EFL Teachers' Facebook Groups as Online Communities of Practice: Toward Configurations for Engagement and Sustainability

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Abstract

The emergence of online communities has redefined teachers' professional development. Voluntary participation in online teacher communities offers possibilities for problem-solving, reflective thinking, knowledge exchanging, and social emotion sharing. However, little research has been conducted about the quality and depth of interactions among EFL teachers while participating in online communities. In response to the call for rigorous research featuring the roles of online communities on teacher learning beyond the Western contexts and the realities of participants' contribution, this case study analyzed two Facebook groups of Vietnamese EFL teachers using Wenger's (1998) analytical framework for communities of practice (CoP). Facebook groups were adopted as an online CoP platform because of its widespread social media penetration in Vietnam - with users being 75% of the population (Nguyen, 2019). Adopting a multiple-site case study design, the study surveyed 84 teachers and analyzed the content of selected posts and comments in two Facebook groups in five months, focusing on members' engagement, perceived benefits, and recommendations regarding their CoP participation. Findings illustrate different realities of university lecturers and school teachers within the two Facebook groups in lights of knowledge domains, sharing practice, and moderation activity. The paper offers insights for the design and administration of online CoP in social media spaces.

Keywords: communities of practice, professional development, Facebook, EFL, Vietnam

Introduction

Two decades into the 21st century, the frontiers of online teacher development have been charted thanks to a growing community of worldwide CALL researchers (Johnson,

2001; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2018; Macià & García, 2016). When teachers activate their digital fingertips, the gains are multifaceted: seeking immediate answers, sharing knowledge, gaining emotional support, and in so doing, forming online communities. Zooming in such cyberspaces, teachers act as model learners (UNESCO, 2011).

A considerable amount of literature has featured teacher digital learning in online communities located in Western contexts. Informally conceived online communities have resurged, creating social and collaborative learning opportunities that have been previously unavailable (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2018). Nevertheless, few studies have investigated the realities of EFL teachers' online communities in developing countries like Vietnam, where EFL teachers worked under financial difficulties (Nguyen, 2017a), and with scarce professional development opportunities (Tran et al., 2017). In Vietnam, while top-down professional development (PD) projects are viewed as the norms (Tran 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019), several case studies have revealed the value of a grassroots approach in which teachers are the active agents in the reform process. Salient examples included peer groups to provide constructive feedback (Vo & Nguyen, 2010) and development groups beyond their working contexts (D. C. Nguyen, 2017b). In higher education, Tran (2019) reported how teachers adopted a local instant messaging app to form institutional communities to develop their foreign language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge. However, the existing accounts have generally overlooked Facebook groups as a possible platform for teacher development. In particular, social media membership could benefit participants who have limited access to high-quality development projects due to costs, distance, and time.

Based on such grounds, this multiple-site case study sheds light on Vietnamese teachers' perspectives of learning and development in Facebook groups through the theoretical lens of communities of practice, entailing the triad of the domain, practice, and community (Wenger, 1998). It aims to examine the realities of contribution in Facebook groups formed and administered by EFL university lecturers and school teachers. Facebook was selected as the researched platform since it is used by 75% of the Vietnamese population (Nguyen, 2019). The study is timely as it fits the socio-political situations of Vietnam where social media is disrupting traditional media in revolutionary ways (Nguyen-Thu, 2018).

Literature Review

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (CoP) refers to "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, para. 5). Rooted in the social theory of learning, the dimensions of CoP are framed with the *domain*, *practice,* and *community* properties (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2009; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The *domain* indicates shared interests or identity that glues the learning partners together and promotes specific areas of knowledge. Their sense of purpose will dictate their *practice*, characterizing members' activities and techniques that facilitate learning from and with each other, learning through formal as well as informal activities, and learning from sources outside as well as inside the community. In the sharing process, the

community is manifested in the mutual engagement of members who exercise mutual support, commitment, and trust, resulting in the interesting connections of roles and conversations in subgroups. The community of practice characterizes the interaction among the members but does not clarify how each community has more interaction or engagement so that each member could reap the most benefits from joining CoP.

Membership in Online CoP

Online CoP takes shape when there is an interplay of technology and community, becoming what Wenger et al.'s (2009) termed as *digital habitats*. In other words, Internet accessibility has transformed brick-and-mortar CoP, lifting the geographical and chronological boundaries and enabling learning partners to interact with each other meaningfully. Consensus has been made on the multifold benefits of membership in online CoP - where problem-solving, knowledge building and social and emotional sharing can be enacted. Some examples are that participants can seek support for their problematic teaching practices, looking for suitable solutions, and providing emotional support (Duncan-Howell, 2010; Kelly, & Antonio, 2016).

