has highlighted the value of social media for fostering learner autonomy, increasing participation, and creating authentic communicative contexts (Wiwin & Widiati, 2022). However, much remains underexplored regarding how specific features of Facebook can enhance different dimensions of EFL learning, particularly in relation to engagement (Moghadam & Shamsi,

2021; Hoi & Hang, 2022), leadership, and humour —three elements that strongly influence classroom dynamics but are often overlooked in digital learning studies. This article draws on reflective teaching practice to examine how a class Facebook group operated as a learning ecosystem. By analysing student interactions, the study offers insights into how social media can complement face-to-face instruction and contribute to more socially grounded, learner-centered EFL pedagogy.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Social media in language education

Recent analytical research demonstrates that social media platforms, particularly Facebook, can enrich English language learning by providing accessible, socially meaningful environments for practice. Qadi (2021) found that undergraduate EFL learners perceived Facebook as supportive in developing their receptive skills, noting that the platform's multimodal input and informal interactions encouraged more frequent engagement with English outside the classroom. Similarly, Zhao and Yang (2023) examined the effects of a social-media–supported flipped classroom and found that students who received Facebook-mediated pre-class instruction significantly improved their writing performance and experienced reduced writing anxiety compared with those who received traditional instruction. These results highlight how structured integration of social media can provide extended exposure, opportunities for collaboration, and greater flexibility in learning (Friedman & Friedman, 2013; Gan et al., 2015; Mostafa, 2021).

Further evidence comes from Ponsamak and Sukying (2023), who explored Facebook-based instruction with young Thai EFL learners and observed measurable gains in vocabulary knowledge. Their findings emphasize that repeated, contextually rich encounters with lexical items on social media can facilitate vocabulary development more effectively than isolated textbook practice. Together, these studies suggest that when used intentionally, social media can enhance various aspects of English learning by increasing input, lowering affective barriers, and fostering continuous learner participation.

### 2.2. Facebook and EFL learning

Research over the recent years continues to demonstrate that Facebook can serve as an interactive environment that meaningfully supports English language development when intentionally designed for pedagogical purposes (Kabilan, 2010; Klimova & Pikhart, 2019; Sirivedin et al., 2018) Research shows that young EFL learners who regularly encountered vocabulary through Facebook posts showed measurable improvement in written word-knowledge (Boonkit, 2011; Ponsamak & Sukying, 2024; Shiau et al., 2018), indicating that Facebook's informal and repeated exposure can reinforce form–meaning connections. This aligns with Wahyuni's (2024) classroom-based investigation, which used Facebook groups to facilitate recount-text speaking tasks and found that students not only produced longer, more accurate oral responses but also displayed greater confidence when contributing to online discussions. Complementing these findings, Uyen (2025) examined English majors at a university and reported that Facebook's multimodal features and peer interaction enhanced learners' motivation and language engagement. However, students also mentioned issues such as distraction and reliance on simultaneous social and academic uses.

Together, these studies reveal that Facebook supports multiple language skills–vocabulary, speaking, and learner engagement–but they also illustrate that pedagogical structure determines whether the platform becomes genuinely beneficial or merely an unregulated social space. Across these empirical accounts, Facebook's affordances, such as asynchronous commenting, multimodal input, and familiar interaction patterns, appear to promote learner participation and authentic language use (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Dovchin, 2019). Yet, effective learning outcomes depend heavily on how tasks are designed, monitored, and integrated with classroom objectives.

### 2.3. Engagement, leadership, and humour in language education

Student engagement, learner leadership, and humour have become increasingly recognised as affective and interactional dimensions that directly shape the quality of language learning experiences. Recent empirical studies show that engagement in EFL settings is strengthened when learners participate actively, initiate interaction, or take ownership of tasks. Such engagement tends to increase when digital or social-media–supported activities offer autonomy, peer visibility, and meaningful communication. For example, a mixed-method study by Souzandehfar and Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim

(2023) found that structured learner-led activities in university EFL classes significantly improved behavioural and cognitive engagement, as students were more willing to initiate discussion and maintain interaction when they had partial control over task direction. Similarly, Greenier (2023) demonstrated that leadership-oriented roles—such as peer facilitators and discussion leaders—enhanced students' confidence and collaborative problem-solving, suggesting that 'micro-leadership' can be a productive pedagogical strategy in communicative language teaching. These findings support the pedagogical argument that leadership is not limited to formal roles; instead, it emerges naturally when learners are given the space to contribute ideas, manage group tasks, or guide meaning-making processes.

