IQRO JURNALI / 2023
GUVOHNOMA № 060680

E-ISSN : 2181-4341
https://wordlyknowledge.uz
IMPACT FACTOR(SJIF) : 3,934

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1, 2023 SPECIAL ISSUE

MECHANISMS FOR DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

The growing popularity and use of social media have influenced every facet of our lives. This research study aims to explore the potential of using social media to develop undergraduate students' English writing skills. Mixed method research design was used to carry out the research.

Keywords

Social media, e-learning, Facebook, ESL learners, writing skill.

INTRODUCTION

Technology has influenced almost all facets of our lives and education is not an exception. It has revolutionized the traditional methods of teaching by introducing modern and innovative methodologies. With continuing popularity and growth of social media, many educators are considering the potential of using social media for educational purposes as they are of the view that social media have the ability to encourage active learning and collaboration among students. However few educators are also concerned about the negative impact of social media on students' academic performance and discourage its utilization in education. Uzbek social media/Facebook users are growing rapidly but the use of social media for educational purposes is little explored in Uzbekistan. Despite the popularity and incorporation of social media as a tool for language teaching inside and outside classroom, research on role of social media in Uzbek context focused on investigating the trends of its use among students and there is a lack of empirical research investigating the impact of using social media on language learning. In this scenario, it is necessary to conduct empirical research to examine the impact of using Facebook on students' writing skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Developments in the field of internet and advent of networked technology in communication have given rise to use of social media all over the world. Safko considers social media as "user-generated content; blogs, audio, video, music, news, photos, tweets—working together with digital technology in [an] environment [where] everything is accessible from everywhere and everything is connected". Grahl classifies social media into six different categories i.e. social networks, bookmarking sites, social news, media sharing, micro blogging and blogging. Facebook, Twitter, Skype are some of the Social Networking Sites (SNSs) relying on social media technology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research studies reveal that technology-assisted instruction is more effective than traditional methods to help students in language learning. It is found that participation on social networks like Facebook and Twitter helped students to enhance their vocabulary and also improved their writing skills. However, Schmidt and Brown are of the view that the use of social media should be taken as

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combination of online and traditional classroom teaching. Warschauer conducted a study on use of laptops to improve writing skills. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant improvement in students' writing as use of laptops helped them to easily access the information to plan their writing, in drafting the papers and publishing their works after having immediate feedback and frequent revision.

Tiene found that written communication by using social media allows students to actively participate in discussions at a convenient time and also facilitates them to express themselves in a more clearer, planned and structured way. On the similar note Deng and Tavares also found that students' participation in discussions on the cyberspace can help to cultivate reflective ability and critical thinking skills in these students. A survey of 2,462 teachers conducted by Purcell, Buchanan and Friedrich revealed that use of social networking sites and texting on cell phones is helpful to improve students' writing as digital technologies are facilitating young students' personal expression and creativity, and encouraging them to write in different formats.

Abdulateef conducted a study about using Facebook to improve students writing skills and concluded that students were highly motivated to practice English writing informally because writing on the Facebook allowed the freedom of expression and convenience of time and the support from their peer comments and feedback. According to Bandura's social learning theory learners' peers and situations both affect individual's learning. Social learning theory "basically explains how the environmental and cognitive components collaborate to affect an individual learning and behavior pattern". The socio- cognitive approach to language teaching and learning emphasizes the meaningful interaction in authentic discourse situations. Social media provides a learning environment which encourages the constructivist learning by supplying authentic activities and substantial variety of tasks combining different formats such as text, graphics, audio, and video.

CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said that with the advancement in technology we need to upgrade our language classes by incorporating social media with traditional classroom practices in order to motivate and engage students in this growing digital world. The study revealed that students' easy access to Facebook makes it a potential tool to be used in language teaching to facilitate language learning. The students were able to improve their writing skills as they were motivated to write in an organized way in a stress free environment provided by Facebook. The use of Facebook increased the student teacher interaction and enabled the students to learn from their teachers and peers through collaborative learning experience. However Facebook should not be seen as a substitute or replacement of traditional classroom learning but as a tool to assist the language teaching in classroom.

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KNOWLEDGE