The cultivation and sustainability of online CoP would heavily rely on the roles of moderators who were in charge of administering and integrating both social and technical configurations (Wenger et al., 2009). Booth (2012) stated that if an experienced moderator was actively involved, good online behaviors were modeled and enforced, the communities would be sustained. They were entitled to *digital sheriffs* who intervened in inappropriate conversations and modeled good digital citizenship practices (Booth, 2012). Siregar (2014) shared this view when she participated in Facebook community *Teacher Voices*, which primarily aimed to serve ELT teachers in Indonesia but has become a global community with the attendance of recognized authors and scholars in the field.

Digital membership is individualized: Members will lead their development tracks (Mackey & Evans, 2011; Prestridge, 2017). Successful online CoP welcomes the newcomers to the community and the lurkers - those who only read information. This membership level is defined as *legitimate peripheral participation* (Chung & Chen, 2018; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2009), implying further moderating activity so that newcomers can make the most of their participation.

Facebook Groups as a Platform for Online Professional Development

Widely-adopted CoP platforms include Facebook, Twitter, and Moodle (Kelly & Antonio, 2016; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2018). Facebook groups have gained its popularity over other traditional platforms thanks to its "fluid and responsive" user interface (Prestridge, 2019, p.2) that facilitates prompt exchanges between members (Lantz-Andersson et al., 2018; Muls et al., 2019; Pi et al., 2013; Ranieri et al. 2012). Being a Facebook group member is one of the most convenient ways that teachers who are new to social media can participate in online communities (Ranieri et al., 2012; Prestridge, 2019).

Studies investigating Facebook as an online CoP platform in different contexts have been documented. Using the ethnographic approach, Muls et al., (2019) highlighted the importance of learning from others' experiences, narrating how secondary school teachers in Belgium exchanged a wide range of ideas as well as materials and embraced self-

reflection, drawing on the reading of other members' posts and comments in a cross-curricular subject group. In Trinidad and Tobago, teachers used Facebook to develop knowledge of curriculum, teaching methodologies, and instructional technology among other elements of professional development (Bissessar, 2014). However, these studies have not investigated the discussions and teacher's engagement in comment threads as well as the role of the moderators.

In developing countries where PD opportunities were limited, Bett and Makewa (2018) analyzed the content of posts and concluded that the Facebook group has proved to be a significant area for school teachers to post and discuss content knowledge of English and literature subject in Kenya. Nevertheless, findings of Bett and Makewa's study have not included the analysis of the comment section which showed the interaction among the members. This study, therefore, aims to fill that gap by focusing on the interaction among the posters and other members within the CoP.

The Downside of Digital Involvement

On the other hand, scholars question the negative impacts of teachers involving in online communities or social media spaces. Johnson's (2001) meta-analysis identified problematic factors in text-based environments: inactive members, cultural differences in heterogeneous groups, and poor discussion content. In the same vein, Duncan-Howell (2010) pointed out that some members were faced with the challenges of misunderstandings, off-topic discussions, content navigation, and agendas of self-promoters and influencers, thereby impacting the sustainability of online groups. Rensfeldt et al. (2018) re-evaluated a Swedish Facebook group's operation as a community, "the [. . .] group could not be described as a fertile space for extended dialogue" (p. 247) because members were dependent on opinions of core members and not fully engaged in critical discussions if any. The researchers further argued that the *digital labor* of members and the hard work of participation in CoP should be truly acknowledged against the backdrop of Facebook's promotional agenda (Rensfeldt et al., 2018). Accordingly, the current study investigates if such challenges exist in the Facebook CoP in the context of Vietnam where online professional communities are under-researched.

The Research Question

The current study is aimed at examining the perspectives of both experienced and lurker-members in Vietnamese Facebook groups to identify the realities of these participants' contributions through the lens of CoP. It sets out to answer the following research question:

> *In terms of domain, practice, and community, what are members' perceptions of and contribution to Facebook groups targeting Vietnamese EFL teachers?*

Methodology

Research Design

The research adopted a multiple-site case study design, drawing on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009).

Data Collection and Analysis

Between March and July 2019, data were collected in two phases: surveying members in two Facebook groups and conducting the content analysis.