Humour also contributes meaningfully to engagement in language classrooms by influencing affective climate, learner motivation, and communicative willingness. A qualitative study by Purwanti et al. (2024) showed that teacher and peer humour increased classroom participation and reduced anxiety in Indonesian EFL classes, with students reporting greater ease in speaking activities when humour was woven into instruction. Likewise, a study by Qamar et al. (2024) found that humour-integrated tasks improved learners' retention of vocabulary and reading comprehension, attributed to reduced cognitive load and increased attention. Beyond affective benefits, humour also enhances pragmatic development: Nasrullah et al. (2025) reported significant gains in learners' ability to interpret and produce L2 humour after a short instructional intervention, indicating that humorous discourse supports sociolinguistic competence. Taken together, these studies show that engagement, leadership, and humour are interconnected dimensions that can reinforce one another—engaged learners are more willing to take leadership roles, leadership often stimulates peer engagement, and humour provides a supportive emotional environment that enables both. In language education, especially in digitally mediated environments, these elements collectively strengthen interactional quality, learner agency, and communicative confidence, making them key considerations for contemporary pedagogical design.

## 2.4. Gaps and research questions

Although existing studies provide evidence that social media can enhance learners' engagement, motivation, and skill acquisition in EFL contexts (Chen & Shu, 2025; Dirjal et al., 2020; Iswahyuni, 2021; Maulida et al., 2024; Mitrulescu, 2024), several critical gaps remain. Most research has primarily focused on individual language skills, such as writing, vocabulary, or speaking, without considering learners' leadership development in collaborative online environments. Leadership, in this context, refers to learners' ability to initiate, coordinate, and manage peer interactions, thereby fostering deeper engagement and autonomy. Despite its potential importance, empirical evidence linking social media use with the cultivation of leadership skills in language learning remains limited.

Similarly, humour has been acknowledged as a useful pedagogical tool for reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, and facilitating language practice (Chinery, 2007; Crawford & Caltabiano, 2011; Kruczek & Basińska, 2018; Zhao, 2019). However, there is a scarcity of studies exploring how learners themselves develop and exercise humour competence in social-media-mediated learning. Specifically, little is known about the ways learners use humour to communicate, negotiate meaning, and engage in peer interactions in online language learning spaces. Furthermore, most existing research examines engagement, leadership, or humour in isolation, rather than investigating their interaction as a multidimensional framework that could enhance holistic language development. Understanding the interrelationships among these three dimensions is critical for designing social-media-supported pedagogical interventions that foster not only language proficiency but also socio-emotional and cognitive growth. To address these gaps, this study focuses on the following research questions:

1. How does social media use influence EFL learners' engagement in language learning activities?

2. In what ways does participation in social-media-mediated tasks promote leadership skills among learners?

3. How does humour manifest in learners' social-media interactions, and how does it contribute to language learning?

## 3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, autoethnographic, multiple-case design, a combined approach that can tap into unique lived experiences (Hills, 2023; Le Blanc, 2016; Voorhees, 2016), to integrate insights from three English language teachers who use Facebook as part of their instructional practice. The research draws on autoethnography, reflective practice, and narrative case study to examine how Facebook supports EFL learning, leadership development, and humour competence across different teaching contexts. These complementary methodologies allow the researchers to explore their lived experiences while generating situated understandings of social media use in language education.

### 3.1. Research approach

The study brings together three forms of teacher reflection: autoethnography, reflective practice, and small case studies. Each teacher described their own teaching experiences, reflected on the outcomes, and examined how Facebook shaped student learning. Each classroom served as a case study, but the reflections were combined to provide a broader understanding of how Facebook can be used in EFL education.

### 3.2. Participant recruitment

Participants were drawn from the teachers' existing classes. Each teacher selected one group of learners they were already responsible for during the semester, so no additional recruitment procedures were required. Students participated as part of their everyday learning activities, and no one outside the existing classes was invited to join. For younger learners, parental cooperation was obtained when necessary, particularly when students' online access was supervised at home. All student identities were anonymized to protect confidentiality.

### 3.3. Participant profiles

Hoa works at a public secondary school in Vietnam and also teaches small private classes at home. These smaller groups allow her to test new activities—such as Facebook-mediated homework before integrating them into her formal classroom. She currently teaches an intermediate class of twelve learners and uses social media to strengthen engagement beyond school hours.

Hien is an early-career English teacher who manages evening IELTS classes at a local English center. Teaching in a resource-constrained environment with late-night schedules, she explores how Facebook can support peer leadership and collaborative learning. Her experiences as a lifelong EFL learner shape her reflective approach to teaching.

Thang is a Gen Z educator whose daily social media use has influenced her professional identity. Working with young learners in private and center-based classes, she incorporates memes to build rapport, enhance humour competence, and create emotionally supportive learning spaces.

