



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF FACEBOOK-BASED E-PORTFOLIOS IN EFL WRITING: A CASE IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Electronic portfolios (e-portfolios) have grown in popularity in ESL/EFL writing instruction for their contributions to students' writing. However, selecting an electronic tool in e-portfolios is of concern to many researchers and teachers. The combination of Facebook and e-portfolios is a rather new implementation in educational research, especially in high school contexts. Therefore, the current research aimed at exploring (1) high school students' perceptions of the use of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions in writing, and (2) problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing. Fifty grade 11 students at a high school in Soc Trang province, Vietnam participated in the research. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by using close-ended questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. Prior to data collection, the students spent six weeks writing on Facebook close-typed groups. The results showed that the students highly appreciated the contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of enhancing interaction, giving and receiving feedback, motivation and confidence in writing, writing skills, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge. No significant problems were found in using Facebook-based e-portfolios. The research is expected to shed light on implementing Facebook-based e-portfolios in improving the quality of teaching EFL/ESL writing in high school contexts.

Keywords: Facebook-based e-portfolios, perceptions, contributions, problems, high school students, EFL writing

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1. Introduction

EFL writing is considered the most challenging skill for language learners and also the last skill to be acquired as it requires learners to be good at grammatical rules, word choice, logical order as well as idea generation, composition, and revision to create a well-formatted writing (Nunan, 2000). Teaching writing traditionally depends upon the final product of learners while it ignores the importance of editing, drafting and the process of writing (Babae & Tikoduadua, 2013; Fakir, 2010). Therefore, it cannot reflect the whole picture of students' writing ability.

Electronic portfolios (e-portfolios), which originated from portfolios, have grown in popularity in many fields such as writing instruction, writing assessment, speaking assessment. In writing, they are proved a viable tool to help improve students' writing performance. In previous studies, despite differences in electronic tools, e-portfolios helped improve not only students' overall writing performance (Khodashenas & Rakhshi, 2017; Kongsuebchart & Suppasetsee, 2016) but also componential writing (Saeedi & Meihami, 2015). Using e-portfolios in writing instruction and assessment is beneficial to learners as it allows them to self-assess their pieces of writing, keep track of their progress over time, and apply what they have learned for upcoming learning (Alawdat, 2015). The researcher clarified the purposes writing teachers employed e-portfolios, that is *"to track their students' writing progress and to engage in effective communication, provide feedback, and display artifacts for assessment"* (p. v).

The combination of Facebook and e-portfolios has been explored in the studies by Aydin (2014) and Barrot (2016). In these studies, students responded positively to the use of Facebook-based e-portfolios. They valued the contributions of the tool in *"expanding their writing vocabulary, grammar knowledge, research, reading and writing skill"* (Aydin, 2014, p. 67). Moreover, e-portfolios positively affect *"collecting, storing, and managing written outputs as well as monitoring students' progress"* (Barrot, 2016, p. 8).

Teaching and learning EFL writing at the high school where the researcher was working faced considerable challenges in terms of time-constraints, students' lack of motivation and confidence in writing, as well as their deficiency in grammatical and lexical knowledge, etc. These challenges forced the researcher to search for alternative approach to teaching writing. Acknowledging the benefits of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing, the researcher aimed to implement Facebook-based e-portfolios in high school context. Investigating students' perceptions of the treatment marks the very first step in implementing Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of perceptions

According to Jordaan and Jordaan (1986), perception *"refers to the human ability, interpret and attribute meaning to the information received via sensory system i.e., seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching"* (p. 332). Moreover, perception can be understood as *"an*

idea, a belief or an image you have as a result of how you see or understand something" (Hornby, 2005, p. 1122).

In the current research, "perception" means students' opinions of Facebook-based e-portfolios. After the students' actual participation in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing, their perceptions will be investigated in terms of the contributions of the treatment and problems during the implementation. Investigating students' perceptions is to help gain insightful information from the main beneficiaries of any new implementation in English teaching and learning.

2.2 Writing

2.2.1 Writing approach in a second or foreign context

In language research, writing is a productive skill which *"requires a certain level of linguistics knowledge, writing conventions, vocabulary and grammar"* (Erkan & Saban, 2011, p. 165). Teaching and learning EFL writing is not an exception. Therefore, searching for an effective approach to teach writing is of main concern of language teachers and educators so as to help students improve their ESL/EFL writing. ESL/EFL writing instruction is mostly subject to product-based approach, which like its name, focuses on producing the final products (Kim & Kim, 2005; Ly, 2007). The outcome of this approach is *"a single written piece"* which will be read and evaluated by the teacher only (Yeh, 2015, p. 198). Product-based approach reveals certain drawbacks, one of which is the neglect of the process of writing, such as planning, drafting, and revising. To compensate for it, process-based approach has come into play as an alternative approach to teaching ESL/EFL writing. In contrast to product-based approach, process-based moves the focus from linguistic knowledge to writing skills including planning, drafting, and revising (Badger & White, 2000; Yeh, 2015). Tribble (1996) as cited in Badger and White (2000) proposed four stages of process-based approach: pre-writing, composing/drafting, revising, and editing. It is noteworthy that process-based approach involves not a single piece of writing but multidraft papers. Thanks to this, students have a great many opportunities to revise their drafts to have a good piece of writing submitted to the teacher. Therefore, process-based approach in writing is a potential approach in writing instruction.

