

Students' perspectives on social media-based learning of writing through Instagram

Renata Kenanga Rinda*, Adriadi Novawan, Alfi Hidayatu Miqawati

*Department of Language, Communication and Tourism,
Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia*

* *renata@polije.ac.id*

Abstract

Teaching writing in an EFL classroom is generally accepted as a composite task. Time-consuming process with various steps is required to train the students to be able to produce successful essays. Many methods and approaches including traditional and modern ways have been practiced by teachers. However, there has been little study devoted to confirm its effectiveness, particularly that of technology-enhanced pedagogy. To fill this gap, this paper presents the results of a case study which investigated the perspective of students who participated in a technology-based writing class about their experience when joining the writing course which mainly employed Instagram. Close ended questionnaire and focus group discussion were used to collect the data. Based on the data analysis, the students' perspectives indicate that: 1) they believed that their peers' feedback on Instagram help them to correct grammar, 2) particular posts on Instagram help them learn new vocabularies and find better ideas to construct writing, 2) Instagram enhanced spelling correction, 3) students believed that negative comments and over-corrected feedback on Instagram make them not only feel under pressure but also become motivated to write a better essay, 4) ads in Instagram distracted their focus when writing, and 5) bad internet connection impeded the process of writing on Instagram. Finally, to maximize its strengths and minimized its weaknesses, it is suggested that students' interaction, students' knowledge of technology, teacher's role, and accessible internet provided by the institution must be augmented.

Keywords: writing, social media-based learning, Instagram, students' perception

Introduction

It is commonly accepted that writing is a multifarious task to be completed. Supporting the statement, Ghaith (2002) described that a comprehensive practice of writing demands the writers to be able to discover thoughts and ideas in order to make their works perceptible and tangible to the readers. Therefore, writing process involving the stages like organizing, formulating, and developing ideas beyond the papers is primarily crucial. At the same time, apposite vocabulary, adequate grammar, accurate punctuation, correct spelling, and suitable capitalization are definitely required for excellent writing (Imeldi, 2001). Therefore, it can be said that writing is a long-term process that requires strategic steps and skills to transfer the writers' message into writing that will influence the readers' mind.

In line with the above complexity, teaching writing can be very challenging in terms of the students' characteristics. There are many obstacles should be faced considering on the uniqueness and heterogeneity of students' point of view. Besides, poor ability to transfer their ideas into words as they are incapable of selecting the appropriate words and the proper grammars is another difficulty that has to be handled carefully (Silva, 1993).

To cope with the above condition, many methods and approaches of teaching writing have been implemented by teachers (Kitchakarn, 2016). Some teachers teach writing in a traditional way. It involves the conventional tools such as paper and pen. Some others conduct their class by utilizing digital technology involving social media. It is understood as a set of internet-based applications that shape the ideological of Web 2.0 technologies and permit users to generate, share, and interchange information, ideas, images, and videos in virtual networking (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). WhatsApp, Telegram, Google Form, Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, and Instagram are the examples of it (Habibi, Mukminin, Riyanto, Prasajo, Sulistiyo, & Sofwan, 2018).

Responding to the teachers' ways of teaching writing, the students tend to choose the involvement of technology, in this case social media, to learn it. Being able to access numerous sources without leaving the classroom is one of the motives beyond their choice (Long, 2010). Using other words, based on the students' point of view, teaching writing with social media is more preferable than the traditional one. Nevertheless, whether their social media-based learning will be more effective in supports of their learning is something else. Therefore, this paper is written in order to provide evidence on the students' perspectives on the use of social media in learning writing and confirm the possibility of use it in writing class.

Upholding the former fact in connection to the use of social media to teach writing in EFL classroom, countless prior studies were conducted. The trend significantly shows that social media plays positive roles as it is stated in the following examples. A study on the use of social media conducted on student teachers' in University of Jambi, Indonesia, proved several advantages of utilizing it. Social media is highlighted as media of social interaction among students, supervisors, and lecturers (Habibi, et al., 2018). Additionally, students' learning motivation and experiences are believed to be improved. Another study accomplished in Malaysia stated that social media is an effective tool to enhance students' skill on writing, brainstorming of ideas before completing whilst writing in particular (Yunus & Salehi, 2012). Gaining the same findings, Alsamadani (2018) proved through his study in Saudi Arabia context that using social media to teach writing can dramatically increase students' skill on writing in terms of language mechanic, style, word choice, and content. According to the previous studies, it is strongly believed that the strengths of using social media to teach writing in EFL classroom are undeniable.