### 3.4. Data collection

Data were collected qualitatively through materials generated during everyday teaching and online interaction. The primary sources included teachers' reflective journals, lesson notes, and written observations about student engagement and classroom decision-making. Additional data were drawn from screenshots of Facebook group posts, comments, discussions, and student reactions produced during homework tasks, leadership activities, and meme-based learning. Informal student feedback, such as short messages, responses, and participation patterns, also contributed to the dataset. These combined sources provided insight into both the teachers' reflections and the observable learning behaviours occurring during the Facebook-based activities.

### 3.5. Data analysis

Data were analysed through a practical, straightforward process designed to promote clarity and accessibility. First, each teacher reviewed their own reflections, classroom observations, and Facebook interactions. They examined these materials to identify recurring patterns, including moments of high engagement, common challenges, or noticeable shifts in student participation. After each teacher identified key patterns, the three cases were compared to determine shared themes. This cross-case analysis highlighted how Facebook contributed to interaction, creativity, confidence-building, and collaborative learning across all teaching contexts.

Using reflective journals, classroom observation notes, and archived Facebook interactions allowed the researchers to triangulate insights across personal reflection, behavioural evidence, and

peer-to-peer communication. This combination strengthened the interpretive validity of the findings by showing how online and offline learning behaviours reinforced one another.

### 3.6. Researcher positionality

As this study is grounded in an auto-ethnographic multiple–case design, the researchers themselves are positioned as both teachers and reflective practitioners. Each researcher drew on personal teaching experiences, emotions, and classroom observations as they integrated Facebook into their lessons. Their dual role as educators responsible for students' learning and as researchers interpreting their own practice shaped the way data were collected and understood.

The researchers acknowledge that their interpretations are influenced by their professional identities, teaching philosophies, and familiarity with social media platforms. Their prior experiences with Facebook also informed the types of activities designed for students and the way student engagement was perceived. Rather than attempting to remove this subjectivity, the study embraces it as a central feature of auto-ethnographic inquiry. By making their perspectives explicit, the researchers aim to provide transparent, honest accounts of how Facebook functioned in their classrooms and how their own beliefs, expectations, and emotions contributed to the insights generated.

To ensure ethical integrity, all student-generated screenshots were anonymised, with names, photos, and identifying details removed before analysis. Students were informed that the activities formed part of regular classwork rather than graded assessment, thereby ensuring that participation did not disadvantage or pressure any learner.

### 3.7. Research procedure

The study was carried out over several weeks and followed a structured yet flexible process that aligned with each teacher's existing classroom schedule. First, each teacher selected one class they were already teaching and introduced Facebook as part of their regular learning activities. Although the specific purposes differed across the three cases - homework engagement, leadership development, and humour-based learning, the teachers integrated Facebook gradually to ensure students were comfortable with the platform.

Throughout the teaching period, each teacher documented their experiences through reflective journals and lesson notes, recording important classroom events, student reactions, and their own emotional or pedagogical decisions. At the same time, naturally occurring data were collected from Facebook, including posts, comments, discussions, and examples of student participation. These online interactions were captured via screenshots and saved as evidence of students' responses to the tasks.

The teachers reviewed their reflections and online interactions weekly, noting any emerging patterns in engagement, motivation, collaboration, or challenges. At the end of the teaching cycle, each teacher compiled their reflections, screenshots, and observations into a descriptive account of their case. These three accounts were then compared to identify shared themes and meaningful differences across the cases. This step-by-step process allowed the study to remain grounded in real classroom experiences while generating a coherent understanding of how Facebook supported learning in different contexts.

## 4. Data Presentation

### 4.1. Case 1: Re-engaging students through Facebook homework

After exploring Facebook's potential, Ms. Hoa decided to test it as a homework platform for her EFL students. Instead of assigning traditional paper-based tasks, she created a closed Facebook group for the class and posted discussion-based assignments. She believed that this private space would encourage students to express their thoughts more comfortably.

To begin, the teacher posed a simple question: 'Describe your day using only three emojis!' She chose this prompt to help students feel at ease interacting without the pressure of writing a long paragraph right away. Although the class had about 12–15 students, only three commented, while the rest remained silent. It appeared that students enjoyed using Facebook for personal purposes, but turning it into a learning space was still unfamiliar to them. Hence, the challenge she encountered was ensuring full student participation. The teacher found that some students were excited about this new

approach to learning, while others remained passive and reluctant to engage. This was not too different from a traditional classroom, where some students actively participate while others prefer to stay on the sidelines and observe.