2.2.3 EFL writing in Vietnam

EFL teaching and learning receive much attention from the Vietnam's government. The 2020 Foreign Language Project launched in 2008 aims to renovate the teaching and learning foreign languages in Vietnam (Vietnamese government). Helping the students achieve level 3 under KNLNN (equivalent to level B1 in the CEFR) as required in the 2020 Project is imperative. As the requirements from the government and the importance of writing itself, teaching EFL writing in Vietnam, specifically in high schools is of great concern, which forces teachers of English to look for more effective ways to teach writing.

2.2.4 Challenges of EFL writing in high school contexts

However important they may be, teaching and learning of EFL writing in Vietnam face considerable challenges. The radical challenge results from the product-based approach, which neglects students' learning process. The students are asked to complete and submit their single draft at once without revision and editing. Pre-writing activities are of concern as high school students are sometimes not aware of the importance of the activities, which subsequently affects their writing performance. Blackburn-Brockman (2001) stated that the students surveyed admitted not pre-writing seriously in middle and high school and some not pre-writing at all. The next challenge worth mentioning is the lack of ideas in composing a piece of writing (Luu, 2010). It is not surprising because for Vietnamese learners, English is a foreign language, and sometimes they are not familiar with the topics they are going to write. Students' deficiency in vocabulary and grammar knowledge may also be an obstacle to the route of successful writing. For example, Nguyen (2015) and Vu (2010) reported from their high school teaching contexts that the students' lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge were the main causes for students' bad achievement in writing. One of the most practical difficulties that interfere with students' ineffectiveness in writing is time constraints (Luu, 2010). He clarified that EFL students are forced to write in a certain limit of time. As a result, some students do not complete their writing as required. Time pressure prevents students not only from creating good pieces of writing but also from demonstrating their actual ability to write (Alfaki, 2015). Time also makes it difficult for the teacher to give feedback in large size classes (Vu, 2010).

How to give feedback to students is another concern in teaching writing (Nguyen, 2009). The findings from the study of Nguyen (2015) revealed that 87.5% of students' written work was corrected by the teacher while only 4% was corrected by the students themselves and 1.5% did not have any correction at all. Vu (2010) added that students lack the ability to give feedback to each other. It can be inferred that they are not well-trained to giving feedback or that they are familiar with teachers' feedback. First language interference in second/foreign language is among the common problems (Bhela, 1999). Using direct translation from Vietnamese into English often occurs in high school writing English classrooms (personal experience). What is more, many EFL students in Vietnam often lack motivation to write (Ly, 2007; Nguyen, 2015), which to some extent hinders their writing ability. Last but not least, the problem is associated with students' voice in writing (Ly, 2007). It is evident that many new implementations in teaching are mostly decided by the teachers, and there is an absence in students' perceptions of treatment. Hence, it lacks insightful views from the two main stakeholders in the learning process, the teacher and the students.

2.3 Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing

2.3.1 An overview of Facebook

Facebook, founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes, is one of the most popular sites on the network system (Maranto & Marton, 2010; Yunus

& Salehi, 2012). Facebook is defined as “a networking site dedicated to information sharing, networking, and interpersonal communication” (Barrot, 2016, p. 3).

Facebook is a potential tool in education. It helps students to follow school-related information, keep in touch with their classmates, access educational links provided by teachers, check class-notes and homework as well as read articles and prepare for upcoming classes (Kitchakarn, 2016; Muñoz & Towner, 2009). Teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction are thus enhanced as well (Muñoz & Towner, 2009). Via Facebook, students can support each other during their course, which implies that Facebook can take a role of an online learning community (Muñoz & Towner, 2009). In addition to the increase in affective factors such as motivation (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Kabilan et al., 2010), confidence and positive attitudes toward learning (AbuSa’aleek, 2015; Kabilan et al., 2010), Facebook also helps enhance students’ language learning (AbuSa’aleek, 2015; Blattner & Fiori, 2009). For example, according to AbuSa’aleek (2015), language learners support the use of Facebook in English learning through such different ways as “regular updates of grammar, vocabulary, and much new information” (p. 62). Not to mention vocabulary and grammar, Facebook in a blended learning course can also promote students’ English learning organization, structure, content and spelling (Shih, 2011). Particularly, authentic language use is another benefit via Facebook interaction (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Additionally, interaction with teachers and peer is one of the prominent advantages that Facebook promotes in language learning (Shih, 2011). McCarthy (2010) emphasized the importance of communication and interaction via Facebook that students can “communicate with their own pace, consider comments and responses, rather than being ‘put on the spot’ in the physical classroom” (p. 731).

