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The effectiveness of using Instagram to build writing skills in language classes

Abstract. One of the most important components of language learning is students' involvement. The ability to engage students in the classroom can be a difficult task or responsibility for foreign language teachers. Engaging students in writing programs is a challenge and a major responsibility of teachers. The technology era has brought with it a lot of conveniences. The rise in popularity of social media and social networking sites has opened new avenues for people to communicate in more genuine ways. Thanks to technological progress, it is easier for language learners to find methods to improve language acquisition and increase the level of engagement. Social media platforms are also used for educational purposes, because of their importance. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of using social media platforms to improve students' writing skills. The study employs a qualitative research method design. As a data collection instrument, there were used semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The study was conducted in a total of 4 Instagram writing implementations throughout the 8-week writing course period in the academic year of 2020-2021 (spring term) at the Foreign Languages Teaching Department of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University. At the end of the study, all participants were interviewed. The findings of the study state the positive attitudes toward the usage of Instagram in writing classes.

Keywords: Instagram, Writing, Language Learning, Technology, social media, SNS (Social Network Service/Site).

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Introduction

When we use technology effectively, in education it may benefit and empower both language learners and instructors. It can lead to an emancipatory learning experience when used to increase student involvement. There have been numerous approaches for incorporating technology into and out of the classroom to engage students. The widespread use of technology and the large array of information available on the Internet has laid the framework for significant changes in language

teaching and learning environments, as well as instructional techniques and devices. Choosing the appropriate strategy for engaging learners in learning settings is regarded as one of the most difficult tasks. Some social networking sites [SNSs] in particular, such as Facebook and Instagram give language instructors extra options for motivating students and improving the classroom experience [1]. Many researchers have been drawn to the use of social media in writing workshops. For example, Fithriani, Dewi, Daulay, Salmiah, and Fransiska [2]. According to the findings of the study, participants found

using Facebook for their writing classes to be an effective and practical way to improve their writing skills by increasing their confidence in using the target language as a communicative tool to learn a language and improve themselves completely. The study found that using Facebook in writing classes had a favorable impact on students. Writing courses appear to be difficult for students to engage in because writing is regarded as a passive and difficult-to-improve skill [3]. To address this issue, the current research examines whether incorporating Instagram, one of the most popular and widely used social networking sites, as a pedagogical learning tool in writing classes for Kazakh EFL students has any positive effects on students' engagement in writing classes and overall performance using Instagram. Even though the impact of Instagram integration in particular writing classes has been thoroughly investigated with university-level EFL learners [4] and private high school students [5], little research has been done on student perceptions and the effects of Instagram integration on learners' writing performance in foreign languages.

The study's primary goals are to determine the influence of Instagram on students' writing achievement, changes in involvement, and attitudes on incorporating Instagram into writing programs. The research questions addressed to evaluate and measure the mentioned purposes of this study and this question is:

What are students' perspectives on the use of Instagram in writing classes?

Literature Review

For the last few years, Instagram has reached a younger and more diverse audience than other social networking sites. The young population started to spend less time on Facebook, which is the other most popular social networking site, and Twitter and more time on Instagram. Since Instagram users are much younger than other popular social media platforms, Instagram has also become a fun learning tool for learners, which is a fundamental contribution to students' learning processes. Instagram provides learners

opportunities to write in multiple modes. Multimodality is a way of writing being implied in many different modes. Posting a text with a picture or photo attached may create multimodality in the writing process since it enables two modes such as text and image. This way of multimodality in writing assists students to deliver the correct message and express the real meaning of the writing. On Instagram, students may write captions as text, and they may use these captions to describe pictures or photos which they also may upload on the same platform. This way, students may write texts on Instagram, and it is beneficial for especially visual learners. This type of writing provides students to avoid blank page syndrome. Since the integration of SNSs in the language learning environment provides opportunities for language learners to be able to share their stories both in and outside the classroom, helps them to be able to discover the power of their personal voice, it is a great tool in the educational context.

Many studies imply that language learners acquire the target language in novel ways by incorporating social media platforms into their learning processes and that instructors may include these new platforms in their teaching processes [6-7]. According to the research done, the potential benefits and prospects of SNSs in L2 learning and teaching environments are growing and developing. In a similar vein, Halvorsen [8] sought to show that SNSs improve language learners' motivation, identity development, critical thinking ability, autonomy, and teamwork in a study conducted in Japan.