After noticing students' initial reluctance, Hoa realized that she needed to motivate students. To foster engagement in the discussion, she implemented the following strategies:

- *Ask more open-ended questions*: For example, 'Does this emoji mean you are happy or tired?' (Providing multiple-choice options makes it easier to answer.)

- *Provide sample answers*: Weaker students can use these as a starting point, providing a formula to imitate rather than having to generate responses from scratch.

- *Use tagging and reactions*: Encouraging students to @mention friends and exchange reactions helps 'pull' more participants into the discussion.

- Gradually, participation increased. After two weeks, comments became longer, and students started responding to each other in English. One day, Ms. Hoa posted a debate question: 'What is more important, following the trend or being unique? (Figure 1). 'Surprisingly, students engaged enthusiastically and clearly expressed their personal opinions in English (Figure 2). This was a complete contrast to traditional writing assignments, where most students followed the model without truly conveying their own thoughts.



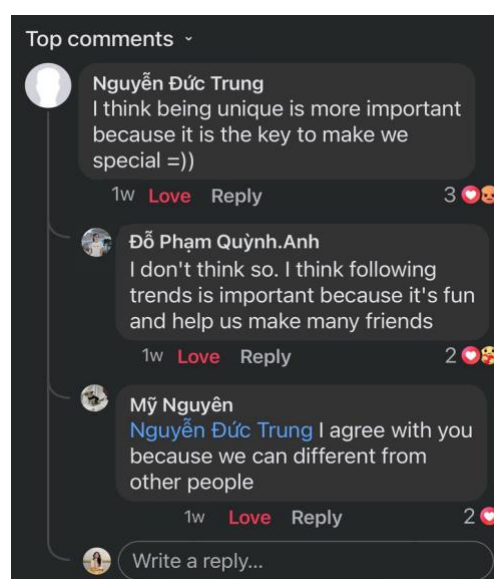**Fig. 1.** Debate question posted on Facebook group



**Fig. 2.** Comments from students

Typically, the teacher assigns homework on Facebook in the following formats:

- *Discussion*: The teacher posts a picture, a question, a trending phrase, or a situation; students comment, while their peers reply and react to the comments.

- *Mini-game*: The teacher creates a small game, such as dividing students into groups to build a story from a given opening sentence or playing a word-chain match on a given topic.

- *Assignments from other platforms*: The teacher shares links to quizzes, Kahoot, or Booklet, allowing students to complete the tasks on those platforms.

- *Class announcements*: The teacher posts updates and important notices about the class.

Among the above activities, Hoa primarily uses discussions because they are highly interactive. Besides, she implemented time limits to activities, sent gentle reminders, and offered small rewards for the best responses. To further enhance the effectiveness of social media assignments, she also sets an agreement with students. If they failed to participate more than three times, they would have to revert to paper-based homework.

Quality control is another key concern. From the beginning, the teacher established clear rules, emphasizing that all feedback must be respectful, non-spammy, and relevant to the lesson. Additionally, all comments must be in English; they do not have to be perfect - the priority is communication. For students without Facebook accounts or those with parental restrictions on phone use, she ensures parental cooperation before implementing this strategy.

What she noticed most was the significant increase in student engagement and interaction. They were no longer afraid to speak up, make mistakes, or be judged. Instead, they felt more comfortable sharing their ideas, responding to their peers' writing, and expressing their views more naturally. Most importantly, students transitioned from passive to active learning. From her observation, they actively completed assignments without teacher intervention. As a result, this positive shift truly led to improved learning outcomes.

This reflection led Hoa to realize that students are not unwilling to learn; they are simply waiting for a more suitable method to engage. Facebook, with its advantages—such as allowing time to think before responding, enabling instant interaction, and creating a less pressured environment compared to traditional classrooms—fosters a more positive learning atmosphere.

## 4.2. Case 2: Building leadership through Facebook collaboration

Every first time in Ms. Hien's teaching career is rewarding and unforgettable, from her first class, first lesson plan, first feedback on the report card, to the first time she uses Facebook as an educational platform. Previously, she often embraced familiarity and simplicity in her teaching. Initially, Hien was very frustrated to integrate social media into lessons. She faced an uphill struggle to tailor the activities to achieve the learning objectives. She just shared some learning resources on Facebook and asked her students to read them and share their opinions below. What made Hien feel literally disheartened was that students played a very passive role in these activities. Some of them did not even care much and put very general comments such as 'Thank you, I love it,' or 'It is so wonderful.'