In EFL writing, Facebook is a good place for discussion (Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012). Additionally, due to peer assessment/ collaborative writing on Facebook, students’ writing can be improved (Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin, 2010; Nguyen, 2015; Ping & Maniam, 2015; Shih, 2011; Shukor & Noordin, 2014). As clearly stated by Ping & Maniam (2015), “students also discover new sentences or writing structures by reading the comments and posts from their peers” (p. 35). According to the students from Kitchakarn’s research (2016), their ranges of vocabulary and grammar knowledge of English were enhanced thanks to learning on Facebook. It is time-saving for them to post writing on this social network.

2.3.2 Portfolios and E-portfolios

A. Definitions

In ESL/EFL writing, a portfolio is defined “a purposeful collection of writing that documents the writer’s progress during the course” (Williams, 2005, p. 135). In light of ICT in language teaching and learning, an e-portfolio has emerged as a new form of portfolios implemented in writing classroom. It is a “purposeful collection of a student’s work that is made available on the World Wide Web or a recorded CD-ROM” (Kahtani, 1999, p. 262). It is like a portfolio which is done purposely to show students’ progress in learning. However, it takes advantage of World Wide Web as the storage for the collection, instead of paper-based collection.

B. Benefits of e-portfolios

Like the portfolio, an e-portfolio brings about the following benefits as suggested by Williams (2005). First and foremost, it is consistent with the process-based approach in writing. Moreover, *“it provides a broader and richer picture of students’ writing”* (p. 136). Additionally, students’ responsibility in the evaluation process and writing process has been promoted. Sense of accomplishment is another benefit the students possess. In fact, any students who take part in writing activities through portfolios, by writing again and again, they certainly see the progress they have made and take pride in it. Williams (2005) also pointed out that using the portfolio helps reduce the pressure. It should be made clear that the pressure here does not always come from the teacher as he mentioned but also from time constraints in class.

In addition to sharing similar values of portfolios, e-portfolios are advantageous to learners in some other aspects. The most prominent benefit is that it allows students to track their growth in learning and makes it convenient for teachers to follow the students’ process and products (Kahtani, 1999; Lopez-Fernandez & Rodriguez-Illera, 2009). Learners’ motivation is believed to be enhanced by e-portfolios (Erice & Ertas, 2011; Kahtani, 1999). As students compose and post their writing electronically, they are aware that there will be many people reading their work. Therefore, they will be more motivated to write. Also, e-portfolios offer user-friendly environment for both teachers and learners (Erice & Ertas, 2011) where students and the teacher can exchange ideas and feedback more comfortably (Lorenzo and Ittelson, 2005). Moreover, e-portfolios on Facebook, Twitter make students aware of the importance of social networking not only for personal interest but also for educational purposes (Zulfikar, 2016). Furthermore, students can upgrade and update the content and organization of e-portfolios without having to rewrite, retype the work (Aliweh, 2011; Kahtani, 1999). Last but not least, e-portfolios are flexible in time and location (Barrot, 2016). Students can compose their writing at any time convenient to them, at school, at home or in a coffee shop while the teacher can take advantage of these benefits to provide feedback and instruction instead performing in class only.

Evidence from previous studies showed great benefits of e-portfolios in writing. For example, after the implementation of digital portfolios, Valdez (2010) measured the participants’ perceptions through personal and online interview together with reflections to investigate benefits and challenges of digital portfolios in an academic writing class at De La Salle University-Manila. As a result, digital portfolios showed students’ progress as writers in terms of ranges of topics, revision and editing the papers. Learners could also employ different forms of media to enhance the quality of their writing. Increasing interaction and avoiding losing face (in comparison with face-to-face feedback) among learners were also included. In another research, six participants from a university in Malaysia also raised their voice after using e-portfolios (Thang, Lee & Zulkifli, 2012). They perceived that e-portfolios helped enhance their multiple skills including language skills, networking skills, communication skills and management skills.