Microblogs on Twitter were utilized in another study by Antenos-Conforti [9] to aid language acquisition by offering input from university students enrolled. The researcher routinely monitored students' tweets on Twitter and provided feedback based on the substance of their tweets as well as the accuracy of their language use. SNSs aided learners in reducing their «affective filter» while talking with people, improving their enthusiasm to use the target language in their communications, and developing their vocabulary and grammatical use in the target language, according to the results of the survey.

SNSs have several drawbacks for learners as a pedagogical tool in the language learning setting, in addition to their advantages in language learning. The research study by Prasojo, Habibi, Mukminin, Taridi, and Saudagar [10] aims to look into the benefits and drawbacks of using social networking tools into English writing classes. It can be difficult to get signals or connections for learners to connect since some internet providers may cause problems with signals and connections, and learners must have a good quality operator to be able to type and transmit their work from wherever they are.

According to Leis [11], using Twitter in a language classroom can be successful and even beneficial in fostering learning autonomy for students who have a high level of self-confidence in the target language. On the other hand, for those who are less confident and lack the drive to use Twitter as a language learning tool, it may induce anxiety. Sani and Bature [12] found fewer positive results of SNSs in language classrooms in their study, stressing the highly poor effect of unguided SNSs use in L2 learners' writing lessons in Nigeria. They discovered that students in the research study struggled with grammar, lexis, and punctuation marks in their writing.

Anderson [13] investigated the hurdles of SNSs in a language learning context, including adoption issues, cultural opposition, pedagogical variables, privacy concerns, and institutional constraints. Anderson also points out that social media platforms are not conducive to teaching because they may involve explicit debates on homogeneity and may lack the necessary resources. Farr and Murray [14] list a number of popular and free social media sites that could be utilized in language lessons to aid the learning process and encourage learners to participate more actively in the language learning environment.

Instagram has attracted a younger and more varied readership than the other social networking platforms in recent years. Young people began to spend less time on Facebook and Twitter and more time on Instagram, the other most popular social networking site. Instagram has become a fun learning tool for learners, which is a crucial addition to students' learning processes, because

Instagram users are significantly younger than other major social networking platforms.

Additionally, Instagram allows students to utilize hashtags to share their work with others for cooperation and to learn from one another through communicating socially [15]. Instagram is a social media site where learners spend hours accessing material [16], and it is also available on a variety of mobile devices, making it more appealing for usage as a pedagogical tool in language learning and teaching processes [17]. As a result, students' writing becomes more transparent and engaging because they can share postings and interact with one another on Instagram [Shafie & Mahadi, 2019].

The above-mentioned studies aimed to determine students' engagement and overall perceptions toward the use of social networking sites in certain activities in the language learning process. The results of these studies indicate that integrating SNSs into language learning activities had a positive effect on learners' engagement. Additionally, it was revealed that the application of social media played an increasing role in learners' motivation and willingness to language learning, and it was also concluded that the use of SNSs in the language learning and teaching environment assisted both language learners and instructors by providing them socially, collaborative and interactive ways of learning and teaching. In all, the body of the studies in the literature shows that the integration of SNSs helps learners become more encouraged and engaged in the process of language learning and Web 2.0 language learning activities have a positive impact on the level of student engagement in the language learning environments consisting of motivation, collaboration, and interaction.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research method design. As a data collection instrument semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used. The study was conducted in a total of 4 Instagram writing implementations throughout the 8-week writing course period in the academic year of 2020-2021 (Spring term) at the Foreign Languages Teaching department of Khoja

Akhmet Yasssawi International Kazakh-Turkish University. At the end of the study, 7 participants were interviewed. Participants were asked eight open-ended questions during the semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Questions for the face-to-face interviews were derived from a prior study on the impact of Facebook on EFL students' English writing performance [Kamnoetsin, T., 2014]. Thematic analyses were used to analyze the data.

Findings and Discussion

The following themes were revealed from the results of the findings:

Learning with SNSs. The usage of technology in the classroom today plays a significant part in the learning process. Because today's students can use a variety of electronic gadgets to aid their learning, incorporating technology into the teaching and learning environment should not be overlooked. In the interviews, participants were invited to share their thoughts on the usage of technology. Some of the extracts from the interviews are below:

"...Having the ability to use technology was one of the main benefits of using Instagram in our writing classes. I use technology frequently in my daily life, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We must live with them. So why not incorporate them into our classrooms as well? I enjoy writing in general, but with this technique, I began to appreciate it much more" (Participant 3).