To make matters worse, students secretly used Facebook for non-educational purposes in the classroom. They felt too lazy to do extra work and often made common excuses for incomplete assignments. However, her anger suddenly subsided when she realized that some students were genuinely eager to learn through Facebook. This gave Hien a sense of accomplishment and motivation. At present, she is working hard to use Facebook in more engaging ways so that my students can grow their social networks, strengthen relationships, share knowledge and worldview with others, foster collaboration, and promote involvement.

Ms. Hien is currently teaching an intermediate class with twelve learners. She divides them into three teams, so each student has a chance to lead at least six times during a three-month course. There are myriad ways to foster language and leadership ability in students via Facebook. For instance, leaders must post a picture or video related to a specific topic after every lesson. Their teammates have to share, give reactions, and add comments below based on my eliciting questions like 'What can you see in the picture?', 'If you are in this situation, what are you going to do?', or 'Why do you like/dislike this photo?' A nice interaction, an informative response, and grading from leaders are necessary for this task. Other groups can comment on their perceptions and ask leaders questions.

In some cases, learners take the responsibility of a little contest organiser. Leaders make a mini plan for a learning challenge that follows their passion or a hot trend, such as an APT challenge, a daily vocabulary challenge, an English poem challenge, or a reading challenge. Besides, there are photography challenges that offer many thought-provoking topics, such as environmental protection, life in space, or a day without the Internet. Students share their favourite photos and write a paragraph describing each picture. Leaders have to set the rules, explain the descriptions, and share sample materials on Facebook so that their classmates understand how to take on the challenges. She will reinforce their ideas, identify procedural problems, and offer suggestions. Later on, students, parents, and teachers will share and post the clips on social media with a specific hashtag to gain reactions and comments in exchange for lovely rewards.

Additionally, Hien utilises Facebook to create social groups for teaching. Her students are required to communicate in English by both texting and voice recording. Leaders, on the other hand, are expected to follow some academic pages on Facebook, such as BBC Learning English, and National Geographic. They have to tag at least three of their friends in a fantastic post to share the information they come across, or send the post directly to their groups. Moreover, she can hold many competitions among leaders. For instance, leaders are encouraged to form a unique Facebook group or page focusing on their interests and experiences, such as bookworm, shopaholic, backpacker, or chill guy. Sharing hobbies with others can lead to a more delightful and natural learning experience. Leaders can also organise small events or workshops and invite others to share and take part. Those who achieve the highest interaction levels and follower count will be awarded prizes such as 'Leader of the Month' or '5-Star Leader.'

Nevertheless, social media in ELT is often recognised as a double-edged sword (D'souza et al. 2021; Smith, 2016; Stieglitz & Ross, 2022). There is plenty of underlying concern towards the application of Facebook in education. The most obvious downside is distraction (Dietz & Henrich, 2014). Many students fall into the habit of constantly browsing other irrelevant sites while doing their tasks. They keep procrastinating and shrinking their attention span due to several eye-catching advertisements, memes, viral content, news feed, trendy hashtags, and notifications. Moreover, Facebook introduces content that is endlessly appealing based on individual preferences. As a result, students are more likely to get addicted and reduce productivity (Adzovie, 2017). Another point worth noting is privacy. Not only students but also teachers prefer to set a clear boundary between study and personal life. Some teenagers regard Facebook as their own world, where they can hide their secrets and express outlandish ideas. It takes over their lives (Hempel & Kowitt, 2009). Hence, they tend to feel uncomfortable and fear that teachers can visit their 'virtual house' at any time and form a negative impression or make a hasty judgment of them. Although they can restrict access to a particular group of viewers, they want their academic postings kept separate from their private ones.

Last but not least, Facebook may turn a person into a clown by its misinformation, disinformation, and fake news (Yang & Hindman, 2023). Misleading text impacts students' understanding of a particular issue. Scammers can also create a perfect background by 'self-branding' and commit malicious behaviour in social networks.

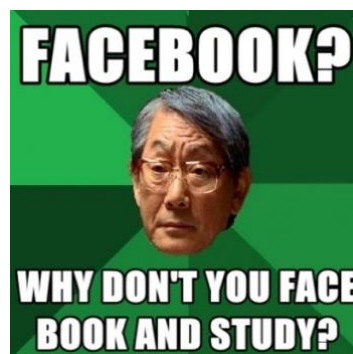### 4.3. Case 3: Finding connection through humour and memes

Thang's view should be understood in the context of a lifelong English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner and a novice IELTS teacher who leads night classes at a small English center in a developing country. Her workplace faces challenges, such as resource constraints and late-night schedules, with the latest class ending at 10 p.m; however, the expectations for excellence in teaching, research, and service are just as high as those in more well-funded academic institutions. As an inexperienced teacher, Thang relied heavily on the teaching method she had observed from her high school teachers and university professors over the years, which was predominantly teacher-led: the teachers talk, and the students listen and take notes. However, she struggled to engage students and felt inadequate, leading to depression and increased social media use. Luckily, the solution was right in front of her all along. She discovered that sharing memes, something she did in university to connect with peers, helped her break the ice with my students and build a friendly rapport, improving engagement and my overall teaching experience, as seen in Figure 3.

