

Instawrite: Instagram as a Platform of Improving ESL Vocabulary among Learners in International School

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i12/11762> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i12/11762

Published Date: 19 December 2021

Abstract

In the world of globalization, education in English is known to be the passport where the future belongs. The limitations of learning English should not be set just between books and classrooms. Using the existing application called Instagram, this approach was used for the 30 Year 9 ESL learners. Most learners under the ESL classrooms are from non-English speaking backgrounds. These learners possess a limited number of vocabularies in English and often repeat the same vocabulary. 30 Year 9 ESL learners from the ESL classroom would benefit from this learning approach in a creative manner and. Instawrite would allow learners to obtain new vocabularies and improve in their writing skills by using the application as a medium of writing. Activities like placing a caption or describing a picture would enhance the learners to learn new words. Through these, learners would be able to employ metacognitive theory and they would broaden their vocabulary by recalling the words used in the Instawrite activity. Educators would post a picture on Instagram and learners would be required to add a caption or provide a description based on the picture. The main idea is to get the learners to engage themselves in learning new words and increase the attention of learning English in an exciting manner. Learners would be able to learn at their own phase and it would benefit them in many ways. The platform of Instagram in the English lessons would provide great contributions to the society as parents could also benefit from this platform as they would see how the progress their children are doing. The findings showed the results of learners gaining the interest to write and enhancing their list of vocabularies. To summarize the above, Instawrite is a great platform for learners to enhance both their writing and vocabulary.

Keywords: Instagram, ESL Learners, Vocabulary, Social Media, Language Learning

Introduction

The methodology of teaching and learning English has changed over the past few years, (Steffanie, 2016). Educators and learners have both experienced major changes through the involvement of technology in the education system. Technology has impacted the way English as a Second Language learners (ESL) and educators adapt things through teaching and learning. The use of various applications through smartphones or the laptops has changed the perception of education to provide innovation in their teaching methodology. Educators are now opened to accept the social media platforms online to provide various strategies to their learners for betterment. In a world of constant changes, educators must innovate themselves and allow social media to be a part of the teaching and learning process. Noraïen (2017) mentioned that educators that chose the right platform of social media in their ESL classrooms can improve their learner's language proficiency.

Moreover, in Malaysia, many people from various generations are using social media to communicate with their family, friends, or even new people from all over the world. These social media platforms vary from Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and many more. However, the current generation prefers to use Instagram as its user-friendly and the amount of language proficiency needed is at the mediocre level. Instagram was launched in the year 2010 and since then has gained popularity and now it has become one of the most used social media among teenagers. As Instagram is a mobile application, it can be used and accessed anywhere. The process of using Instagram is taking pictures, posting captions, commenting on posts and video sharing. This encourages learners to participate and improve their communication skills. As a social media platform, Instagram is a tool of motivation to allow learners to improve their language proficiency skills.

Furthermore, the ESL learners are non-native speakers, and they belong to various backgrounds. In the international school context, pupils from different ethnicities would come together and learn. However, their language proficiency varies and some even struggle to understand the language. These pupils would often isolate themselves and avoid talking in public as they are afraid of their language proficiency. They obtain a lower or a repetitive vocabulary, therefore, they are demotivated to communicate among themselves. The researchers investigated the background of the pupils and concluded that the ESL learners need to sustain and improve their vocabularies. Using the existing social media platform, which is Instagram, educators are looking to improve the ESL learner's vocabulary and allow them to speak and write confidently in the nearest future. Moreover, the Year 9 ESL learners are given the priority for this study due to their performance ability as well as their Cambridge Checkpoint examinations that would be used to assess their writing skills. It is also hoped that both educators and learners would embrace technology and participate in the given activity for the betterment of the ESL teaching and learning classes.

Therefore, with the help of this study, both educators and learners would benefit from the use of Instagram in the ESL classroom. The Instagram would help to improve the learners' vocabularies and enhance their English skills. Learners would be able to learn at their own phase and it would benefit them in many ways. The platform of Instagram in the English lessons would provide great contributions to the society as parents could also benefit from this platform as they would see how the progress their children are doing.