In this study, Instagram was selected under the consideration of its positive values. Akhlar, Mydin & Kasuma (2017) confirms that Instagram encourages community-centeredness and generates meaningful communication among the students. Correspondingly, it is ascertained as a social media that is able to improve students' writing skill and increase the students' confidence to publish their writing. The activity by using Instagram is not time-consuming to be implemented and it is relatively practical to be administered and monitored every time and everywhere. In addition, comment and feedback toward the writing project uploaded from fellows and teacher can be effortlessly completed in Instagram (Anggraeni, 2017).

Reserach Method

The study reported in this paper used a case study research by using close-ended questioner and focus group discussion (FGD) as its main data collecting methods. The purpose was to reveal and describe the students' perception on the strengths and challenges of writing on Instagram. The participants of the research were 70 students of a vocational higher education joining the academic writing course. During the course, they were actively engaged in three phases of writing on Instagram; pre-writing which includes brainstorming and making the outline, whilst-writing which includes developing their writing, and post-writing which covers switching comments and revising. The data from questionnaire and FGD were collected after the participants completed the course.

The instrument of questionnaire comprised of eight statements adapted from (Yunus & Salehi, 2012). The first up to the fourth statements were used to describe the students' perception on the process of writing via Instagram while the rests were the challenges of implementing certain social media platform, Instagram, to teach writing in EFL classroom. The detail statements in the questionnaire are presented as follows:

1. My friends' comments and feedback on Instagram helped me to correct my grammatical mistakes coded by ST1,
2. Instagram helps me to have correct spelling coded by ST2
3. Peer feedback on Instagram helps me to learn new vocabularies coded by ST3
4. Posts on Instagram helps me to find better ideas in pre-writing, construct better text in whilst-writing, and revise better in post-writing coded by ST4
5. My friends' comments and corrections toward my writing on Instagram make me under pressure coded by ST5
6. I always read and check my writing before uploading it in Instagram coded by ST6
7. Other features provided in Instagram such as ads distract my focus when writing coded by ST7
8. The Internet connection facility in my campus supports my writing process on Instagram coded by ST8

In completing the questionnaire, the participants were expected to choose the most appropriate option of 4-level Likert Scale labeled by: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Unlike other questionnaires that usually comprised of five choices, the neutral option was avoided in order to know the students' standpoint.

The data collected through questionnaire were triangulated with the data taken from focus group discussions. To get the detail information, the discussions were recorded and transcribed in the form of conversation. Deeper evidence related to the strengths and challenges of implementing Instagram in writing were noted and coded by FGD.

After the data collection, the next step done was data analysis. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and presented in percentage. While the data obtained from focus group discussion were analyzed qualitatively. Finally, the results were presented and arranged in eight sections referring to the number of questionnaire distributed.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this research are divided into eight sub-sections based on the students' statements to answer the questionnaire.

My friends' comments and correction on Instagram helped me to correct my grammatical mistakes (ST1)

In response to ST1, 87.14% students agreed with the statement. On the contrary, a small number of students represented by 8.57% of the population believed that their peers' feedbacks on Instagram did not help them to correct their grammatical mistake during writing. Slightly different from the previous percentage, 4.29% students strongly agreed with the statement and 0% student selected strongly disagree. Cumulatively, more than 91% of students agreed that their friends' comments and correction on Instagram helped them to have better grammar while less than 9% of them dissented. Supporting the data, evidence taken from focus group discussion is quoted as below.

FGD1

- T : For example, your grammar was incorrect and then were there any comments from your friends in the comment column?
- S12 : Yes, Mam. I make mistakes. My grammar is wrong and my friends gave comments on my grammar.
- T : Then?
- S12 : Then . . .
- T : After your friends gave comment on your incorrect grammar, what did you do next?
- S12 : Edit, Mam, edit.