In terms of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing, there are few studies on this trend. Aydin (2014) conducted a survey on four aspects of Facebook-based e-portfolios: students' attitudes towards Facebook in learning, students' perceptions of the contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in the learning process, students' perceptions towards problems of the tool and factors affecting students' attitudes and perceptions. The findings presented that Facebook-based e-portfolios were beneficial to the students for the sake of improving students' vocabulary, grammar knowledge, research, reading and writing skills. Meanwhile, in Barrot (2016), the students perceived that Facebook-based e-portfolios offered them opportunities to reflect on their work, exhibit their best achievements in writing, track their progress and realize the gaps in their knowledge and skills.

In educational contexts in Vietnam, no research has been found on e-portfolios in writing. However, a number of researches on portfolios has been conducted on portfolios (Nguyen, 2015; Nguyen, 2017; Trinh, 2007; Ung, 2010). Trinh (2007) conducted an experimental study on portfolios among 62 students of mixed levels and age ranges. A comparison between a pre-test and post-test indicated that students' writing performance was enhanced thanks to using portfolios. The attitude questionnaire delivered to the students participated in the treatment and 18 writing teachers indicated positive attitudes towards portfolio in promoting students' writing performance, specifically language system and content. The results from Nguyen's research (2015) and Nguyen's research (2017) were in line with Trinh's findings (2007) when the students under portfolio treatment experienced higher performance in writing and had high opinions of portfolios. Ung (2010), in contrast, did not focus on students' writing performance but on students' anxiety in writing. Forty-seven eleventh-graders participated in Assessment Portfolio Strategy and data from the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory, semi-structured interviews and writing logs revealed that Assessment Portfolio Strategy was effective in reducing students' writing anxiety.

C. Challenges of e-portfolios

Despite enormous benefits, e-portfolios remain considerable challenges. Williams (2005) also pointed out some disadvantages of using portfolios, which can also apply to an e-portfolios. The first issues are related to time, the complexity of portfolios as well as students' hard-working process. Another concern questions about the reliability of the students' work. As portfolios can be brought home, no one can ensure whether the students work by themselves or copy someone else's products. The problems are in congruence with problems found in Wetzel & Strudler's research (2006) in the aspects of time and efforts. Moreover, when writing online, the students may overuse online spelling check and auto-correction (Eric & Ertas, 2011).

Some remarkable challenges reported by the participants in Valdez (2010) were the resistance to the use of digital portfolios as it took much of their time and their efforts to use them but the tool did not bring many effects on their grades. The students' hesitation to the use of digital portfolios might be due to students' preference of using

networking site for personal purpose rather than educational one. Slow internet connection, insufficiency of computers connected with the internet as well as the choice of different social networking site also causes certain challenges to the use of e-portfolios. Barrot (2016) also include some problems such as slow internet connection, time, stress and pressure of posting the products on Facebook, feedback giving (they were uncertain of whether their friends actually read and give comments or not). The students in Aydin's research (2010) and Aydin's research (2014) pointed out some problems with regard to time-taking, boredom, and tiredness in using portfolios and Facebook-based e-portfolios. Besides, they sometimes found it difficult to study with their peer, to give feedback and revise their writing. Some other difficulties were finding mistakes in paragraphs and essays, using checklists for feedback, and brainstorming and outlining.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research questions

The current research aims to (1) investigate students' perceptions of the use of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions to writing and (2) discover problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing. Based on the research aims, the research attempted to find the answers to two research questions:

Question 1: *What are students' perceptions of the use of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions in writing?*

Question 2: *What problems do students face in using Facebook-based e-portfolios?*

3.2 Research design

The research employed a descriptive study under a mixed method design, which combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data while the semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data to answer the two research questions.

3.3 Participants

Fifty EFL students in grade 11 (35 females and 15 males) at a high school in the Mekong Delta participated in the research. Their common age is 17 (47/50). They voluntarily participated in the research as they admitted having Facebook accounts. Most of them used mobile phones to access Facebook. The participants shared the same culture and level of English proficiency.

3.4 Research instruments

3.4.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire consisting of 63 items was administered on Google Form to collect data to answer the two research questions.

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections:

Section A, Personal Information, requires the students to provide background information regarding gender, age, years of learning English, numbers of hours accessing Facebook, and devices used to access Facebook.

Section B, Questionnaire, is the main section which is divided into two smaller parts (Part I and Part II). Items in Section B were designed on the 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, to (5) strongly agree.

Part I, *the Contributions of Facebook-based E-portfolios in Writing*, consists of 40 closed-ended items and an open-ended one. Items in this part were adapted from a number of previous studies, namely Aydin (2010), Kitchakarn (2016), Shih (2011), and Yunus, Salehi and Chenzi (2012). The items are categorized into six clusters, namely vocabulary improvement, grammar improvement, writing skills, giving and receiving feedback, motivation and confidence in writing, and interaction.