Literature Review

Frita (2015) conducted a study on using Instagram as a platform of teaching and concluded that it helped the pupils in achieving improvement in the English language. Steckman & Andrews (2017) mentioned that social media has an overwhelming presence in the Philippines teaching and learning. Social media is a platform that can help learners to perform at their own phase (Noraine, 2016). Noraine (2016) also mentioned that social media platforms are an innovative method to conduct teaching and learning in schools. Both the educators and learners benefit from the usage of social media. Moreover, learners actively participated in the activity as they were motivated to perform better. The interactive nature of Instagram allows educators and learners to actively involve and bring improvement in the language proficiency of learners thus improving their vocabularies.

The Metacognitive Theory

The metacognitive theory is used in this research. This theory was proposed by John Flavell in the 1970's. The metacognitive theory explains the process of planning out work, tracking progress, and assessing own knowledge. The learners could use the process of thinking and apply that in the activity given. Flavell (1976) mentioned that there are three stages involved in the metacognitive theory. Stage one involves storage. In this process, learners would use repetitive words that are stored in their mind. Thus, in the beginning of social media writing activity, learners would apply the words that they are familiar with. Moving forward is the second stage, whereby learners would complete an activity and recall the words that were being used in a specific activity (Flavell, 1976) This would give learners space to look back at their work as well as the other pupils. It is also a process where learners would combine theirs and the other classmate's vocabulary. It is a process of combined learning through communication and social media. The final stage is systematic strategy. This process is about collective memory where learners would use their past and present knowledge for future purpose. It is a process of recalling all information such as different vocabularies and storing it to be used in the future. This is also known as active recall strategy where learners would do self-questioning and thinking aloud. Bell (2013) conducted a similar study and found that learners that receive feedback throughout an activity using Instagram have shown improvement in their vocabulary skills. The metacognitive skills allow the learners to persuade a goal effectively as the approach of giving and receiving feedback plays a role in the teaching and learning of ESL learners.

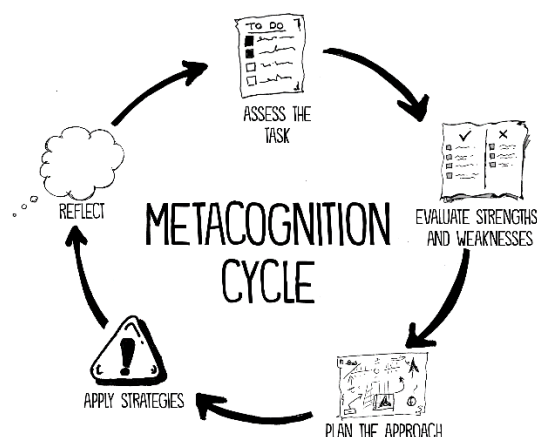


Figure 1 shows the metacognitive theory by John Flavell. Resources taken from <https://spencerauthor.com/metacognition/> by John Spencer, August 13, 2018.

Social Media in Education

In recent years, social media is known to be the companion of learners for various reasons (Anankulladetch, 2017). Although it was first used as a medium of communication, now it is widely used as a tool for learning English among ESL learners (Anankulladetch, 2017). The use of these applications helps learners to be more confident and improve their vocabularies skills. Voyce (2017) also mentioned that this innovation had brought changes to the education world and the learners' remark on learning through social media is a positive sign. Through Instagram, learners can communicate with different people and enhance their vocabularies skills by looking at captions posted by others on Instagram. This is a good exposure for ESL learners as they can learn while surfing the social media (Reinhardt, 2018).