"This was my first-time using Instagram to study a language, and I like it. Because I use Instagram daily. When I first started posting my articles on Instagram throughout this approach, I didn't feel obligated or compelled to do so. However, every time I am in a writing class where we practice the usual style of writing, I am bored and even unwilling to write" (Participant 6).

The semi-structured interviews revealed that all of the participants were enthusiastic about using the Instagram strategy in writing workshops. They all said that incorporating Instagram into their writing was good and

effective in the learning process. During the interviews, students discussed the significance and impact of including images or photos in their writing pieces. It was discovered that, when compared to the traditional way of writing, the feature of posting a picture or photo related to the students' writing tasks on Instagram, sharing their opinions, and being able to give feedback on each other's work, had an impact on stimulating their motivation in writing.

Joy. According to the interviewers' responses, all of the participants had a good time during the Instagram writing classes. The students' statements revealed that they all had a good time integrating Instagram into their writing lessons, despite the fact that they normally found writing classes uninteresting and were not always willing to participate. As said by one of the students:

"Integrating Instagram into the learning process really made it more enjoyable. I'm not a big fan of writing classes, but the Instagram writing assignments were a lot of fun. Even Instagram piqued my curiosity in learning how to write. The photographs we posted were also quite useful in expressing my thoughts in writing..." (Participant 1).

"... The best part of using Instagram into our writing workshops was making it more authentic, entertaining, and fun. I found it amusing and thought to myself, «Why not write like this instead of using a paper and a pen?» because I despise writing in both my original language and English" (Participant 2).

"...Instagram makes learning more enjoyable. I was no longer bored, and Instagram was attacking my desire to learn to write. The illustration is quite helpful in expressing my thoughts in writing" (Participant 4).

Proficiency. The respondents stated that, as a result of the Instagram strategy, they learned to write more effectively and correctly, resulting in greater grades on their writing examinations between mid-track and final writing exams.

"...I believe it aided my improvement in English writing because I now feel more secure in writing than

I did previously. When I write something in English, I am accustomed to thinking in English” (Participant 7).

“When I compare my mid-track writing score to the one I received on the final writing exam, I can clearly see the improvement. Apart from the usual in-class writings I had during this track, I believe Instagram writings helped me enhance my writing. I began to write better, and I became more inspired and excited to write” (Participant 5).

Practicality. During the interviews, the respondents were asked to express their thoughts on using the Instagram technique versus the traditional way of writing in terms of the differences and impacts that they provide to learners, and the responses revealed that the Instagram technique was more practical for their writing classes than the traditional way of writing. Some of the responses are:

“...It allowed me to save time by allowing me to do my writing assignment anywhere and at any time.” (Participant 1).

“...It was more efficient than writing with a pen. There is no need for paper, a pen, or an eraser. All I have are my fingers. It took me around thirty-five to forty minutes to write on Instagram instead of the thirty-five to forty minutes it took me to write on paper. This demonstrates the instrument’s utility as a writing tool for me” (Participant 3).

“...It was easy that we could utilize online dictionaries instead of a regular dictionary while writing on Instagram. Because we are not permitted to use dictionaries in our regular writing classes. However, I believe that not being able to utilize a dictionary while writing limits our ability to write well” (Participant 5).

All the interview participants expressed positive attitudes toward the usage of Instagram in writing classes and the benefits of including Instagram as a learning tool in the language learning process, based on their responses to the interview questions.

The findings of the current study are comparable to those of Handayani [2017],

who found that students had a highly good attitude toward using Instagram as a teaching writing activity in the classroom. Students who were interviewed believed that incorporating Instagram into their writing helped them improve their overall performance. They indicated that the Instagram strategy gave them opportunities to practice their writing skills, and that it was the useful pedagogical tool for them to improve and reinforce their writing abilities. These findings support those of Akhiar et al., 2017; Anggraeni, 2010; Rinda et al. 2018; Shazali et al. 2019, namely that the Instagram strategy motivated students in producing better writing.

Conclusion

This research study aimed to investigate whether the integration of Instagram assisted to promote student engagement in writing classes and how this integration helped to enhance the engagement of the students. The study found out the dimensions of student engagement performed in the writing classes with the use of Instagram.

Firstly, the use of Instagram in writing classes promoted student engagement to a great extent. It was found that it assisted learners to have more fun in writing classes, enhanced learners’ motivation for writing tasks, presented higher effectiveness in students’ writing success and provided practicality majorly. Besides, the writing activities on Instagram were perceived as positive and engaging by the participants since these activities were easy to complete anytime and anywhere.