Phase 1: Surveying Members' Participation. The experience of being members and administrators of several Facebook groups enabled the research team to employ a purposive sampling method in the screening process of group selection. In this phase, Booth's (2012) and Kelly and Antonio's (2016) selection criteria were utilized to identify groups that are in good standing:

- Lifespan: at least 2 years in operation.
- Group size: the groups which have more than 2000 members can be described as massive (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).
- Informality: should be organically formed, not belonging to any institutions.
- Visibility: Anyone can find the group. The admin's information is visible.

After an initial screening, three groups targeting Vietnamese EFL teachers were selected: VNTEFL, Teachers' Hub, and VietnamTeach (These are pseudonyms used to retain anonymity and privacy). As members of the three groups, the researchers then posted the call for survey participants with the approval of the administrators. The VietnamTeach group was later removed from the official data analysis due to the low number of valid responses. During the data collection process, except for our post of calling for research participants, we acted as lurker-members who were not engaged in any posting, commenting or reacting, and only read the content to reduce researcher influence on the group activities (Muls et al., 2019).

Table 1 depicts the two Facebook groups which qualified as a case (Yin, 2009). While VNTEFL was established earlier than Teachers' Hub, it has a much smaller number of members. Other differences lay in the workplace settings of administrators and the language used for posting and commenting in each group.

Table 1

An Overview of the Two Facebook Groups: VNTEFL and Teachers' Hub

Characteristic	VNTEFL	Teachers' Hub
Members (as of July 2019)	>5000	>50000
Creation date	3 March 2014	1 February 2017
Status (as of July 2020)	Active	Active
Visibility	Private (Only members can see who's in the group and what they post)	Private (Only members can see who's in the group and what they post)
	Anyone can find this group	Anyone can find this group
Number of admins and moderators	5	3
	University	School

Their workplace		
Language	Mainly in English	Mainly in Vietnamese

Participants. An invitation to participate in the research was extended to all members of the two groups with an attached information sheet. Interested participants provided their consent and responded to a survey in Vietnamese to avoid any possible misunderstanding. The survey consisted of both close- and open-ended questions. The multiple-choice items elicited information about the members' demographic data (gender, age, workplace, and position), their membership mode in the group, and their reactions to the posts. The open-ended questions asked for members' opinions about their expectations, contribution, useful posts, and recommendations in the group. A total of 84 valid responses were collected from both groups, which constituted the first primary source of data. Incomplete and invalid responses were removed before analysis was conducted using the SPSS® software. Translation of survey items, open-ended responses, and content analysis in both phases was cross-checked by the co-researchers. Among the 84 valid responses, 50 were completed from VNTEFL members and 34 from Teachers' Hub. The humble number of responses despite the massive size of the groups echoed the low-response rate observed in researching social network sites (see Rensfeldt et al., 2018).

Table 2 illustrates the selected demographic data of survey respondents. The majority of the survey participants were female and aged between 20 and 40 in both groups. University lecturers accounted for nearly two-thirds of the population in the VNTEFL group while school teachers made up half of the Teachers' Hub (The respondents were able to choose more than one option under the workplace and position items). The number of self-defining roles as lurker-members who never posted or rarely commented in the groups was significantly high: 40% and 62% in VNTEFL and Teachers' Hub respectively. The lurker-member was coded with an initial L in the Results section.

Table 2

Demographic Data of Survey Respondents

Characteristic		VNTEFL (n=50)	Teachers' Hub (n=34)
Gender	*Female*	86% (n=43)	94% (n=32)
	Male	14% (n=7)	6% (n=2)
Age	*20-40*	82% (n=41)	76% (n=26)
	> 41	18% (n=9)	24% (n=8)
Workplace	*Language Centers*	32% (n=16)	29% (n=10)
	Schools	26% (n=13)	50% (n=17)
	University	70% (n=35)	38% (n=13)
Position	*Lecturers*	68% (n=34)	35% (n=12)
	Teachers	38% (n=19)	65% (n=22)
Self-defining membership roles	*Lurker-members (L)*	40% (n=20)	62% (n=21)
	Members	60% (n=30)	38% (n=13)

Phase 2: Analyzing Posting and Commenting Activity. The survey findings were supplemented and triangulated by a close content analysis of posts and comments in each group. This convenience sampling method can be justified given the explanatory nature of the case study design (Riffe et al., 1998), and was based on the frequency of posting in