Part II, *Problems in Using Facebook-based E-portfolios in Writing*, consists of 11 close-ended items and an open-ended one. Items in this part were adapted from Aydin (2010), Barrot (2016), and Shih (2011) and belong to nine following clusters, namely psychological factors, time-taking, difficulties in pre-writing, difficulties in while-writing stages, giving and receiving feedback, revision, collaboration, internet connection, and Facebook for academic purposes.

3.4.2 The interview

In order to triangulate the information, a semi-structured interview was conducted. As there were seven groups of students participating in writing via Facebook-based e-portfolios, seven representatives of the seven groups joined the interview. The interview was voice-recorded and transcribed to ensure no important information was missing. The questions for the interview evolves contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing, problems the students faced under the intervention, their decision on whether or not to continue writing via Facebook-based e-portfolios, and suggestions and recommendations for better future use of the treatment.

3.5 Procedure

The research was conducted from early January 2018 to March 2018 and was divided into two main stages: the implementation of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing, and data collection procedure via the questionnaire and the interview.

3.5.1 The implementation of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing

After signing the consent form to participate in the research, the students were divided into seven groups, six of which consisted of seven students and one of which consisted of eight students. Each group created a close-typed group on Facebook where members could post their writing on the timeline.

The implementation of Facebook-based e-portfolios was conducted in two settings: in class and at home. In class, they were taught writing lessons followed PPP approach (Pre – while – Post for skill lesson and Presentation – Practice – Production for

a grammar lesson) before they started to write. At home, the students typed and posted their writing products on their Facebook group for other members and the teacher to give feedback. They then revised and edited their writing in accordance with the feedback they received. The students had to write a total of four pieces of writing on Facebook-based e-portfolios within five weeks. Topics of writing followed the textbook for grade 11 students, entitled *Tiếng Anh 11*, published by Vietnam's Education Publishing House (2006). They were then offered an extra week to revise all of four pieces of writing. Finally, they chose two pieces that they were most satisfied with to submit to the teacher for evaluation. It is noteworthy that two writings submitted were considered a stimulation for the students' active participation in the research.

3.5.2 Data collection procedure

After six weeks of writing, the students completed the questionnaire delivered on Google form. Prior to the delivery of the questionnaire, twenty-six students whose levels of English were similar to those under the treatment were to pilot the questionnaire to check the reliability. After having first data from the questionnaire, seven representatives of seven writing groups on Facebook participated in the semi-structured interview.

3.6 Data analysis method

The IBM SPSS statistics 20 was used to analyze the data from the questionnaire while thematic analysis and grouping students' answers were used to analyze data from the interview.

4. Results and Discussion

Prior to data analysis, a scale test was run on Reliability Analysis to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The result of the scale test showed that the reliability of the questionnaire is relatively high ($\alpha=.855$), which ensures the reliability of the questionnaire for the research.

4.1 The contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing

A descriptive statistics test was run on the total mean score of the contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing. The result was indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Contributions Mean	50	2.75	5.00	4.03	.53
Valid N (listwise)	50				

As can be seen from Table 1, the total mean score of the contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios is 4.03. A One-Sample T test was run to check whether the students' perceptions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions in writing

($M=4.03$, $SD=.53$) was statistically different from the test value of 4.0, a high level of agreement in the 5-point Likert scale. The result showed that no difference between the students' perceptions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions in writing and the test value was observed ($t=.268$, $df=49$, $p=.790>.05$). It can be concluded that the students' perceptions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions in writing is high.

A descriptive statistics test was run on the mean score of six clusters including vocabulary improvement, grammar improvement, writing skills, giving and receiving feedback, motivation and confidence in writing, and interactions. The result was presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the six clusters of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions in writing

Clusters	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Vocabulary improvement	50	1.80	5.00	4.05	.67
Grammar improvement	50	1.00	5.00	3.76	.88
Writing skills	50	2.38	5.00	3.98	.59
Giving and receiving feedback	50	2.88	5.00	4.15	.52
Motivation and confidence in writing	50	1.83	5.00	3.86	.72
Interactions	50	2.50	5.00	4.47	.52

As can be seen from table 2, the mean scores of six clusters of the students' perceptions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms of their contributions in writing are ranging from 3.76 to 4.47 on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). It indicated that the students agreed or highly agreed with clusters about the contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing. Interactions took the highest mean score ($M=4.47$, $SD=.52$), followed by giving and receiving feedback ($M=4.15$, $SD=.52$), and vocabulary improvement ($M=4.05$, $SD=.67$). The three clusters which were under the mean score of 4.0 were writing skills ($M=3.98$, $SD=.59$), motivation and confidence in writing ($M=3.82$, $SD=.77$), and grammar improvement ($M=3.76$, $SD=.88$).

