Instagram as a Digital Tool to Enhance Students' Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

Students often face difficulties in writing due to grammar, vocabulary, syntax, lack of practice, over-reliance on their first language and writing anxiety. The traditional method of teaching writing has no longer seen as adequate to fulfill the demand of the current generation who are considered as digital native. This demand forces educators to explore and integrate technology into their teaching approaches. Instagram, with it many fun features; create, filter, share live videos are relatively easy to use tool and can be accessible anytime and anywhere. Although many studies highlighted that Instagram can be an effective pedagogical tool for developing learners' vocabulary range and writing skills (Akhiar, Mydin & Adi Kasuma, 2017; Shafie, Yaacob & Singh, 2016), but Instagram is not commonly used in formal second language learning contexts. This paper promotes the use of Instagram as a digital writing tool to enhance students' writing skills. The researchers provide suggestions of activities which allow students to observe selected Instagram accounts by focusing on the topics/themes, the styles of writing and the purposes of their writing. The activities teach students how to write each post by using the formula on Instagram. Apart from that, students also learn to use captions and hashtags to intrigue their audience.

Keywords: Instagram, Digital Writing Tool, Writing Skills, Second Language Learning, Captions and Hashtags.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is always considered as one of the most difficult language skills to master, due to insufficient linguistics proficiency including syntax, grammar and vocabulary. According to Che Musa, Koo and Azman (2012), Malaysian students are scared of making grammatical mistakes which make them anxious and agitated. With the current developments in technologies such as web 2.0, social networking sites and many others, learning environment can be more enjoyable and interesting.

Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are the most popular social networking sites (SNS) used by university students as their mobile learning tools (Akhiar, Mydin & Adi Kasuma, 2017; Shafie, Yaacob & Singh, 2016). Salomon (2013) says Instagram attracts undergraduates than any other social networking sites (SNS). Although it was only started in 2010, it has gained very much popularity and is currently one of the most popular SNSs in the world with over 300 million active users (Instagram Press, 2015).

Instagram is a social media tool used to share pictures and videos for mobile phones. Instagram offers a platform for media visual which is appropriate and designed for visual learners while connecting communities of learners (Al-Ali, 2014). Unique hashtags enable learners from different classes to share and learn. Instagram makes learning become more personalised-contexts for learners. Passive learners who were reluctant to learn before can increase their L2

learning proficiency when they engage themselves in computer-mediated learning environments (Kroonenberg, 1995; Paz, 2017).

The popularity of social networking sites among language learners prompt many researchers to investigate the impact of social networking sites on language learning. According to Viberg & Grönlund (2012), mobile technology studies reveal that mobile technology assists second language acquisition. There are many studies investigated the effects of using Facebook and Twitter on language learning (Aydin, 2014; Buga, Căpeneaţă, Chirasnel, & Popa, 2014; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). However, there are not many studies on the impacts of Instagram on language learning (Akhiar *et al.*, 2017).

Handayani (2017) states that teenagers tend to spend hours accessing Instagram and the level of engagement of college students on the network appears to be higher (Solomon, 2013). Besides, Instagram is available in most mobile devices which are easy to access (Al-Ali, 2014). Thus, these make Instagram more tempting to be considered and utilised as a language learning tool in classrooms (Handayani, Cahyono & Widiati, 2018). Mansor and Abdul Rahim (2017) further claim that learners can improve their writing and reading skills apart from communication skills with the use of mobile learning tools. Learners are more relaxed and increase their self-confidence due to the informal nature of learning. Students can communicate their ideas and share ideas in learning communities (Lao & Gonzales, 2005).

Learners also improve their writing skills after they used Instagram because of their engagement (Bell, 2013; Solomona, 2013). Students enjoy writing and giving feedbacks on Instagram (Handayani et. al., 2018). Learners can learn a language by following Instagram accounts that can assist learners to learn. There are many Instagram accounts such as language diary challenge, language jam, Instagram language challenge. There are hashtags learners use to practise on Instagram like #correctionwelcome, #languagepractice.

Instagram has the potential to be a language learning tool in terms of language skills. In a study conducted by Al-Ali (2014), Instagram was used as a production tool for a holiday project with two writing activities. The findings revealed that students become more active learners as they developed high order thinking skills throughout their learning and were encouraged to be creative in completing their writing activities. When pictures or videos are uploaded and shared with the students followed by questions from the teachers, the students are encouraged to use their language skills. Most studies revealed that Instagram promotes a better understanding for students with high and low motivation (Listiani, 2016); It is also an effective tool for developing students' vocabulary range and grammatical accuracy (Kelly, 2015); and Instagram is an effective tool for students' interactions while discussing task-related content (Mansor and Rahim (2017).

