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TO USE OR NOT TO USE: INSTAGRAM AS A FACILITATOR OF DEVELOPING ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS

Abstract. Developing writing skills may be challenging for the majority of students while learning English. They easily get bored of typical writing structures and often neglect such tasks. In order to engage students in the writing process and boost their interest, teachers always try to search for new modern teaching tools. One of the contemporary instruments to develop English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' writing skills might be using social media. The current article attempts to conduct an overview of the studies devoted to the investigation of Instagram as a tool to practice writing as well as to facilitate the development of writing skills.

Keywords: Instagram, writing skills, EFL students, development

Аңдатпа. Жазу дағдыларын дамыту студенттердің көпшілігі үшін ағылшын тілін үйрену кезінде қиын болуы мүмкін. Олар әдеттегі жазу құрылымдарынан оңай жалығады және мұндай тапсырмаларды жиі елемейді. Студенттерді жазу процесіне тарту және олардың қызығушылығын арттыру үшін мұғалімдер әрқашан жаңа заманауи оқыту құралдарын іздеуге тырысады. Ағылшын тілін шет тілі (EFL) ретінде үйренушілердің жазу дағдыларын дамытудың заманауи құралдарының бірі әлеуметтік медианы пайдалану болуы мүмкін. Көрсетілген мақала жазбаша машықтандыру құралы ретінде, сондай-ақ жазу дағдыларын дамытуға көмектесетін Instagram-ды қолдануға арналған зерттеулерге шолу жасауға тырысады.

Түйін сөздер: Instagram, жазу дағдылары, EFL оқушылары, дамыту

Аннотация. Развитие навыков письма может быть сложной задачей для большинства учащихся во время изучения английского языка. Им быстро надоедают типичные структуры письма, и они часто пренебрегают такими задачами. Чтобы вовлечь учащихся в процесс письма и повысить их интерес, преподаватели всегда стараются искать новые современные средства обучения. Одним из современных инструментов для развития

навыков письма изучающих английский язык как иностранный (EFL) может быть использование социальных сетей. В представленной статье предпринята попытка провести обзор исследований, посвященных изучению Instagram как инструмента для практики письма, а также для развития навыков письма.

Ключевые слова: Instagram, навыки письма, студенты EFL, развитие

Introduction

Improving writing skills may be challenging for the majority of students while learning English. They easily get bored of typical writing structures and often neglect such tasks. In order to engage students in the writing process and boost their interest, teachers always try to search for new modern teaching tools. One of these instruments can be writing texts via Instagram. The research shows that integrating various applications and internet platforms in teaching foreign languages is rather effective and demonstrates good results [1]. Nowadays the role of social media is significant for almost everyone. Based on Kemp's [2] report for 'We Are Social', people spend 50.1% of their time per day on social media apps. One of them is Instagram, which has more than 1 billion users all over the world [3]. The average time that people spend on this social network is 28 minutes that makes it the fourth most used app after Facebook, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger [3]. The development of social media has also influenced the methodology of teaching foreign languages. Teachers try to combine creative writing and social media together to enhance students' writing skills and motivation while learning a foreign language. Extensive research has already been conducted regarding the use of Instagram in developing writing skills of English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a second language learners all over the world [4] [5] [6]. The current article attempts to make an overview of some recent studies devoted to the investigation of Instagram as a tool to practice writing as well as to facilitate the development of writing skills. The authors describe the advantages and disadvantages of utilising Instagram, university students' perceptions and attitudes towards Instagram by presenting the findings of the works related to the development of writing skills via this platform.

Main part

In the twenty-first century, the rapidly evolving dynamics of technology require new and innovative ways of teaching. For example, Nugroho and Rahmawati [4], Handayani et. al. [5], and Saleh and Muhayyag [6] examined the influence of Instagram on students' writings and found a great difference between pre-test and post-test essays, which showed the effectiveness of using Instagram in practicing writing. Although, according to some students' opinion, they would enjoy receiving feedback, from their peers and teacher, offline not online. Moreover, all these researchers suggested involving other tools of Instagram, such as instastory and instapolling, to enhance students' creativity

and interest. Nugroho and Rahmawati [4] believe that the role of social media is significant, especially in learning English writing skills. They conducted the pre-experimental research with 36 Indonesian ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students, which included eight meetings. Pre-test and post-test, writing a descriptive essay, and survey were used by the researchers to achieve the study goal. Handayani et. al. [5] used the same instruments to collect data with 34 Indonesian university students. Six meetings including pre-test and post-test were organized, where they should have written opinion essays. Other researchers Saleh and Muhayyang [6] used the same mixed-method research with 25 students and a semi-structured interview with 10 of them, who showed the highest result on post-test.

