



Developing EFL Learners' Creative Writing Skills Through Social Media

A. Omarova^(✉)

Suleyman Demirel University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan
aigerim.omarova@sdu.edu.kz

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. 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 present study is small-scale mixed-method research. It is aimed at testing the effectiveness of using Instagram in developing creative writing skills for EFL university students in Kazakhstan. Participants are 48 s-year students, who study the course Major Foreign Language B2 in the second semester of the academic year 2021–2022 at Anonymous University. An experiment with control and experimental groups have been conducted for ten weeks and the results of pre-test and post test essays have been analyzed using the quantitative method. According to the outcomes, the general experimental group's rate considerably has improved to 82.3% (41.1/50 points) compared to the control group's results of 72.5% (36.3/50 points). In addition, interview results establish that the majority of participants have a very satisfying experience with Instagram, admitting to finding using this social network extremely beneficial in developing creative writing and posting essays on Instagram.

Research Contribution: This research has implications for overcoming the problems and difficulties that English language learners confront when attending written courses. It intends to shed light on the impact of social media use on student motivation and attitudes toward language learning, improving linguistic abilities and writing excellence at the university level.

Keywords: creative writing · Instagram · EFL learners

1 Introduction

Improving writing skills may be challenging for the majority of students while learning English. They easily get bored with typical writing structures and often neglect such tasks. 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 (Miangah and Nezarat 2012). Nowadays

the role of social media is significant for almost everyone. Based on Kemp's (2020) 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 (McLachlan 2022). The average time that people spend on this social network is 28 minutes which makes it the fourth most used app after Facebook, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger (McLachlan 2022). The development of social media has also influenced the methodology of teaching foreign languages. Teachers try to combine creative writing and social media to enhance students' writing skills and motivation while learning a foreign language. First of all, the concept of creative writing should be thoroughly explained. Extensive research has already been conducted regarding the use of Instagram in developing creative writing skills for English as a foreign language (EFL), and English as a second language learners all over the world (Nugroho and Rahmawati 2020; Handayani et.al. 2018; Saleh and Muhayang 2021).

1.1 Research Aim

This research aims to explore the effectiveness of social media (Instagram) in developing EFL learners' creative writing skills.

1.2 Research Objectives

To achieve the aim of the research the following objectives were defined:

1. to find out students' improvement in academic skills after using IG.
2. to discover the students' perception of using IG to develop their writing skills

1.3 Research Questions

The problem of the study is crystallized in the following questions:

1. What is the effectiveness of using IG in developing the creative writing skills of EFL learners?
2. What are the students' perceptions of using IG to develop their creative writing skills?

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Developing writing skills is often challenging for the majority of EFL learners. Traditional teaching can be less beneficial as students get easily bored or cannot manage complicated grammar structures (Moses and Mohamad 2019). As a result, they become demotivated to improve their writing skills and stop practicing them.

1.5 Literature Review

The research conducted by Ragustio (2019), Nurdiansyah and Abdulrahman (2020), Sallamah and Sabiq (2020) using a quasi-experimental method, showed a significant difference in students' writing performance of both control and experimental groups. The researchers' aim was to examine whether using Instagram is useful for improving creative writing. Comparing the two data, the experimental group's result was higher than the control's one. Students, who used Instagram in their learning, were more active and passionate about the learning process. The researchers shared that students could develop their creative writing as their texts become better. After posting their descriptive essays, they could easily express opinions and brainstorm with their peers. Except for these advantages of this tool, some disadvantages were identified such as poor internet connection and the large size of the app.

2 Method

2.1 General Background

The present study is small-scale mixed-method research. It is aimed at testing the usefulness of social media (Instagram) to develop university students' creative writing in Kazakhstan. The experiment was conducted with 48 university students, control and experimental groups, which lasted for ten weeks. Experimental students were supposed to write descriptive essays consisting of 100–150 words on any preferable topics and post them on their Instagram pages. While control students completed the same task; however, without the use of a social media platform. The pre-test and post-test results of written texts were compared and the results were considered quantitative data. In the last week of the research, experimental students were involved in an online interview and shared their experiences which were defined as qualitative data.

2.2 Participants

The research is conducted among second-year TFL students at Anonymous University in Kazakhstan. The total number of participants is 48 students aged 18–20 who were divided into 2 groups. One class with 24 people (20 female and 4 male) was assigned to the experimental group and another one with 24 people (21 female and 3 male) was to the control group.