VNTEFL during this phase: It would take the group nearly two months to reach 50 posts (see Table 3 below). This is expected to achieve a more holistic and comprehensive analysis of member engagement as a complex social phenomenon (Kohlbacher, 2006), yielding "rich and thick" data (Selwyn, 2012, p. 218). The number of texts from posts and comments helped generate effective numbers of themes corresponding to the issues under research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To mitigate the changing nature of the content on social network sites (Kelly & Antonio, 2016), the team created a shared Facebook folder to save links and content. Data were stored in the form of screenshots of posts and comments. Religious and spam posts were removed from the analysis. Table 3 summarizes the amount of data collected in the two groups, depicting a higher frequency of posting and a much bigger number of comments in the Teachers' Hub group compared to the other.

Table 3
A Summary of Posts and Comments

Characteristic	VNTEFL (n=50)	Teachers' Hub (n=50)
Time to reach 50 posts	54 days	5 days
Language	Mainly in English	Mainly in Vietnamese
Post with comments	38% (n=19)	80% (n=40)
Total number of comments	55	518

The domain and practice dimensions in CoP framework were elaborated about the five continuing professional development competencies in the Cambridge English Teaching Framework (CETF):

- CETF1 (learning and the learners): teachers' understanding and application of learning theories and learner preferences.
- CETF2 (teaching, learning, and assessment): teachers' understanding of learning resources, language systems and skills, and assessment types.
- CETF3 (language ability): teachers' understanding of language points of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and use of appropriate classroom interaction at different levels.
- CETF4 (language knowledge and awareness for teaching): teachers' understanding of terms to describe language, use of strategies to check and develop language awareness.
- CETF5 (professional development and values): teachers' understanding and practice in the areas of teacher learning, classroom observation, professional development, and critical reflection.

The CETF adoption is based on its prevalence among other PD standards (see Allen & Hadjistassou, 2018).

Results

VNTEFL Facebook Group

Domain and Practice: University Lecturers Addressing PD and Research-related Needs. A majority (60%) of the respondents from this group reported professional development and values (CETF5) as the most useful posts' content in comparison with other competencies of CETF. Member RV38 expressed their opinion about the most essential posts shared in the community: "News and updates regarding the conference, workshops, live sessions of AE-Teacher program; news about MOOC courses and scholarships". For example, under post #21, which called for seminar participation on the topic of Econometrics in Linguistic Analysis, a commentator suggested: "Please live stream the webinar", which was liked by the post author.

Another common type of post was for sharing academic articles from successful Vietnamese scholars with local members. Post #4 (Table 4) by a Vietnamese lecturer teaching in Australia was a salient example of this.

Table 4

Sharing in Post #4

Member	Discourse
Poster #4	Interested in Bourdieu's tool as a conceptual frame to analyze interview data on a higher education topic?
	New issue […] of Teaching in Higher Education includes our article on language & learning advisors as a valuable but under-recognized workforce in higher education. Language and learning advisors provide critical support for international students who relocate to a new cross-border learning environment & study in a foreign language. If you are interested in a copy of this article co-authored by […] and myself, email [sic] us at […].
	Link to the new issue and our article where we used Bourdieu!: [link provided]
Commentator 4.1	Dear Sis, can I ask for a copy to [email provided] plz. I'm extremely thankful for you and the co-authors.
	[liked by the poster]
Commentator 4.2	Sis, can I ask for one copy plz [email provided].
	Thank you, sis!
Commentator 4.3	Congrats to [tag the author and co-authors] and colleagues!
	[hearted by a tagged co-author]

Expecting email requests in the post, the givers were appreciated, congratulated, and tagged - possibly by members in their close circle. For members who had difficulties accessing journal articles with a paid subscription, these posts would be relevant and helpful, as acclaimed by lurker-member LRV45: "Some members share their newly published research works, which help others who have financial difficulties accessing high-quality materials" (LRV45). Post #5 (Table 5) illustrates how technical assistance was sought and provided when it comes to online PD activities.