Alghamdi (2018) further adds that Instagram can also be a platform for digital-storytelling which promotes creativity among its users. Digital storytelling allows participants to tell their own stories, use the language with no feeling of anxiety, build confidence and self-esteem.

Therefore, this paper aims at promoting Instagram as a digital writing tool to enhance students' writing skills. The activities suggested in the chapter focuses on students' writing skills. The activities allow students to observe selected Instagram accounts by focusing on their topics/themes, the styles of writing and the purposes of their writing. The activity also teaches students to write each post by using introduction, body (context) and conclusion. The students will learn to use captions and hashtags to intrigue their audience in their posts.

2. SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Level of Learners: Beginner
Group size: Pair work
Language skills: Writing
Objective: At the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

1. To improve students' paragraphing writing

Materials: Instagram accounts Pictures
Duration: 2 hours

Procedures

1.   The trainer shows students several Instagram accounts that can be used for improving their English language skills. The accounts listed below:

    1 task a day
    bbc learning english
    e teacher jonathan
    be confident in english
    English with nab
    idiom. land
    english_vocabulary

2.   The trainer asks learners to choose which Instagram accounts assist them with their writing skills.
3.   The trainer asks students to use the vocabulary used in the Instagram account of english_vocabulary that shows healthy living.
4.   The students are grouped in pairs.
5.   The pairs choose five words from english_vocabulary for five posts that reflect healthy living.
6.   They are to write one sentence for one word for one post in their Instagram accounts to show healthy living.
7.   The trainer comments on the students' words, sentences and posts.
8.   The trainer summarises the lesson.

Activity 2

Level of Learners: Intermediate
Group size: Pair work
Language skills: Writing
Objective: At the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

1. improve students' descriptive writing

Materials: Instagram accounts Pictures
Duration: 2 hours

Preparation

1. Students are asked to create their new Instagram accounts for the class/ use their existing accounts.
2. Students are asked to wear exercise gear and sports shoes as they are required to walk and run.

Procedures

1. The trainer divides students to work in pairs.
2. The trainer informs students they are going to participate in a   Treasure Hunt. The treasure hunt's theme is healthy living. The picture of the treasure, information and the directions of the location of the treasure are given in the trainer's Instagram. Students are given 20   minutes to search for the treasure. They have to take   pictures to document their journeys. The first group to locate the treasure has to take and upload the picture.
3. The trainer gives students his/her Instagram's account to study the clues. The trainer shows students a picture of the treasure and the directions to the treasure in the trainer's Instagram. The trainer can use Instagram story to give clues to students.
4. Students are given time to study the clues given on the trainer's Instagram account (Appendix B).
5. Students are reminded that the clues will be given as their journey progress through Instagram.
6. The trainer announces that the treasure hunt begins.
7. Students search for the treasure and document their journeys to find the treasure. They need to post pictures and write captions for each post in English.
8. They are allowed to communicate with other teams using comments
9. After the Treasure Hunt ends, students write comments on their friends' Instagram accounts.
10. Students reflect on what has been learnt and how to incorporate Instagram in
     English lessons.
11. The trainer summarises the lesson.

Activity 3

Level of Learners: Intermediate
Group size: Pair work
Language skills: Writing
Objectives: At the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

1. To improve students' paragraphing writing

Materials: Instagram accounts Pictures

Duration: 2 weeks

Preparation

1. Each student is asked to bring a picture that reflects good health which they can download from the Internet or take from magazines.
2. The trainer asks students to paste their pictures on an A4 paper.
3. Students are asked to bring their pictures to class.

Procedures

1. The trainer asks students to write a short description of 2-3 sentences for each picture.
2. The trainer collects the pictures and compiles them in a journal.
3. Students decide on the title of their journal.
4. The trainer compares the journal to Instagram.
5. The trainer teaches the formula of writing in an Instagram post (Appendix C).
6. The trainer introduces the usage of Instagramin English classrooms as a writing journal to promote good health and well-being in their lives.
7. The trainer informs students that they are going to work in pairs.
8. The trainer shows examples of Instagram accounts which reflect healthy lifestyles.
9. The trainer asks students to follow their friends' Instagram accounts.
10. The trainers ask the class to come up with a unique hashtag for the class project.
11. The trainer asks students to take upload a photo that reflects good health and well-being in their account and put the hashtag. They are also asked to write at least 5sentences for their posts.
12. Students are also asked to write comments for their friends' posts.
13. The trainer reminds the students that the project continues for two weeks and they need to post at least one picture or video per day. They also need to write at least 5sentences per post. They are required to leave comments on their friends' Instagram accounts.
14. Students reflect their paragraph writing and their journey of good health and well-being in their last post at the end of two weeks.
15. The trainer gives comments on grammar, content and communicative aspects of The students' posts.
16. The trainer summarises the lesson.