Use of Instagram in ESL Teaching and Learning

Instagram is a social media platform that was created in the year of 2010 and since then it has gained massive popularity among various age groups. This social media has won the heart of many people and almost everyone uses this platform to take pictures, post videos, share comments and post captions on various pictures. Instagram can be used anywhere, and it is free of charge. Since it gained much popularity and Instagram mostly involves pictures and language, most educators have innovated their teaching methodology and applied Instagram approach in their daily learning. Lin et al (2016) mentioned that the knowledge found on social media can be shared throughout the globe and learning tends to be more fun and informative. Learners can share their ideas and broaden it when their friends pass a comment or even a feedback. This would give the learners more room of improvement. It goes by the saying of killing two birds with a stone, as learners would improve their vocabulary knowledge and communication skills. Independent learners would benefit from Instagram learning as well. They can learn different vocabularies at the space of their home and become motivated in using social media for education purposes. Most learners that possess limited vocabularies are afraid of looking into books or dictionaries for meaning or finding a new word. With the help of Instagram, they can explore new words by looking at the comment sections and at various pages or posts of activities. According to Khan and Iyer (2009), cited by Balakrishnan and Lay (2016), learners with limited vocabularies prefer to learn at their own pace as it provides them freedom and social media such as Instagram would draw their interest towards learning and improving. Moreover, the omnipresence of social media would allow them to have a practical schedule in learning. In addition, when a task is given, learners are given a certain time frame where they can access the activity and provide ideas. This would lead to expansion of ideas throughout discussion as learners are given the freedom to adapt the ideas on the posts. Therefore, Instagram is a site that would also enhance collaborative learning among weak and good learners as they are willing to share ideas and opinions. Based on the existing vocabularies, ESL learners can enhance their vocabularies skills when they are exposed to new words that are unfamiliar to them.

Impact of Instagram on ESL Learner's Language Skills

Pero Ali (2014) mentioned that Instagram is an amazing application that provides room of opportunities for learners to improve their skills. It is also mentioned that it is undeniably the best application for learning English language as the usage of this platform is easy and spontaneous. Learners can have fun and enjoy the process of educating themselves as this platform does provide a vast range of activities. It is merely important that learners enjoy

themselves in the learning process. This would provide them a sense of motivation and they would be enthusiastic to perform better (Salomon, 2013).

The fundamental of learning language through social media platforms is the acquisition of vocabulary. Despite having a lower number of vocabularies, learners are improving towards attaining advanced language skills (Mofareh, 2015). Kamnoetsin (2014) found that the social media platform aided learners in expanding their grammar, vocabulary, and writing. It helped them share information and acquire new knowledge. Instagram was therefore shown in the above study as an effective tool in improving learner's language skills such as writing and speaking skills. With the broad vocabulary, learners would be able to perform better in their English language skills. In relation to writing skills, learners would be able to read their fellow classmates' comments and feedback and obtain a few new words, which then can be used by learners in their daily communication skills. Learning new words can be fun and less stressful for ESL learners.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is a qualitative research study which involved 30-year 9 ESL learners from an international school in a state in Malaysia. An open ended and document observation was done to explore the learners' experience and perceptions on using Instawrite to improve their vocabulary.

Research Sample

In this study, purposive sampling is used to observe the intervention is effective to the learners. There were 30 ESL learners mainly from Year 9 students.

Research Instruments

The qualitative data for the research come from document observation and open ended. The document observation was utilised to check the captions written by the learners on the picture posted by the researcher. There were 5 open ended questions prepared by the researcher to look at the learner's perception on using Instawrite in ESL classroom in improving their vocabulary.

Research Procedure

During lessons, learners were exposed to the objective of Instawrite and the purpose of the activity. They were given 15 minutes to interact with the researchers on how Instawrite works and what are the pros and cons of this activity. Upon completion of discussion, learners received the link to the Instagram page where they can comment and posting their ideas. Researchers check with the learners if the link is received to assure all the learners would participate in the given task. Next, researchers post a picture on the Instagram picture about a task that must be completed by learners. The task involved in writing a caption for a picture posted by the researcher. Learners are given three days to complete the task. Upon completion, researchers check the comments of learners and provide them feedback to ensure two-way learning is taking place. Upon completion, researchers discuss the opinions in the following class. The learners talk about the new vocabulary learnt by them. The researcher also explains the meaning of certain vocabularies that learners are not familiarized with. At the end of the week, the researcher checks if the learners still remember the new

vocabulary learnt. The researcher also gets the learners to verbally make a sentence of a new vocabulary learnt to ensure they are aware of the entire process.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, student's motivation and perception were taken into consideration. Student's motivation was observed through a document observation where students have improvements in using different vocabularies for every task. However, their perceptions were measured through open-ended questions asked by the researcher.