To ensure which cluster was strongly agreed by the students, a One-Sample T test was run to check whether a sample mean was statistically different from a certain test value.

In terms of interactions, A One-Sample T test was run to check whether the students' perceptions of interactions in using Facebook-based e-portfolios ($M=4.47$, $SD=.52$) were statistically different from the test value of 4.0, a high level of agreement. The result showed that there was a difference between the students' perceptions of interactions and the test value ($t=6.38$, $df=49$, $p=.00$). Therefore, another One-Sample T test was run to check whether this mean score was statistically different from 4.5, a very high level of agreement. It is indicated from the test that no difference between the students' perceptions of interactions and the test value was observed ($t=.480$, $df=49$, $p=.633>.05$). Therefore, the students' agreement of Facebook-based e-portfolios in terms

of interactions was very high. When interviewed, five out of seven students agreed that their interactions were enhanced thanks to Facebook-based e-portfolios. For example:

"I exchange more with my friends. We understand each other more and more."

(Student 1)

"I can interact with the teacher and learn many things." (Student 6)

The finding was in line with that of Kitchakarn (2016) and Yunus, Salehi and Chenzi (2012) as the students believed that their interactions with their teacher and friends were enhanced (Kitchakarn, 2016). Moreover, outside interactions between the teacher and the students were promoted (Yunus, Salehi & Chenzi, 2012). It is noteworthy that in the current research, interactions became the highest contribution of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing. It may be due to the fact that in big size classes, the students were afraid to interact with each other and with the teacher. In small size groups on Facebook, they might find it comfortable and easy to interact with each other. They could even ask the teacher for help directly on Facebook group's timeline or they could send messages via messenger function on Facebook.

In terms of giving and receiving feedback, the result from a One-Sample T test showed that no difference between students' perceptions of giving and receiving feedback ($M=4.15$, $SD=.52$) and the test value of 4.2 (a high level of agreement) was observed ($t=-.678$, $df=49$, $p=.501<.05$). It is concluded that students' agreement of Facebook-based e-portfolios as a mean for giving and receiving feedback was high. Through the interview, three students (Student 5, Student 6, and Student 7) appreciated the use of Facebook-based e-portfolios in helping them to give and receive feedback.

"I felt that I learned more from my friends' writing, learned many new ideas so that I could use in my upcoming writing." (Student 5)

"Every time I wrote, I received comments on my writings from my friends. And exchanges with my friends helped me to improve my communication skills." (Student 7)

In comparison with previous studies, while in Aydin's findings (2010), the students perceived that they learned how to give feedback, find and classify mistakes, and revise their writing, Shih's findings (2011) revealed that feedback was beneficial to the students as it made them actively assess others' work, which as a result enhanced cooperative learning. The finding of the current research was correlated with what has been found in the two aforementioned studies in the aspect of giving and receiving feedback.

In terms of vocabulary improvement, the result from a One-Sample T test that no difference between students' perceptions of vocabulary improvement ($M=4.05$, $SD=.67$) and the test value of 4.0 was observed ($t=.507$, $df=49$, $p=.48>.05$). It means that students' perception of Facebook-based e-portfolios in improving vocabulary was high. The

seven interviewed students also agreed that they improved their vocabulary when writing via Facebook-based e-portfolios.

"When we write using normal words, our pieces of writing are not good enough. Therefore, when I wrote, I found some new vocabulary which I had never known before. Since then I have known many new words such as "bánh trôi nước", "chè" and "đậu" in English and many other words." (Student 1)

"Because topics of writing varied, I did not know many new words. Therefore, I had to look up new words online or in a dictionary. I could apply new words that I learned in class to the writing." (Student 2)

In terms of writing skills, the result from a One-Sample T test showed that no difference between the students' level of perceptions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in improving writing skills ($M=3.98$, $SD=.59$) and the test value of 4.0 was observed ($t=-.202$, $df=49$, $p=.841>.05$). It means that students' perception of Facebook-based e-portfolios in improving writing skills was high. From the interview, the students expressed that they learned the organizations of the letters. For example, Student 6 explained:

"I knew more clearly about the organization of the letter. I knew how to start a letter, how to write the content and how to end the letter"

In two studies conducted by Aydin (2010) with portfolios and Aydin (2014) with Facebook-based e-portfolios, the students perceived that portfolio keeping and Facebook-based e-portfolios were beneficial in improving their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, reading, research, and writing skills. The current research did not focus on research and reading skills. However, the results of the current research were in line with Aydin (2010) and Aydin (2014) in three aspects, namely vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills.