Table 5

Sharing in Post #5

Member	Discourse
Poster #5	FYI [share a post with the registration link and event flyers to a sponsored webinar on Teaching Integrated Skills for K-12 EFL Teachers]
Commentator 5.1	Sis, can I ask why I can't log in [share a screenshot of her log-in details of the failed log-in]. This is my newly created account.
Poster #5	[tag the event organizer- Commentator 5.2] assist Commentator 5.1. Thanks, sis.
Commentator 5.2	[tag Commentator 5.1] can you check if you've keyed in the correct username and password that you used when creating your account? Make another attempt of logging in. Message me if the problem occurs again.
Commentator 5.1	[tag Commentator 5.1] Thank you, sis!! [two smiley emojis inserted]

This post indicated a less frequent sharing of a PD event related to the context of K-12 teaching, sponsored by LIVE [pseudonyms], ELT associations, and publishers. When an interested participant encountered technical faults, the organizers provided timely and helpful support. Digital members' disadvantaged backgrounds were cited by member RV38 who gave the most elaborate accounts to express her membership appreciation that:

> The group is a precious platform that enables learning opportunities and inspires teachers of all levels. I come from a remote background. Thanks to this Facebook group I've known wonderful teachers, TESOL experts, accessing useful professional development activities and receiving endless inspirational sources from great teachers that empowers us to love our career and strives to engage in deeper learning. I'd like to express my gratitude towards the group's admins. (RV38)

In brief, the VNTEFL's members revolved mainly around lecturers who share resources, materials, opportunities for online PD, and research development in higher education contexts.

Community: Noting a Lack of Voices and Casting Doubt on the Depth of Interaction. Tagging, thanking, and requesting technical support aside, substantial discussions relating to the shared content were not present in both posts #4 and #5. Concerns over a lack of posters and content diversity were raised. One lurker-member observed, "Most posts in this group are from LIVE, those who are working for or close to this organization" (LRV32). This perception was supported by member RV39 who noticed inactive periods of the CoP, "The group is only active when it is the conference 'season', and there are a few influential members because they have invaluable sources of information" (RV39). The content analysis further highlighted that 44% of the posts (n = 22 out of 50) were created by admins and moderators - the influential members who focused on the call for webinar and conference participation. Other members seemed to be inactive in their discussions and engagement.

Member RV18 observed the size of the group and questioned the depth of interaction in the group, contrasting RV38's experience of "deeper learning" aforementioned, "The number of members is massive, but there is little interaction. Most of the posts are news, and there are few academic exchanges relating to the English language teaching practices" (RV18). Among the "few academic exchanges" recorded in the group was post #42, which discussed the National Assembly's rejection of the English as a Second Language policy. The most detailed comment on post #42 was an outburst of emotions, "English is an official language in other countries. However, it isn't even a second language in our country. This explains the ever backward development of English here. I'm outraged!" (Commentator 42.1), while other comments lacked substance or even written with impolite language to refer to the lawmakers.

Concerning the growth of the community, the survey respondents made several suggestions, requiring the admin and moderators to modify the group's technical and social configurations such as "monthly members' evaluation and removing inactive members from the group" (RV38); "assign a hashtag to posts so that the members can search easily. For example, #ask #game #review #quizlet ..." (RV46). Member RV18 elaborated that:

> Organize online or offline competitions. There should be monthly or quarterly topics for discussion. For example, in January: designing and using picture stories in English teaching and learning. There is a Q and A section that teachers can share and deal with the difficulties in English teaching and learning. There should be someone who raises the issue so teachers can share. (RV18)

The above recommendations reflected members' higher expectations of the group activities. While it may require more effort and labor from the admin and moderators in meeting members' expectations and further engaging them, a sharing culture can be initiated and developed by members of the community. Although some suggestions are demanding to meet, they provide insights into ways to make the CoP more useful and lively. One member said:

> If the group can involve school teachers to contribute and share, similar to the group *EM Experts*, the activities will be more effective. Interactive activities should be organized, for example, how to present at conferences for high school and secondary school teachers. (RV39)

While challenging, the above suggestion involves learning moderation practice from another Facebook group, bridging university-school collaborative professional development efforts, which is a well-thought-out proposal and reflects deep reflection on how to improve member engagement within and outside the group boundary.

In essence, although the VNTEFL Facebook group is primarily the domain knowledge of university lecturers sharing information about professional development opportunities, they rarely engaged in critical discussions, an essential property of CETF5. This group experienced the frequent posting of and support from core members who were acknowledged for their giving. Other members, however, perceived higher expectations of diverse sharing and contribution from the community.

Teachers' Hub Facebook Group

Domain and Practice: School Teachers Responding to Peers' Pedagogic Puzzles. More than 70% (n = 24 out of 34) of the respondents in this group identified teaching, learning, and assessment (CETF2) as the most useful one among the five CETF areas. For example, one lurker-member reflected that "The posts which relate to teaching young learners and materials for general English communication [are most useful]" (LRT9). This preference for content sharing was captured in post#45 (Table 6).