**Fig. 3.** Students' reactions to meme sharing on Zalo
(translation: 'For a brief moment, I had assumed everything was alright')

After receiving positive reactions to the memes Thang shared in my Zalo group chat, she began to use them in her lessons, starting with vocabulary. For example, she joined several English learning groups where members often shared vocabulary memes. These memes usually depict short, funny exchanges or relatable situations, paired with a word that captures the essence of the scenario, helping learners associate the target vocabulary with the amusing context and making it easier to recall whenever they remember the meme (Figure 4). Although she understood the mechanism, Thang struggled to find humour in everyday situations, let alone create her own memes. Nevertheless, the more excited her students became when she used memes in class, the more motivated Thang was to make her own.



**Fig. 4.** A cultural stereotype meme

Figure 3 demonstrates the stereotypical view of Western countries towards Asian parents, perceiving them as strict and expecting their children to excel at everything, especially in academics. The meme plays on the literal meaning of 'Facebook,' suggesting that instead of using social media, students should 'face a book' and study. The humour comes from generational authority, moral admonishment, and a playful critique of digital distraction. By noticing this type of mainstream cultural portrayal, the teacher began paying closer attention to both her own culture and those of others, which ultimately inspired her to create a cultural meme using a meme generator website.
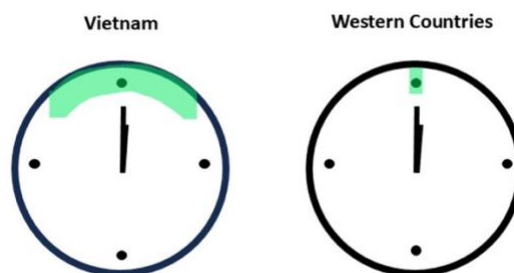
**Fig. 5.** Vietnamese 'rubber band' time meme



**Fig. 6.** Language variation meme

While Figure 5 portrays her ability to deliver implicit hints of the Vietnamese 'rubber band' time culture, where time tends to be more flexible in other places. Figure 6 illustrates her understanding of the differences between American and British English. For example, Americans use pounds (lbs) to refer to weight, whereas the British associate the same term with currency, highlighting a key difference in both language and culture. Ultimately, she has successfully combined her cultural and language competence to provide students with a fun way to see how the language works in real life.
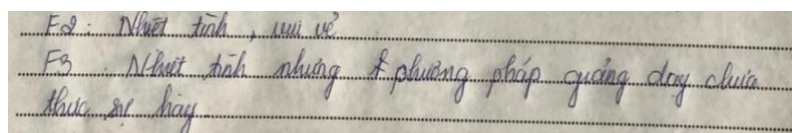


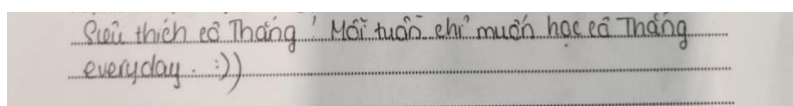**Fig. 7.** Student feedback before incorporating memes in lessons



**Fig. 8.** Student feedback following the incorporation of memes in lessons

The student in Figure 7 said that 'the teacher was passionate, but her teaching method was not truly effective.' This suggests that, despite my enthusiasm, certain aspects of my teaching may not have fully met students' learning needs or expectations. In contrast, the student in Figure 8 expressed 'extreme satisfaction with the teacher's performance and wanted to attend her class every day.' Clearly, this difference underscores the positive effect of using memes and humour on both student engagement and their perception of her teaching effectiveness.

## 5. Cross-Case Analysis

Across the three cases, the findings reveal several common patterns that illustrate how Facebook shaped student engagement, interaction, and classroom relationships, despite the different instructional purposes in each setting. Although each teacher used Facebook for a specific goal — completing homework, developing leadership skills, or building humour competence — the platform consistently supported higher student participation and more authentic communication. In all three classrooms, students who were normally quiet or hesitant in face-to-face lessons became more active online, demonstrating greater willingness to comment, respond, and take part in tasks when the interaction occurred in a familiar digital environment. This shift suggests that Facebook can serve as a low-pressure space where learners feel more comfortable expressing themselves in English.