In terms of motivation and confidence in writing, the result from a One-Sample T test showed that no difference between students' level of perceptions of Facebook-based e-portfolios in enhancing motivation and confidence in writing ($M=3.86$, $SD=.72$) and the test value of 4.0 was observed ($t = -.134$, $df=49$, $p=.186 >.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that students' perception of Facebook-based e-portfolios in enhancing motivation and confidence in writing was high. It was in line with Shih's finding (2011). In Shih's study (2011), the combination of Facebook and peer assessment motivated the students to write in English. The two studies employed Facebook for different objectives but the results were interrelated in terms of enhancing students' motivation to write in English. In the interview, seven out of seven students believed that they became more confident in writing after they had written on Facebook-based e-portfolios. At first, some students were nervous but gradually they became confident. For example:

Teacher: *"Did you feel confident in writing in this way"?*

Student 4: *"At first, I felt a bit nervous but I gradually became more confident."*

Teacher: *"Why were you nervous"?*

Student 4: *"Because I thought my writings would be criticized in different ways."*

Finally, with regard to grammar, the result from a One-Sample T test showed that no difference between the sample mean score ($M=3.76$, $SD=.88$) and the test value of 3.8 was observed ($t=-.360$, $df=49$, $p=.720>.05$). It means that students' perception of Facebook-based e-portfolios in improving grammar was relatively high. The students' responses from the interview helped confirm the findings from the questionnaire when six out of seven students perceived that they learned and improved their grammar. For example, one student said:

"I practised my grammar knowledge because I usually made grammatical mistakes. I could exchange grammar with many of my friends." (Student 1)

The current research was in line with the two previous to some extent. As mentioned earlier, the students in Aydin's research (2010) and Aydin's research (2014) agreed that portfolios and Facebook-based e-portfolios enhanced their grammar knowledge.

Additionally, time was another contribution that Facebook-based e-portfolios brought about, postulated by three students in the interview. A possible explanation was that they could write without time-constraint of just forty-five minutes as they used to write in class. Moreover, they could make use of their free time to write instead of playing games or watching TV. One student said:

"Whenever I had free time, I would get into writing instead of playing games or watching films as what I used to do."

From the aforementioned findings, it can be seen that the students highly perceived the contributions of Facebook-based e-portfolios as they helped the students enhance interactions, giving and receiving feedback. Moreover, they also helped improved students' vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Writing skills, and motivation and confidence in writing were promoted as well. The next concern to be clarified was what problems the students faced in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing.

4.2 Problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing.

A descriptive statistics test was run on the total mean score of the 21 items. The result was shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Problem Mean	50	1.00	3.48	2.36	.62
Valid N (listwise)	50				

As can be seen from Table 3, the overall mean score of problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios was ($M=2.36$, $SD=.62$), which was in the level of disagreement. A One-Sample T test was run to check whether this mean score was statistically different from the test value of 2.4, an accepted level of disagreement. The result showed that no difference between the mean score and the test value was observed ($t=-.501$, $df=49$, $p=.619>.05$). It can be concluded that the students' perceptions of problems in Facebook-based e-portfolios were low. It means that they almost had no problems associated with Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing.

In order to investigate each problem in detail, a Descriptive Statistics Test was run on the mean score of students' agreement and disagreement on each cluster. The result was illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of nine clusters in problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychology Problem	50	1.00	4.33	2.19	.79
Pre Writing Problem	50	1.00	4.00	2.45	.83
While Writing Problem	50	1.00	5.00	2.88	.99
Revision Problem	50	1.00	5.00	2.23	.96
Collaboration Problem	50	1.00	4.00	1.80	.74
Facebook for Academic Problem	50	1.00	4.00	2.25	.87
Time Problem	50	1.00	5.00	2.20	.95
Internet Connection Problem	50	1.00	5.00	2.90	1.40
Feedback Problem Mean	50	1.00	4.75	2.31	.72
Valid N (listwise)	50				

As can be seen in Table 4, students' perceptions of the problems in Facebook-based e-portfolios were generally insignificant as the mean scores of nine clusters of problems were below the level of 3.0 (Neither agree nor disagree). Two clusters that needed to be taken into consideration were *Internet connection* ($M=2.9$, $SD=1.40$) and *while writing stages* ($M=2.88$, $SD=.99$).

In terms of problems regarding *Internet connection*, One-Sample T test was run to check whether this mean score ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.40$) was significantly different from the test value of 3.0 (the average level in the five-point Likert scale). The result showed that no difference between the mean score and the test value was found ($t=-.504$, $df=49$, $p=.617>.05$). It means that students' perception of problems regarding Internet connection was at the average level. Two students from the interview also complained that without Internet connection, they could not join the course. For example, Student 7 stated, "I had to have Internet service to write.". It was in line with Barrot (2016) as the students complained about slow Internet connection, which caused discomfort in using

Facebook-based e-portfolios. This problem is considered common when technology is implemented in teaching and learning. One problem associated with technology-based teaching and learning is the unavailability of mobile devices. It was the concern of Student 5 when she said that if there were no mobile phones, she could not join the course.