Insani [7], Renaldi [8], and Bestari [9] conducted a pre-experimental method; however, as an instrument, the researchers used only pre-test and post-test results. Except for positive outcomes, similar to mentioned research works, the researchers highlighted some disadvantages of using Instagram as poor internet connection, passive students' engagement, and language barriers. Based on Insani [7] research with 25 students, 'the students mean score of post-test was (79.36) greater than the mean score of pre-test (66.84)'. Renaldi [8] concluded that 'the mean score of pre-test (47.3) is lower than the mean score of post-test (78.6)', which proved the effectiveness of Instagram in learning writing skills. According to Bestari [9], data were analyzed through a questionnaire and an interview among 11 students of the Mathematical Study Program, who took English classes. The same research was conducted by Nurdiansyah and Abdulrahman [10], Ragustio [11], Sallamah and Sabiq [12] via using a quasi-experimental method. Nurdiansyah and Abdulrahman [10] selected 370 students, Ragustio [11] - 76 students, and Sallamah and Sabiq [12] - 35 students to do their experiment. Based on the findings, there was a significant difference in writing performance between the control and experimental groups. The usage of Instagram motivated experimental groups' students to study better and raised their interest in the writing process. Moreover, researchers highlighted that students understand learning materials better and exchange their ideas freely in the class. This non-traditional way of writing provided an opportunity for peers to see each other's work and benefit from it or prevent the same mistakes. However, based on Nurdiansyah and Abdulrahman's [10] results, poor internet connection and size of application were discovered as weaknesses of using Instagram in teaching.

Akhiar et. al. [13] investigated university students' perceptions and attitudes about the usage of Instagram for improving writing skills in English class. The outcome of the experiment showed participants' high positive perceptions about using Instagram for writing class; however, their attitudes were on the average level. 101 undergraduate Malaysian students were supposed to write a descriptive essay and post it on the Instagram platform. Moreover, the questionnaires with twenty closed-ended statements and five open-ended

questions were done by the students. The researchers used a quantitative method to analyze the closed items. On the other hand, both quantitative methods with the help of mean scores and qualitative by analyzing the content were used to analyze the respondents' answers to the open-ended questions. There were two issues discovered by the researchers. Firstly, students did not want to share the posts with their followers due to some personal reasons. Therefore, Akhilar et. al. [13] suggested creating a new account, which may be accessible only to learners' group mates and the teacher. Secondly, students struggled with grammar mistakes, which demotivated them to write. Researchers recommended building a friendly atmosphere and peering community, where all of them can practice and assist each other. This develops students' English proficiency and self-confidence. Finally, they highlighted the importance of a writing activity period for future research papers, which should be up to 15 weeks.

However, despite an improvement in writing performance, the research results by Zarate and Cisterna [14], Suswati and Saleh [15], and Hidayah [16] showed negative perceptions of students' towards using social media in the learning process. According to Zarate and Cisterna [14], the 6th-grade students' responses in a bilingual school in Chile, they did not notice any changes and development from their previous writings. This interpreted that giving corrective feedback is essential for the students. Furthermore, they got easily distracted while using writing on Instagram and could switch to other pages. Suswati and Saleh [15] decided to implement social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram for developing students' writing and reading abilities. The participants were 80 undergraduate university students. The researchers used Research and Development method and the Likert Scale to analyze data and get the results. According to the findings, students were not satisfied with the general process because of the inappropriate learning materials that the teacher had chosen. They did not meet students' needs and as a result, demotivated them to learn reading and writing. Finally, in order to discover challenges of specific aspects of learning English that students mostly have, Hidayah [16] analyzed 36 tenth-grade students' descriptive essays on Instagram. According to data, 'the most dominant errors were grammar with 117 errors or 48,35 %, the second was punctuation 72 errors or 29,75%, the third was capitalization with 44 errors or 18,18 % and the last was spelling with 9 errors or 3,72 %'. The researcher gave some recommendations to improve general English language skills; however, he did not mention the role of Instagram and its impact on students' performance.

Besides writing descriptive essays and comparing control and experimental groups' results, Shafie and Mahadi [17], Kurdi [18], Pujiati et. al. [19], and Cruz [20] discovered the importance of tasks and their usage through Instagram. Shafie and Mahadi [17] believe that activities, which are done via Instagram, should be entertaining. They prepared various types of tasks for different levels. Results showed the improvement of students' writing skills and high engagement while selecting images and hashtags for their posts. Moreover, they

enjoyed reading their peers' texts and leaving some comments. Similarly, Kurdi [18] suggested conducting pre-activity, main activity, and post-activity during the class. These steps guide students and help them to complete the task successfully while using the social network. Moreover, Pujiati et. al. [19] conducted an experiment with 93 students via Instagram stories. They posted questions and participants had 24 hours to answer them. During the process, students showed high competitive skills, as they wanted to get more correct answers than their peers did. In general, the task was interesting for them and it motivated students in learning English. Finally, Cruz [20] collected data from five Instagram users through a questionnaire about the use of the target language on this platform. According to participants' responses, it was concluded that Instagram improved their language skills and communication skills.

Conclusion

To summarize, the article presented an overview of previous recent research considering both advantages and disadvantages of using Instagram for developing writing skills. According to researchers' experience and findings, the majority of writing instructors succeeded in applying it for their lessons and determined higher academic results than learners had before. Moreover, students shared positive feedback and enjoyed doing the tasks. Reviewing all researchers' studies and analyzing their outcomes, we consider Instagram as a beneficial instrument in improving students' writing skills. There is no perfect approach or teaching tool. Therefore, each educator should meet students' needs, select appropriate materials, think of all anticipated problems, and find possible ways to solve them. We need to modify this teaching instrument and adapt it individually to the specific class.

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