Activity 4

Level of Learners: Intermediate - Advance
Group size: Pair work
Language skills: Writing
Objective: At the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

1. improve students' narrative writing

Materials: Instagram accounts Pictures
Duration: 2 hours

Preparation

Students are asked to create their new Instagram accounts for the class.

Procedures

1. The students are introduced to short narrative writing on the importance of having healthy breakfast.
2. The students are informed that they are going to use Instagram to practise their short narrative writing.
3. Students are asked to work in pairs.
4. Students are asked to go to three Instagram accounts and they are asked to observe at least five posts for each account (Refer to Appendix D):

        The topic (What are they writing?)

        The style of writing (How are they writing?)

        The purpose of their writing (Why are they writing?)

5.   Each pair is given a theme for their given assignment.
6.   Each pair chooses an image for their theme.
7.   Each pair writes a paragraph of 5 sentences about the chosen theme and image.
8.   The pairs write four Instagram hashtags for their posts.
9.   The pairs are asked to tag the trainer.
10.   Each pair posts their photographs and paragraph in their Instagram accounts.
11.   The students need to read and review classmates' Instagram accounts. The students are asked to comment on their classmates' posts and comment on the picture, the posts and the hashtags chosen.
12.   Students are allowed to edit their posts.
13.   The trainer summarises the lesson.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Instagram helps to improve the students' writing skills (Al-Ali, 2014; Handayani *et al.*, 2017). Instagram enhances students' writing proficiency as the students are engaged in the writing activities as they observe Instagram accounts, select their desired images posting, write their posts and write comments on their friends' posts. They also improve their writingskills when they determine unique hashtags for their posts. Writing process becomes more transparent and meaningful to the students when they are engaged in the process of sharing and commenting on Instagram. The students will be able to connect the process of their writing and claim ownership to their writing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A   Using Instagram in Classroom

1.   You can download the Instagram applications on your device.
2.   You can open the Instagram account by using your Facebook account or create a new account.
3.   You can select your friends to follow and request your friends to follow if they have private accounts.
4.   Edit your profile to edit your name, user name and e-mail address. You can adjust Accounts setting.
5.   You can search and explore function to explore people, specific people and hashtags.
6.   You can use the Home tab to see the feeds of your photos and other people.
7.   When you want to share photos, you can take a photo from your camera and upload from your picture gallery.
8.   You can tag your friends if you want them to be notified if your account is private or if your friends have many followers.
9.   You can use video and switch on the video icon.
10.   You can use Instagram story click the setting to select people who you want to see your stories.
11.   You can edit your Instagram story.
12.   You can view analytics of the story.

Appendix B   Clues for Treasure Hunt

Treasure Hunt

Example 1
The trainer upload a photograph of a treasure and the trainer gives pictures and directions in his/her Instagram:

This is the treasure you are looking for.
Follow this arrow.
Turn to your right.
Ask Mr Perfect for a clue.

Mr Perfect says........
Once you are there, you will see a black box on your right.
Walk ten steps.
You will see a box of vegetable.
The treasure will be in the box of vegetables.

Example 2

1.   Upload an image of food that contains less than 120 calories
2.   Touch something that can prevent your cold.
3.   Share a healthy snack
4.   Do an activity that makes your body healthy
5.   Show an activity that makes you unhealthy
6.   Share an activity that you do at night that contributes to your health
7.   List five types of vegetables
8.   Show three processed food.
9.   Share a song that promotes healthy living
10.   List two food allergies

Appendix C   The formula of writing

Introduction	Attract your audience	Comments
Body (Context)	Who What When Where Why How	
Conclusion	Restate your thesis statement	
Intrigue your audience	Use caption & hashtag Use words that reflect smell, sound, taste and touch Use present tense and active voice	

Appendix D   Observation of Instagram accounts

	The topic (What are they writing?)	The style of writing (How are they writing?)	The purpose of their writing (Why they are writing?)
Account A			
Account B			
Account C			