Another shared pattern concerns motivation and responsibility. In the homework case, students completed tasks more regularly because they received quick responses and could view their classmates' efforts. In the leadership case, students used Facebook to coordinate roles, update progress, and hold one another accountable. In the humour case, students often went beyond the minimum requirements, creating additional memes or reactions simply because they enjoyed the activity. Across all three contexts, students appeared to take more ownership of their learning when tasks were made public within the group, and when the platform allowed them to interact socially while completing academic work. The visibility of their contributions seemed to create both positive pressure and a sense of community.

Creativity emerged as another unifying theme. Although it was most prominent in the humour case, where students designed memes and playful captions, creativity also appeared in the other cases—students phrased homework answers more naturally, responded to teammates with supportive or clever comments, and experimented with how they expressed themselves online. Facebook's multimodal features supported this flexibility, giving students room to use images, reactions, and informal language in ways that made communication feel more personal and less restricted by traditional classroom norms.

Teacher–student rapport strengthened across all cases as well. The online interactions allowed teachers to see sides of their students they had not noticed before: leadership tendencies, humour, personal interests, and even shy students' hidden confidence when typing instead of speaking. Students also initiated more contact with their teachers, asking questions or sharing comments they might not feel comfortable voicing in class. These interactions created a warmer, more connected learning atmosphere that carried over into the physical classroom.

Despite these benefits, similar challenges appeared across cases. Distraction was a recurring obstacle, as Facebook's social nature sometimes pulled students away from academic tasks. Uneven participation also appeared in each case, with a small number of students remaining passive even when others were active. These challenges indicate that while social media can enhance engagement, it requires careful task design and clear expectations to balance participation and focus.

Taken together, the three cases demonstrate that Facebook is not only a tool for communication but also a flexible learning environment that can support interaction, motivation, creativity, and relational warmth. The cross-case patterns show that regardless of whether students were completing homework, collaborating as leaders, or creating humorous content, Facebook consistently encouraged more active and meaningful engagement than traditional classroom approaches alone. The platform's informal and familiar atmosphere helped remove barriers that often limit students' participation, making it a valuable supplementary space for language learning across varied teaching goals.

## 6. Interpretation

The findings from the three cases illustrate that Facebook meaningfully supported learner engagement, leadership behaviours, and humour development in EFL learning, offering a complementary perspective to existing research on social-media–mediated instruction that Facebook increases learners' exposure to English through informal interactions (see, for example, Monica-Ariana & Anamaria-Mirabela, 2014; Qadi, 2021; Rabongue et al., 2024). The students in Case One demonstrated higher participation and reduced anxiety when completing homework tasks in the online group. Their willingness to comment, respond to peers, and seek clarification mirrors the multimodal

engagement benefits identified by Zhao and Yang (2023), who reported that Facebook-supported tasks reduced writing anxiety and promoted more active learning.

The leadership-focused case reinforces previous claims that learner-led roles can enhance engagement and autonomy. In line with Greenier's (2023) findings that 'micro-leadership' strengthens collaboration and confidence, students in Case Two used Facebook to coordinate tasks, assign responsibilities, and monitor group progress. What this study adds is evidence that leadership can emerge organically without the teacher formally assigning leadership titles; instead, the visibility and public nature of Facebook posts encouraged students to take initiative and guide their peers. This extends earlier studies that suggest how social-media environments can support not only vocabulary development but also broader socio-interactional skills (Antoci, 2012; Maiz et al., 2016; Ponsamak & Sukying, 2024).

The third case on humour complements the affective research presented in the literature review. Purwanti et al. (2024) and Qamar et al. (2025) both emphasise humour's role in reducing anxiety and increasing retention, and similar patterns appeared here when students created and shared memes. The humour-based tasks lowered emotional barriers, encouraged creative risk-taking, and fostered rapport between teacher and learners. Aligning with Nasrullah et al. (2025), students also demonstrated signs of emerging humour competence, using English to play with cultural references, visual formats, and pragmatic meanings.

Taken together, the findings contribute three key insights. First, engagement, leadership, and humour are not isolated constructs but mutually reinforcing dimensions, as theorised in = = Facebook's familiar, asynchronous structure appears to support these dimensions simultaneously by offering autonomy, peer visibility, and low-pressure communication spaces. Third, the multidimensionality observed across the three cases addresses the gap identified in the literature, which noted the lack of research examining engagement, leadership, and humour together within the same social-media environment. Overall, this study suggests that Facebook can function as a pedagogical ecosystem where linguistic, social, and affective development intersect. While existing empirical work has examined each of these dimensions separately, the present cases demonstrate how they operate together in authentic classroom contexts.