Table 6

Sharing in Post #45

Member	Discourse
Poster #45	Anybody here has image files of basic communicative patterns for Grade 2? Can I ask for the worksheets? Thanks much!
Commentator 45.1	You should design the worksheets yourself: much easier to teach and suitable with your students' level, dear!
Poster #45	I'm working on it but need some references.
Commentator 45.1	dear, what syllabus do you teach?
Poster #45	The Ministry of Education and Training's textbook

Note. The commentator 45.1 then shared two smartphone screenshots of (1) her worksheet and (2) the google keywords for the font template.

Unlike the VNTEFL's posts which focus mainly on PD and academic research sharing (CETF5), the posts requesting teaching resources like #45 (CETF2) are ubiquitous in this group. Another lurker-member appreciated, "Posts about choosing coursebooks, and difficulties in the profession" (LRT6). Members of this group mentioned the struggle to teach grammar lesson like in post #9 (Table 7).

Table 7

Sharing in Post #9

Member	Discourse
Poster #9	Hi, homie. How to teach students to remember and use the tenses? It seems the students grasped the use at first but the following lesson they would know nothing and have it wrong. Help me plz, homie. Many thanks.
Commentator 9.1	You can teach them, again and again. The Question and Answer and the time expressions auto response mode should be always on in the classroom. Practice lots of sample exam questions. It's essential that you should assign the struggling students into a special support group. Adopt one-on-one teaching. This is the summer time so the students are having more free time: It's very good for special support classes. I've tried this out and it works!

Other members shared how to overcome the difficulties of teaching pronunciation to young learners in Table 8.

Table 8
Sharing in Post #31

Member	Discourse
Poster #31	[Share a video of her students exchanging conversations and ask for feedback] I believe taking the first step is the most important one. Appreciate your advice and comments on this fun video.
Commentator 31	You can correct the young learner's lisp: What's your "lem"? [name]
Poster #31	Yes hii, I'm trying to correct him. Thank you! At first when he attended my class his tongue was tied and he was often shy. This is actually one of his achievements! hii

Upon asking for feedback, poster #31 (Table 8) expressed her pride in helping the students to improve her mother tongue's interference when making utterances.

The way of addressing other members of this group differs. In post #45 (Table 6), the commentator 45.1 called the poster "dear" [used when speaking to somebody you love] and encouraged them to become material creators. Teachers' Hub sharing was mediated owing to the member's technological fluency of sharing worksheet screenshots.

As regards posters' intimate use of language, post #9 (Table 7) showed the friendly manner in which pedagogical support was described with great details. The Teachers' Hub community members used their local language and affectionate terms ("homie", "dear") in their exchanges, showing their familiarity with chat language that facilitates mutual support. Member RT7 valued "posts about pedagogical techniques or materials reviewed with the author's examples and experience." The material review activity was exchanged enthusiastically in the group as seen in Table 9.

Table 9
Sharing in Post #25

User	Discourse
Poster #25	Has anybody ever taught the course book BP for pre-school learners??? Can I ask for a review and some activities? Many thanks.
Commentator 25.1	This course book is beautiful, interesting and easy to teach. They provide the smartphone app, a very beautiful and interesting one. You can consult the activities, full of which are in the teacher's book
Commentator 25.2	I swear Sis T. [Commentator 25.1] is amazing.hhh
Commentator 25.3	Sis T is like an encyclopedia of English language teaching!
Commentator 25.1	[Add another comment] The app is great. You all should download and test it! The players must finish unit 1 before moving on to Unit 2.

Community: Recognizing Starred Contributors and Appreciating Effective Admins. The exemplary performance of Commentator 25.1, who was not a moderator, was recognized: What she shared was trusted by the community members. Not surprisingly, as a community, the survey respondents were satisfied with their

membership when they were able to network with nationwide teachers and learned about new approaches. One lurker-member reflected that "This is a useful group, attracting many teachers in the country" (LRT22). This perception was supported by one member who added that "As a not-for-profit group, this is an effective channel for networking and disseminating new directions in English Language teaching" (RT26). Another lurker-member noted that the admin of the group was thanked for her moderating activity, "I'm delighted to be a member of such a helpful group. The way Ms. J manages the team is excellent" (LRT6). One member shared the perception that "Thank you the admin for creating this group, connecting communities of English teachers to share and learn" (RT29).