Secondly, the learners in the study performed social engagement, cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and emotional engagement in the integration of Instagram in writing classes. According to the mean scores of the findings of the study, it indicated that the overall feedback received from the students was mostly positive. Additionally, the students mostly considered Instagram as a motivating and enjoyable mobile language learning tool in classroom learning.

Thirdly, according to the results of students’ academic writing achievement scores in their

final writing exams compared to their mid-term exams, it was concluded that the quality of the students' writings improved. Mistakes such as missing topic sentences and irrelevant sentences or insufficient supporting statements in a paragraph decreased bit by bit.

Additionally, the students found it easier to give feedback on their peer's writing outlines by using Instagram. It is easy to integrate the technology to provide and receive feedback because today's language learners have already adapted to it.

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Тіл дәрістерінде жазылым дағдысын қалыптастыруда Инстаграмды қолданудың тиімділігі

Аңдатпа. Тіл үйренудің маңызды компоненттерінің бірі - студенттердің белсенділігі. Тіл мұғалімдері үшін студенттерді сабаққа тарта білу күрделі, әрі жауапты міндет. Атап айтқанда, студенттердің жазылым дағдыларын жетілдіруді қамтамасыз ету - бұл көп жағдайда мұғалімдердің негізгі жауапкершілігі. Технология дәуірі көптеген жаңалықтар енгізді. Әлеуметтік желілер мен олардың танымалдығының артуы адамдардың шынайы қарым-қатынас жасауына мүмкіндіктер ашты. Бүтінгі технологиялық прогрестің арқасында тіл үйренушілерге тіл үйренуді жақсарту және қарым-қатынас деңгейін жоғарылату әдістерін табу оңайырақ. Әлеуметтік медиа платформалары да маңыздылығын ескере отырып, білім беру мақсатында пайдаланылды. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты оқушылардың жазу дағдыларын жақсарту үшін әлеуметтік медиа платформаларын қолданудың тиімділігін анықтау болды. Зерттеу жұмысында сапалы зерттеу әдісі қолданылады. Деректерді жинау құралы ретінде жартылай құрылымдық бетпе-бет сұхбаттар қолданылды. Ахмет Ясауи атындағы Халықаралық қазақ-түрік университетінің шет тілдерін оқыту факультетінде 2020-2021 оқу жылында (көктемгі семестрде) 8 апталық жазылым курсы кезеңінде Инстаграмда хат жазудың 4 түрлі тәсілі қолданылған тәжірибе жүргізілді. Зерттеу соңында барлық қатысушылардан сауалнама алынды. Сараптама нәтижелері жазылым сабақтарында инстаграмды қолданудың тиімді әсері бар екендігін көрсетті.

Түйін сөздер: Instagram, жазылым, тіл үйрену, технологиялар, әлеуметтік медиа, SNS (әлеуметтік желі қызметі/ сайт).

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Эффективность использования Instagram в формировании навыков письма на языковых занятиях

Аннотация. Одним из наиболее важных компонентов изучения языка является участие студентов. Для преподавателей языка возможность вовлекать студентов в занятия может быть сложной задачей или обязанностью. В частности, обеспечение участия студентов в письменных заданиях является проблемой

и, по большей части, основной обязанностью преподавателей. Эра технологий принесла много удобств. Рост популярности социальных сетей и сайтов социальных сетей открыл новые возможности для общения людей. Благодаря сегодняшнему технологическому прогрессу изучающим язык легче найти методы, позволяющие улучшить усвоение языка и повысить уровень вовлеченности. Платформы социальных сетей также использовались в образовательных целях, учитывая их важность. Целью этого исследования было определение эффективности использования платформ социальных сетей для улучшения навыков письма учащихся. В исследовании используется качественный метод исследования. В качестве инструмента сбора данных использовались полуструктурированные личные интервью. Исследование было проведено в 4 случаях реализации письма в Instagram в течение 8-недельного периода курса письма в 2020-2021 учебном году (весенний семестр) на факультете преподавания иностранных языков Международного казахско-турецкого университета имени Ходжи Ахмета Ясауи. По окончании исследования все участники были опрошены. Результаты исследования говорят о положительном отношении к использованию Instagram на уроках письма.

Ключевые слова: Instagram, письмо, изучение языков, технологии, социальные сети, SNS (социальная сеть/сайт).

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