## 7. Implications for Teaching

Despite its limitations, the study offers several important implications for English language teaching. First, teachers can use social media platforms like Facebook to extend classroom learning into familiar digital spaces where students feel comfortable participating. The cases show that even reluctant or quiet learners may become more active when tasks are presented in a less formal, more accessible environment. Second, the integration of leadership-oriented responsibilities—such as organising group posts or coordinating peer contributions—demonstrates that social media can naturally support the development of learner agency and collaboration.

Third, humour-based tasks, such as meme creation, offer a low-stress and motivating way for learners to practise language while building pragmatic awareness and creativity. Teachers should not overlook humour as a meaningful instructional tool, particularly in digital spaces where playful communication is already everyday. Fourth, the study highlights the importance of task design: Facebook becomes pedagogically beneficial only when activities are structured with clear goals, monitoring, and scaffolding to prevent distraction. Finally, teacher education programs may consider preparing educators to navigate social-media–mediated learning more confidently, especially given its growing role in creating inclusive, engaging, and socio-emotionally supportive EFL environments.

## 8. Limitations

Although this study provides valuable insight into engagement, leadership, and humour in Facebook-mediated EFL learning, several limitations must be acknowledged. Its auto-ethnographic multiple-case design is inherently subjective, shaped by teachers' personal histories and classroom relationships, which limits generalisability. The participant groups were small and varied across instructional settings, restricting broader claims. Data were drawn mainly from naturally occurring interactions rather than structured instruments, meaning some learner perspectives may not be fully captured. Facebook itself introduced constraints such as distraction and inconsistent access. Despite

these limitations, the study offers meaningful guidance for future research and more sustained digital interventions.

## 9. Conclusion

This auto-ethnographic multiple–case study explored how Facebook supported engagement, leadership, and humour across three EFL classroom contexts. The findings indicate that Facebook meaningfully shaped learners' participation and classroom dynamics, offering insights that address the three research questions.

First, Facebook positively influenced learner engagement by providing a familiar online space where students could interact more freely and consistently. Across all cases, students who were normally quiet in physical classrooms became more willing to comment, ask questions, and respond to peers in the asynchronous Facebook environment, aligning with earlier studies that highlight the role of social media in increasing learner participation and lowering affective barriers.

Second, participation in social-media mediated tasks promotedleadership skills, particularly when students were assigned roles or responsibilities within group activities. Leadership behaviours emerged naturally through online coordination, decision-making, and peer support, demonstrating that Facebook can function as a space for 'micro-leadership,' where learners manage tasks and guide group interactions—an area under-explored in previous research and directly addressing the gap identified in the literature review.

Third, learners demonstrated humour competence through meme creation, playful exchanges, and multimodal expression. Humour helped reduce anxiety, strengthened rapport, and encouraged authentic language use, supporting previous evidence that humour enhances motivation and communicative confidence. In the online setting, humour also became a creative tool for meaning-making, allowing students to blend cultural references, English captions, and visual symbolism in ways not typically achievable in traditional classroom tasks.

Together, these findings reveal that engagement, leadership, and humour do not operate independently; instead, they reinforce one another when mediated through social media. Increased engagement created more opportunities for leadership to emerge, and humour contributed to an emotionally safe environment that encouraged both interaction and initiative. Facebook, therefore, acted not merely as a digital platform but as a social learning space where affective, interpersonal, and linguistic dimensions intersected.

Although challenges such as distraction and uneven participation were present, the overall evidence suggests that intentional pedagogical design — combined with reflective teacher practice — can transform social media into a meaningful extension of the EFL classroom. Future research may further examine these three dimensions using larger participant groups or more robust experimental designs. Still, this study demonstrates that even small-scale, reflective, teacher-led interventions can generate valuable insights into how learners engage, lead, and express themselves creatively in digital language-learning environments.

Looking ahead, further studies may investigate how these patterns of engagement, leadership, and humour unfold in larger or more diverse student populations, or explore whether similar dynamics emerge on alternative platforms such as Instagram, Zalo, or TikTok. Such comparative work would help determine the extent to which the pedagogical benefits observed here are platform-specific or reflective of broader digital learning behaviours.

## Declarations

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Author contribution** | : | The research was collaboratively undertaken by both authors, encompassing topic selection, proposal development, methodological application, data analysis, and the preparation of the discussion section. |
| **Funding statement** | : | No funding is available for this research. |
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| **Ethics Declaration** | : | As the authors, we confirm that this work has been written based on ethical research principles in compliance with our university's regulations and that the necessary permission was obtained from the relevant institution during data collection. We fully support ELTEJ's commitment to upholding high standards of professional conduct and practicing honesty in all academic and professional activities. |
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