Findings

According to Alfiandy (2019), Instagram can develop students' vocabulary and they feel extremely interested to learn vocabulary through Instagram. In conjunction to that, this paper aims to look at Instagram as a platform to improve ESL learner's vocabulary skills in an international school context. The activities being carried is shown in the figure below.



Figure 1 shows the instructions given by researchers to learners.

In the above figure, the researcher has provided a task for the ESL year 9 learners. Clear instructions are given by researchers to ensure when learners are completing the task independently, they are assured with what to do and how to complete the task. The above activity is for learners to write a description based on the given picture. This can also be called as caption writing activity. The researchers have also put a limitation of words to allow learners to learn at a moderate pace.

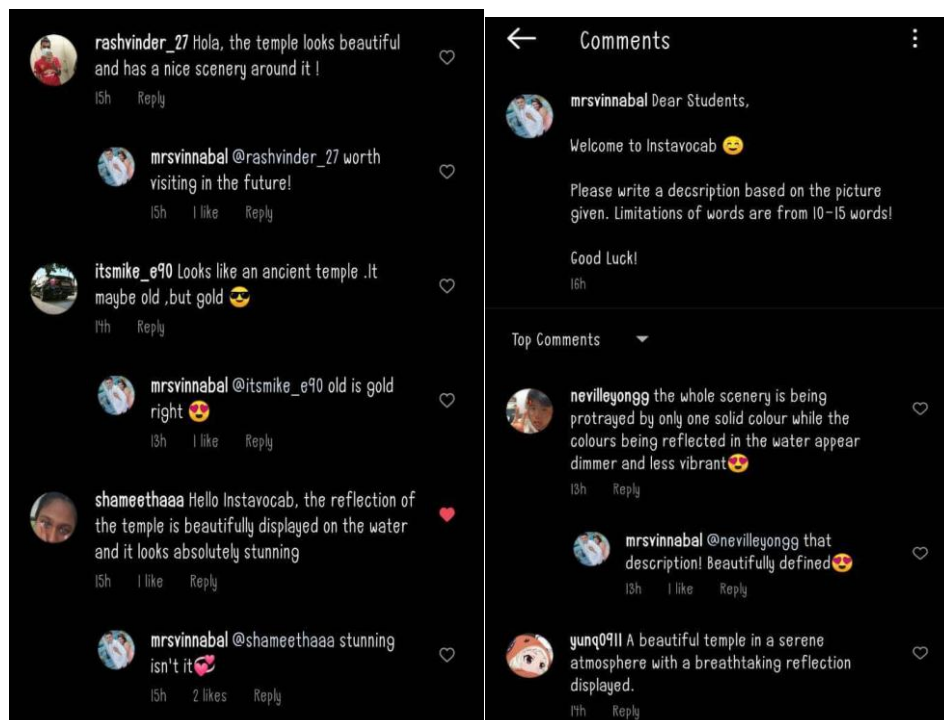


Figure 2 shows learner's responses. Figure 3 shows learner's responses.

Figure 2 and 3 shows the learners' response towards the activity. The ESL learners were anticipated and motivated to complete the activity as this approach of learning was new to them. Upon receiving feedback, researchers responded to their answers to motivate the learners and to provide positive feedback. All learners comply with the instructions well and have posted a caption below the word limitations.

The researcher also received feedback about the activity to understand what do the learners feel about Instawrite. This was also to ensure learners are happy with the innovation being carried out and motivated to apply this innovation in the following ESL classrooms. The figure below shows a learner's feedback on the following activity.