Based on FGD1, students took advantage from their peers' feedback when they used Instagram to produce writing in term of grammar. According to Aichner & Jacob (2015) grammar is one of five tangible components of writing. It makes the requirement of good grammar for writing is prerequisite. Nevertheless, it was very often that students uploaded their writing containing incorrect grammar. Even so, they might not recognize nor identify any mistakes yet until their friends pointed out through the comments. Moreover, S12 admitted that his writing contained several incorrect grammars. Knowing this obstacle, students shared knowledge by switching and giving advice especially related to incorrect grammar found in column comment on Instagram. In line with the previous fact, Mubarak (2016) states that by implementing social media, in this case Instagram, problems such as what was faced in this research can be deliberately encountered. In this case, students' correction and suggestion to their friends facilitated by Instagram gives positive impacts. By implementing peer feedback on Instagram in writing classroom, students' incorrect grammar can be reviewed and enhanced lively.

Instagram helps me to have correct spelling (ST2)

Without doubt, 100% students came to an agreement with the statement of Instagram helps them to have correct spelling. It was distributed in two choices: 91.43% agree and 8.57% strongly agree. In contrast, the other two alternative answers provided in the questionnaire were not selected by the students. All of the students cumulatively agreed that Instagram

made them have correct spelling. Having the same conclusion, FGD2 supported the data as follows:

FGD2

- T : *Wah*, so you were happy to write things in IG.
Ss : Yes, yes, Mam.
T : Okay. *Kalian suka salah-salah nggak spelling nya kalau nulis?* (Have you misspelled words when writing?) Have you ever made mistake?
S7 : Spelling, *ya* (yes) Mam?
Ss : *Pernah, pernah.* (I have)
S1 : *Ya pernah*, Mam. Many. (Yes, I have, Ma'am)
T : Did Instagram help you to correct your spelling?
S1 : *Ya, Mam kalau ada ejaan yang salah, ada garis merah.* (Yes, Ma'am. If there are misspelled words, a red-marked line appears)

According to FGD2, during the process of writing, students admitted that they made mistakes frequently related to their spellings. Stated by S1, many errors in spelling were found in his writing when it was uploaded. Related to this case, Manan, Alias & Pandian (2012) asserts that the use of social media increases the usage of non-standardized English word when they interact to each others. Also, in his study, students tended to use slang words to communicate and avoided the formal forms.

Yunus & Salehi (2012) states that the use of social media can reduce the error spelling through spelling check feature. It is able to flag the unfitting words' form automatically and give suggestion of correct spelling that can be utilized by the students. Students then can simply revise it by clicking the suggested form. In this case, if the students have a good knowledge, and understand all features facilitated by Instagram, the above explained case can be practically minimized. Thus, the use of Instagram helps students to complete their task of writing as it was stated by S1 in FGD2 in his last sentence rather than give the negative impact.

Peer feedbacks on Instagram help me to learn new vocabularies (ST3)

Reacting to ST3, there was only a small number of students (7%) strongly disagreed on Instagram helps them to learn new vocabularies. Having bigger percentage with the previous one, 21.43% students disagreed with the statement. On the different path, 57.14% students agreed that Instagram made them learn new vocabularies and 14.28% of them strongly agreed. Considering on the previous percentage, the number of students that cumulatively agreed with the statement was undeniably higher than those who differ. In addition, validating the above data, FGD3 was cited as follows:

FGD3

- T : *Kalau vocab gimana ya? Bertambah nggak?* (Is your vocabulary expanding? Is your vocabulary enriched while producing text in IG?)
S10 : Yes. Yes, Mam.
T : How? Tell me
S10 : *Biasanya dikasih saran sama teman-teman untuk ngedit, kata-katanya kurang tepat gitu.* (My friends usually suggest me edit, the words are less appropriate)

Conferring to the above citation, teacher asked the students about their experiences in using Instagram related to vocabulary. S10 believed that his vocabulary repertoire is enhanced when using Instagram. He added that his work was firstly uploaded then it was followed by comments from his classmates. Suggestions to use better vocabulary and to choose more suitable words were directed to each other. According to Hadiyanti & Simona (2016), the activity of giving and accepting ideas may trigger them to be active learners by exposing their suggestions and comments and looking for meanings of new words they did not understand.