One possible explanation for the members' satisfaction regarding their membership was clear posting and commenting guidelines set by admins. The group's codes of conduct were made specific and visible as shown in the snippet below:

- Please do not leave a soulless single period (.) in the comment section.
- Do not share your email address recklessly.
- Be a kind-hearted sharer: Do not demand any requests or apply terms or conditions.
- Interact with emotions.
- Admins are not robots: Do not call, send us a private message or inbox us at our private hours (at mealtime, sleep or rest hours).

From content analysis and the posting experience, the researchers observe that the admin sets the posting mode under strict moderation hence explains the number of posts on the same day. It would take 5 days for the Teachers' Hub community to reach 50 posts that were contributed by 47 different authors. Posts were all in Vietnamese, seeking immediate answers (74% or 37 posts).

The survey respondents offered suggestions of refined techniques of group moderating in addition to the request for more posts on storytelling and grammar (LRT24), assessment types (RT33), organization of post content from primary to tertiary (LRT3), integration of technology into language teaching (RT15). Sincere wishes were voiced,

The group should restrict the sellers even though they are for educational purposes. I'd love to learn from more experienced teachers' live streaming. I look forward to admins or senior teachers sharing their teaching experience or teaching us so that the junior ones can learn from them. I can't join the team offline events because of distance and costs. I hope the admin can live stream the conferences for us. (RT16)

The members may share the useful, interesting posts to other groups, for example, the learning materials for students can be shared to a parenting group "Our Children Can Do Self-Study" . . . so that many others can know about our group's presence. (RT31)

Taken together, Teachers' Hub is a dynamic, budding CoP where school teachers can seek immediate answers to their daily struggles of designing communicative and assessment worksheets, choosing materials, and applying appropriate teaching approaches (CETF2), who can be acknowledged for their contribution under the visible moderation of admins and community-building activity. As the practice is localized and the posts are relevant, the community is thriving to the extent that it can be linked to other Vietnamese communities as member RT31 recommended.

Discussion

The Diverging Domain and Practice Between VNTEFL and Teachers' Hub

The analysis of the two Facebook groups presented as CoP helps us to understand how Vietnamese EFL teachers and lecturers have been expanding their professional support by embracing social media affordances. The findings mirror the studies whose voluntary digital engagement benefit members in numerous ways (Bett & Makewa, 2018; Bissessar, 2014; Kelly & Antonio, 2016; Muls. et al, 2019; Ranieri et al., 2012; Prestridge, 2019). Nevertheless, the educational discourse of each CoP may undergo major divergence from one another. While the two examined social media groups present the elements within the coherence of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), their engagement levels differed remarkably. They project unique domain and practice: Where VNTEFL is oriented towards university lecturers' research and development knowledge (CETF5), the digital landscape of Teachers' Hub is conducive to just-in-time solutions, crowdsourced teaching ideas, and intimate support purposively contributed by school teachers (CETF2).

Given that EFL lecturers in higher education institutions in Vietnam are faced with difficulties searching for funding and resources to carry out quality research (Tran et al., 2017), participating in the group VNTEFL could result in expanding research knowledge (shown in post #4 in Table 4). Teachers' Hub seemingly hosts a plethora of voices and diverse practices of members who are willing to ask questions, share experiences, and trust advice from recognized contributors. The findings in the Teachers' Hub group are consistent with Bett and Makewa (2018) who indicated that the posts are professionally rich and relevant to practitioners. To enact effective sharing, the sharers and commentators tapped into their communicative, technological, and pedagogical competences in social media platforms. The discourse in post #9 (Table 7) resonates with Siregar (2014)'s highlights of Internet language used to enhance mutual support. Poster #31 (Table 8) can be attributed to Kelly and Antonio (2016)'s classification as one of "modelers of practice" in social media learning (p. 143). The exchange of poster #25 and other members (Table 9) signifies the importance of good modeling online behaviors (Booth, 2012) and Pi et al.'s (2013) characteristics of providing positive feedback to those members who contributed their knowledge. Teachers' Hub group, in this sense, is truly participant-driven.