2.3 Instrumentation

To collect necessary data for giving precise and thorough responses to the research questions, the researcher used a mixed approach, which implies “the combination of at least one quantitative and at least one qualitative component in a single research” (Bergman, 2008, as cited in Guest and Fleming 2015).

2.4 Pre-test and Post-test

To test the effectiveness of Instagram as a teaching/learning tool the researcher conducted a true experiment over 10 weeks. The true experiment is considered to be the most precise type of experimental research. For the experiment to be true, three main requirements must be fulfilled (Ross et al. 2005). First, there must be an independent variable manipulated by the researcher, and this variable is assumed to affect a dependent variable that is being measured. In this research, the independent variable is Instagram in developing creative writing skills, while the dependent variables are students' progress and motivation in developing writing skills. Second, data must be gathered from at least two groups of participants. These groups are similar in every respect except the independent variable which is altered for the experimental group, whereas the control group is not exposed to any changes. Third, research participants are appointed to either the experimental or control group by using convenience sampling. All participants had ordinary English lessons with their instructor. However, while focusing on writing skills both the control and experimental groups wrote eight essay works. One of them is considered a pre-test activity and another one is a post-test activity. All students were given assessment criteria and they could select any preferable topics. After each essay work, they were able to receive the researcher's feedback via Moodle. Moreover, the experimental group had a chance to discuss their peers' essays using the comment section on Instagram. Finally, to get accurate results, except for the researcher, the other two EFL teachers analyzed the written texts.

2.5 Interview

To know students' background and personal experience on possible difficulties in writing and to identify their perceptions of developing creative writing skills through Instagram, the interview was conducted in the tenth week. The approximate amount of time required to complete the interview questions is fifteen/twenty minutes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data. The interview consists of five questions, such as

1. What are the challenges you face while developing writing skills?
2. Did you like using Instagram for educational purposes? Why (not)?
3. Did you discover any disadvantages of using Instagram during the experiment?
4. Did you see any improvement in your writing while and after the experiment?
5. What are your suggestions for improving creative writing through Instagram?

2.6 Procedures

The researcher conducted a ten-week experiment at Anonymous University where the practicum was held. In the first week, the researcher got acquainted with the students. Participants were assigned to experimental and control groups after all details of the experiment were carefully explained. In the second week, the researcher asked both groups' students to write a descriptive essay, which is considered a pre-test activity. They submitted their texts via Moodle and received feedback from the researcher after they were checked. In the following weeks, both groups had to write descriptive essays on

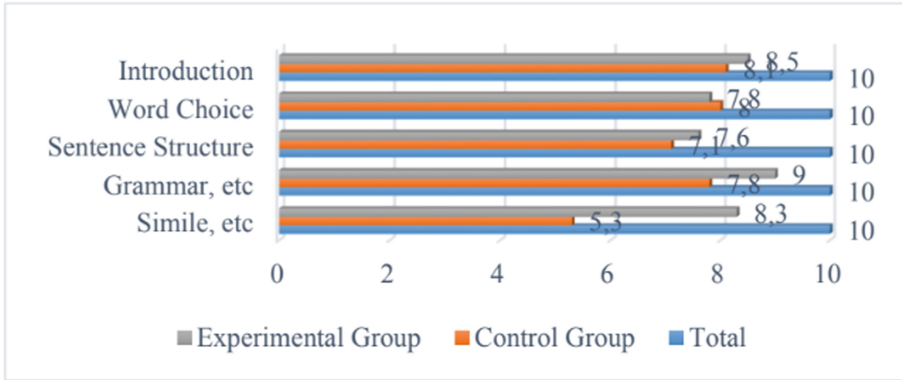


Fig. 1. Post-test results of the control and experimental students

any preferable topics and submit them via Moodle platform. Additionally, experimental group students were supposed to complete the writing task once a week, make a post on Instagram, and submit it with a screenshot. They received the researcher's feedback on a regular basis and discussed peers' posts in a comment section. In the ninth week, both group students wrote their last descriptive essay, which was considered a post-test. In the last tenth week, 10 students from the experimental group took an online interview with the researcher. They were expected to share their personal experience using Instagram in developing creative writing skills.