In addition, by implementing Instagram in writing, students were able to build social interaction among them. As stated by Yunus, Salehi, Amini, Shojaee & Fei (2016), social interaction built in social media is a positive phenomenon. It brings great benefits to improve students' aptitude to search, evaluate, and communicate meaningfully by using tools. That is why, in the observed classroom, after accepting comments from others related to vocabulary use, students searched the most suitable word for their writing, evaluated, edited, and re-uploaded. Based on the previous explanation, it was reasonable that the percentage of students who agreed with the statement was definitely high.

Posts on Instagram helps me to find better ideas in pre-writing, construct better text in whilst-writing, and revise better in post-writing (ST4)

In response to ST4, the option "agree" became the most dominant choice chosen by 65.71% students. On the second percentage, 20% students agreed with the statements. Next, less frequent than the preceding percentage, 14.29% students decided to disagree with the statement. Last, none of students chose alternative answer "strongly disagree" to respond the statement. Thus, the total number of students who cumulatively agreed with the statement is greater than those who disagreed. The additional evidence related to the benefits of using Instagram was found in FGD4:

FGD4

- T : Okay. What do you mean by easy? Is it helps you to write?
 S4 : (Silent)
 T : What I mean is, while you wrote story, narrative, recount, or others, kalau menggunakan IG itu lebih mudah ya. *Mudahnya kenapa?* (Why is using IG much easier?)
 S4 : *Ya easy Mam. Menemukan ide-ide itu lebih mudah.* (Finding ideas are much easier)
 T : Thanks. So, by using IG, it is easy to find new topic for writing, *ya?*
 Ss : Yes, yes.

The FGD4 is an essential evidence to fortify the positive value of Instagram in the process of writing. Student 4 declared that it was easier to discover ideas or topics while he was producing writing on Instagram. According to Yunus & Salehi (2012), it may be occurred because some students were inspired by others' ideas and opinions posted previously. Those can be used as references in writing and revising. In addition, students were able to open many sources including photos and videos shared on Instagram. As a result, in FGD4, students found better ideas and they were expected to construct and produce better writing.

In contrast, Yunus, Salehi, Amini, Shojaee & Fei (2016) argues that even though there is overabundant information provided in social media, its accuracy and quality are uncontrollable. Having the same opinion, Siddiqui & Singh (2016) adds that not all things posted in social media are considered as positive resources. Some posted information may contain inappropriate contents which lead the students to the erroneous side. Preventing this dilemma, students should be more selective to select sources provided by Instagram that gives countenance towards their writing. Therefore, the teacher's role as a classroom facilitator should be maximized in order to give direction and to monitor the students during their searches.

My friends' comments and corrections toward my writing on Instagram make me under pressure [ST5]

There were exactly half of the students who agreed with the statement on ST5. "Disagree" became the second alternative selected by 21.43% students. Having close percentage with the previous number, 17.14% students decided to strongly agree with the statement while the least percentage, 11% of the students, chose strongly disagree. In other words, students who agreed with the statement were more frequent. To upkeep the exceeding data, FGD5 was cited below:

FGD5

- T : What happened then? What happened with *kakak tingkat?* (senior)
S3 : *Ya mereka itu Mam suka komen.* (They often give comment)
T : It is good then. They gave advice for you?
S3 : *Tapi kebanyakan mencerca, Mam.* (But mostly negative comment)
T : *Mencerca yang gimana?* So many negative comments? Destructive one? (What do you mean by giving negative comment?)
S7 : Yes. *Malu, Mam.* (Embarrassing Mum)

Based on FGD5, it was stated that there was also students' undesirable experience in relation to the use of Instagram in teaching writing. There were destructive comments coming from the former students who took the same major as stated by S3. Because students follow each other on their Instagram account, most of the previous year students could see and gave negative comments to the students taking the writing class this recent semester. As a result, they felt shame and demotivated.