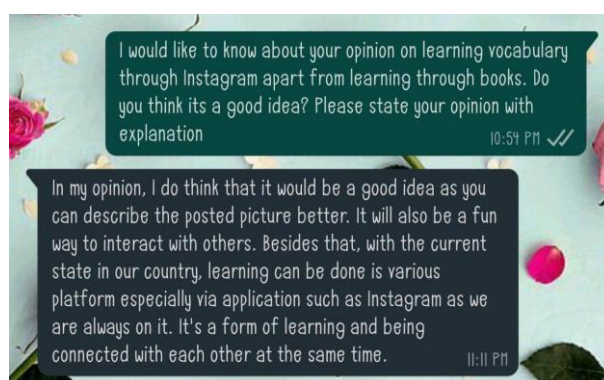


Figure 4 shows one of the learner's feedback.

The learner has mentioned that using Instagram is a good idea as learners can describe the picture given and add a caption based on their creativity. It is also said to be interactive as they could look at the whole classroom's ideas. The learner has also mentioned that this way of learning allows the learners to stay connected despite being at their very own space. The

researchers received positive feedback from the learners mentioning how Instagram is a fun method to be imposed in ESL teaching and learning.

Discussion

It is important for students to possess better vocabularies as it is important in all skills like writing, listening, reading, and speaking. In the study by Melor and Azmanuddin (2019) mentioned that usually Malaysian students would have roughly 11-12 years of English language education before they start their tertiary level which means they should at least own a satisfactory level of English by then. Based on the activity being carried out, learners felt anticipated and contributed their ideas to the activity. These ESL learners that only possess limited vocabulary and are often shy to communicate have shown an improvement which can be seen from figure 2 and 3. Learners were motivated to learn and communicate in the posts as well as adhering to all the rules for the given activity. According to Melor et al (2020), students performed better in picture- based methods than the word-based method in terms of vocabulary acquisition this is due to pictorial cues can assimilate vocabulary items into students' prior knowledge to produce a long-lasting mental image memory for prompt recovery of words, making well predictions as well as decoding words. Most learners completed the task within minutes of the task being posted on the Instagram page. Moreover, during the classroom discussion, learners have stated their satisfaction about improving vocabulary through Instagram. As the nation has been hit by the pandemic, learners felt that learning through Instagram kept them connected even though they are not allowed to attend face to face learning. According to Melor (2018), learning English through mobile devices and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has increased fame and trustworthiness as an instrument of learning language. Instagram is undoubtedly user friendly and all the year 9 ESL learners have an Instagram account, therefore the process of giving and receiving knowledge was easy and achievable. Lomicka & Lord (2016) mentioned that due to the popularity Instagram has gained it is easier to use it as a platform of delivering knowledge. Figure 4 also shows that learners do believe that Instagram is a fun and interactive platform to learn from. This can be proven in the study by Haida, Melor and Harwati (2018), students are more interested in learning once digital learning is tangled. Besides that, researchers also found that upon using Instagram learners have improved their vocabulary skills. Most learners obtain broader vocabulary and become more motivated after completing the activity for three weeks. Using a virtual learning environment has established its benefits in the aspect of students' participation, motivation, and enhancement in learning (Melor et al., 2020).

Limitations of the Present Study and Future Research

The present study deals with the use of Instagram as a platform of improving vocabulary among ESL learners in an international school context. Moreover, the number of learners involved in the study is only 30 ESL year 9 learners. Further study would be needed for learners with various years to review the effectiveness of Instagram in the ESL teaching and learning. Future researchers can investigate the impact of Instagram towards teaching and learning innovation for ESL learners from different years or various backgrounds.

Conclusion

This paper is aimed to use Instagram as a platform of improving vocabulary among ESL learners in international school. The results showed that the learners were motivated to use Instagram as a platform of communication to improve their vocabularies. All ESL year 9

learners participated in the given agenda and provided good feedback on the activity being carried out. This shows, educators should adapt social media into ESL learning and teaching to make it interesting and to motivate learners. The implications show that innovation in delivering and receiving knowledge plays a vast role in motivating learners to attain more knowledge and improve their language proficiency.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia under research grant No. MRUN-RAKAN RU-2019-003/4 and GG-2020-014.

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