3 Findings and Discussion

Comparing pre-test and post-test essays of control and experimental groups, the results of the research totally support previous literature results of Ragustio (2019), Nurdiansyah and Abdulrahman (2020), Sallamah and Sabiq (2020). Pre-test results show almost similar levels of writing abilities of both group students, which is 32.5 points out of 50 points (65%) for the control class, and 32.6 points (65.3%) for the experimental class. Regarding research question one: "What is the effectiveness of using IG in developing the creative writing skills of EFL learners?" as it is shown in Fig. 1, post-test results represent a considerable increase in 4.8 points (9.8%) of experimental group students' creative writing, which equals 41.1 points out of 50 points (82.3%). While control group students demonstrated a result of 36.3 points, which equals 72.5%. Especially, the experiment class has increased the rate in two categories - Grammar, Spelling, Capitalization, and Punctuation by 1.4 points, from 7.6 points to 9 points, and Simile, Metaphor, and Personification by 4.3 points, from 4 points to 8.3 points. Speaking of students' topic preferences, the majority have focused on self-improvement such as time-managing, life learning, a healthy lifestyle, and worldwide problems such as global warming, recycling, and air pollution.

Similar to Akhilar et. al. (2017) and Bestari (2020), the interview outcomes on participants' perceptions of using Instagram for developing creative writing can be considered positive. Regarding research question two: "What are the students' perceptions of using

Table 1. The example of the participants' answers

Answers	Theme
S4. "...It is very convenient to write your thoughts. And I think it's very interesting that other people read my essays and share their thoughts..."	Expressing thoughts
S5. "...I was happy when I heard pleasant word about my essay from my follower who is from Kenya. So, I think our essays could express us on another perspective..."	Interaction
S3. "...To follow educational bloggers and read British mass media. To make posts was very interesting and motivated me a lot..."	Involvement Educational blogs
S8. "...I didn't like using Instagram for educational purposes..."	None

IG to develop their creative writing skills?" Based on Table 1, the majority of students have enjoyed writing creative posts on Instagram. Almost half of them have found this social media a great way for brainstorming and expressing their thoughts. Several respondents have mentioned a strong interaction between them and their group mates and followers, as they are active in commenting and discussing posts. According to some students, the non-traditional way of learning creative writing and the usage of educational blogs on Instagram has increased their interest in the experiment. Moreover, the majority have highlighted their improvement in creative writing skills, which can be seen in the successful usage of Simile, Metaphor, and Personification. Finally, the revision of the essay structure has been identified by one of the respondents. As a result, summarizing the participants' responses, it can be concluded that students enjoyed writing and uploading creative texts on the social platform. In general, involving social media in education, especially as a direct learning tool, can awaken learners' interest. This may be proven by the fact that experimental students' (8.3 points) academic performance was higher than for the control students' (5.3 points).

4 Conclusion

The usage of innovative approaches is crucial and needs to be developed and widely applied in modern education. Therefore, in the 21st century, the improvement in academic performance can be correlated to the media. The main goal of this research was to implement an Instagram social network in developing the creative writing skills of university students in Kazakhstan. The research results are based on quantitative and qualitative analysis, which contains pre-test and post-test essays and online interviews. Generally, the results indicated that using Instagram has a positive effect on students' writing engagement. Moreover, used techniques in the experimental class significantly influenced the increase of students' Grammar, Spelling, Capitalization, Punctuation, and creative writing skills, which can be seen in the results of Simile, Metaphor, and Personification. During the online interview, the experimental students shared that writing creative texts and posting them for the public, motivated them to modify the quality of their essays every week. However, the researcher faced some limitations which discouraged precise outcomes, such as time constraints, peers' passive involvement in giving

feedback to each other, lack of language proficiency of their audience on Instagram, word limitation on writing posts, and time and energy-consuming process of commenting on students' essays. All in all, they are significant parts of the study which is mainly focused on improving students' creative writing skills via Instagram. Therefore, these limitations directly affect not only the precision but also the nature of outcomes. They need to be taken into consideration for further practice and research work. Moreover, essay reviewers, the researcher, and other EFL experts should be competent and qualified to give detailed feedback on the content, structure, and other rubric components. Any other commenters on students' media accounts are welcome to discuss the topic and share their personal opinion but they are not considered experts or assessors.

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