In terms of problems regarding *while writing stage*, as can be seen in Table 4., the mean score of problems in *while writing stage* was below the average level of 3.0 ($M=2.88$, $SD=.987$). The result from a One-Sample T test showed that no difference between students' problems in *while writing stage* and the test value ($t=-.860$, $df=49$, $p=.394>.05$). It means that students' problems in *while writing stage* was at average level. It confirmed Aydin's (2010) and Aydin's findings (2014) that the students faced considerable challenges in word selection and sentence combination in while writing stages.

Other issues including psychological factors, pre-writing, giving and receiving feedback, revision, time and Facebook for academic purposes were not problematic to students. Particularly, by using Facebook-based e-portfolios, the students experienced no problems related to collaboration. These findings were not consistent with Aydin (2010), Barrot (2016) and Shih (2011).

Some other problems were presented by the students via the semi-structured interview. The results indicated that the students had very few problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing. However, some remarkable ones that needed considering time-related problems, use of online translation, and finding mistakes in others' writing.

In terms of time-related problems, two students said that due to time expansion, they faced problems in correcting or receiving feedback as many of them did not access Facebook at the same time. One admitted being lazy because time for writing was much longer than he used to have in class.

"Because time for writing was long, many people did not access Facebook at the same time. Therefore, some writings which might be written that day but were only corrected some days later." (Student 2)

Because there was no time pressure, I was inclined to be lazy. (Student 5)

Some students admitted using Google translate to assist them in writing. However, one student (Student 7) stated that it was not a big problem as the more he used Google translate, the more new word he learned. He said:

"Every time I used it (he meant online translation), I had more vocabulary and knew how to pronounce it as well. If it is repeated time after time, I will remember the words and will not use online translation anymore".

In short, the students' problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing were not significant. Only two problems which were concerned by the students were slow Internet connection and word selection and sentence combination in while writing stage. Therefore, it is strongly confirmed that Facebook-based e-portfolios can be used in writing courses for high school students in Vietnam and in similar contexts.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The research investigated students' perceptions of the use of Facebook-based e-portfolios under two aspects: contributions and problems. Results from data analysis indicated that Facebook-based e-portfolios were beneficial in terms of vocabulary and grammar improvement, writing skills, giving and receiving feedback, interactions, and motivation and confidence in writing. However, according to the students, problems in using Facebook-based e-portfolios were not significant. Two problems which are of concern are while-writing activities and slow internet connection. It can be concluded that Facebook-based e-portfolios becomes a viable tool in writing instruction in high school contexts. Therefore, it should be recommended that EFL high school teachers implement Facebook-based e-portfolios in teaching writing. Moreover, they should create more activities for students to join such as offering them more topics for writings and more genres of writing, and posting extra assignments of other skills in addition to writing. Posting songs together with multiple choice questions to increase students' interest and attention is also recommended.

The research has reached its purposes. However, there were certain limitations. Firstly, the research employed a descriptive method (both quantitative and qualitative). Students' competencies in writing have not been measured in depth at the beginning and the end of the treatment. Small sample size (N=50) is also a limitation in the current research. It may not represent the whole high school students in the Mekong Delta. Moreover, the current research just focused on letter writing. If different types of writing had been implemented, students' perceptions of their writing performance would have been more accurately reflected. Furthermore, the implementation of Facebook-based e-portfolios was carried out in six weeks with four topics of writing only. If the time for such implementation had been longer, students would have offered more in-depth responses to the implementation through the questionnaire and the interview. The last issue of concern is the availability of Facebook accounts. Only those who had Facebook accounts joined the research, which may be a limitation in implementing Facebook or any online programs in educational research.

Based on the findings and the limitations of the research, some suggestions for future research should be observed. First, as few studies have been conducted on Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing, follow-up research with larger sample size should be replicated so as to provide stronger evidence on students' perceptions of the intervention. Next, there is a need to implement Facebook-based e-portfolios to different levels of students such as grade 10 and grade 12 to see how students of different levels respond to the intervention. The current research was a descriptive one

investigating students' perceptions of the use of Facebook-based e-portfolios in writing. Future researchers may investigate the effects of Facebook-based e-portfolios in students' writing competencies by pre-test and post-test to explore to what extent Facebook-based e-portfolios affect students' writing performance.

As the research was carried out at a high school context in Vietnam, its results are expected to shed light on improving the quality of teaching and learning EFL writing in Vietnam. Hopefully, the research findings help provide stronger evidence of implementing Facebook-based e-portfolios in EFL writing inside and outside of Vietnam.

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