These two communities looked like alien digital habitats to each other, presenting the contextualized mode of voluntary professional support and sharing. Newcomers to social media learning, hence, should familiarize themselves with the CETF specific competencies in the domain and practice of the Facebook groups upon making membership requests. What stands out from findings are the voices of lurker-members in organically-driven communities, who were not featured in Muls et al.'s (2019) investigation. The finding confirms Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger et al. (2009)'s substances of legitimate peripheral participation. On the surface, the lurker-members who rarely engage in discussions seem not achieving their membership benefits. In practice, their learning stems from reading about and reflecting on the experience of their peers' digital sharing.

The Roles of Moderators in the Configurations for Sustainability and Engagement

As described earlier, both Facebook groups were organically formed; however, the Teacher's Hub school teachers extensively interacted and engaged in the discussions while VNTEFL lecturers seemed to be less active and inclined towards a top-down approach. VNTEFL's post content is predominantly and knowingly informed by a limited number of key members. What is happening in the VNTEFL group is the situation alerted by Wenger et al. (2009) in which the dialogue is dominated by a small articulate group whose interests might not reflect the whole community. In other words, this homogenous sharing might hinder VNTEFL's sustainability and growth when dominant posters' agendas and a lack of diversity of perspectives were noted, echoing doubts narrated in Duncan-Howell (2010) and Rensfeldt et al. (2018).

Comments in VNTEFL were unmoderated, which suggests that its team of admins seems less involved in the moderating activity compared to those of a more organized admin who even went as far as "curating collective book lists, FAQs and content— recommendations of—making these lists available to the group via her separate blog" (Rensfeldt et al., 2018, p.238). Similar to the content analysis of posting and commenting in Kelly and Antonio (2016) and Rensfeldt et al. (2018), the one-word comment *following* or a single full stop left in the comment section under the post was prevalent in the selected samples in the two Vietnamese Teachers' Facebook groups despite Teachers' Hub's actionable rules, stressing the importance of more frequent moderating implementation.

These findings have notable implications for learning designers in social networking sites: Even when Facebook groups are informally formed and developed, the role of admins and moderators still matter. When many members are peripheral to the post content and commenting, moderators should take action to further engage the group audience, starting with an awareness of their groups' domain and practice. Further suggestions should be taken into consideration to manage and grow a massive community: distributing the editorial workload to deal with malpractice, writing a post to welcome new members, using a hashtag or *Add your topic* mode to organize posts for newcomers to navigate the posted content, setting clear rules to reward and punish appropriately, and organizing regular activities to boost interactions and communications (Group Management for Admins, 2020; Pi et al., 2013). More importantly, moderators should consider the possibility of live streaming offline events to reach members in remote regions, recognizing starred members to invite them to be moderators, and setting a back-up site to avoid risks of social media interruptions (for reports of Facebook censorship in Vietnam, see Nguyen-Thu, 2018).

From the perspectives of stakeholders, provided that the work of moderators is voluntary and members' perceived expectations of moderation are demanding, we support the argument by Rensfeldt et al.'s (2018) calling for the official recognition from admins and moderators' workplace to acknowledge their digital labor when they are doing meaningful community work. This can only be achieved if policymakers are informed of such online CoP, requesting to join the community to observe and promote teacher digital learning in motion.

Conclusion

The multiple-site case study illuminates why, what, and how EFL Vietnamese teachers are learning and sharing online in two massive, private Facebook groups using the theoretical lens of online CoP. The empirical body of evidence captures the essence of Vietnamese school and university teachers' digital engagement in informal online communities from the voices and practices of both active members and lurker-members. The diverging directions in the domain, practice, and community participation mode are explored. While university lecturers in the VNTEFL group are more focused on reading and following research and professional development opportunities prescribed by influencers, the school teachers in Teachers' Hub tend to be more internally driven in their community, seeking and sharing possible solutions to the pedagogical challenges of their professional lives in supportive manners. To guide policymakers and designers of CoP via social media platforms, the paper unfolds configurations that stakeholders can refer to with the hope of constructing online communities, acknowledging contribution, and building up sharing. Surveying and researching social media sites in this sense will yield interesting data with regards to the dynamics and complexities of evolving membership in CoP.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. This study was limited by the self-reports of survey respondents and a comparatively small convenience sample size for content analysis. Besides, the study has not followed all the activities of active members or lurker-members to explore whether their modes of membership would be modified with their interactions in the community. In this respect, longitudinal studies with multi-stage content analysis can be employed in future studies. What teachers learn in communities will continue to be a promising area for both language teachers and researchers in the field of CALL, enriching the knowledge base of teacher professional learning.

Note

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