In order to avoid the above case, Underwood & Tregidgo (2006) explain that students tend to choose constructive comment rather than the destructive one. Coping with this, it is important for teacher to create good virtual environments and to communicate to them positively. Teacher is supposed to remind the students to learn how to respect other works by not only pointing out their lacks but also praising their positive side.

I never read and check my writing before uploading it in Instagram [ST6]

In response to ST6, there were only two options chosen by the students: strongly disagree and agree. Most of them, represented by 87%, selected strongly disagree. Much smaller than the previous percentage, only 12.85% students chose agree. The option labelled by disagrees and strongly agrees got the identical percentage, 0%. With that in mind, it can be said that the number of students who cumulatively disagreed were bigger. To verify the above results, discussion among teacher and students was mentioned in the following conversation:

FGD6

- T : *Baik, baik. Oh ya hampir lupa saya.* Almost forget. Before uploading your text in IG, *kalian baca dulu gak tulisan kalian?* Or do you directly upload it?
- S3 : Read, Mam
- S7 : Yes, read, read first.
- T : Okay.
- S2 : *Takut salah trus dibully,* Mam. (Afraid of making mistakes and others' will bully)
- T : Okay, thank you.

Based on FGD6, it was known that S3 felt unconfident uploading his writing before reading it. Stated by them, it was common to get negative comments from others that made them felt guilty as it was also stated by the students in the previous statement in the questionnaire (ST5). Having consulted to Taggart & Laughin (2017), while students receive too many negative comments and feedback directed to their works, disrespect and frustrated are the major feelings felt by them. Supporting this, S2 declared his experience in the last quoted sentence. He felt afraid of negative comments. Then, in order to prevent this, students tended to spend more time to re-read their work before uploading. In this way, the negative side of using Instagram can be diminished.

Other features provided in Instagram such as ads distract my focus [ST7]

It was known that more than a half of the students, represented by 57.14%, decided to choose "disagree". Significantly differ, 0% of them selected the first alternative, strongly disagree. Others were distributed into two options: 32.86% agree and 10% strongly agree with the statement. In short, 43% cumulatively agreed and 57% disagreed with the statement on ST7. In addition, FGD7 listed below was used to strengthen the previous data.

FGD7

- T : Oh ya, have you ever found ads in IG?
- Ss : (silent) . . .
- T : Have you ever found advertisements or product promotion?
- S8 : Yes.
- S9 : Often found, Mam.
- T : Does it make you losing your focus?
- S10 : Not really. *Tapi ya . . . kadang sih suka lihat-lihat. Seperti beauty blogger,* Mam? (Yes, sometimes)
- S3 : No, Mam. I just ignore it.

From FGD7, it was seen that the teacher tried to get deeper information about distracter found on Instagram. It revealed that some students were sometimes distracted by advertisements showed on Instagram, either in the form of photos and videos as it was stated by S10. According to Yunus & Salehi (2012) students chose to spend more attention on it rather than their main task to write. Yet, some others with bigger percentage felt dissimilar. Those students chose to ignore all the advertisements exhibited. In order to make students stay focused and complete their task, Yunus & Salehi (2012) stated that teachers play

significant role toward this case. Teachers should be able to prompt the students to manage their time well.

Internet connection facility in my campus supports my writing process on Instagram [ST8]

Unlike the other seven statements in the questionnaire, responding to ST8, all of the students stood on their acclamation voice to select “strongly disagree” with the percentage of 100%. Other alternatives labelled by strongly agree, agree, and disagree gained none elector. Having the same conclusion, the data stated in FGD8 were cited below.

FGD8

- T : Good. So, you can share knowledge and make discussion related to the use of correct vocabulary in IG. *Nah sekarang, pas buka*, to open IG in this campus, do you usually use internet provided by the campus?
- Ss : No. . .
- T : Why almost all of you say no?
- S11 : *Koneksinya*, Mam. (The connection, Mum)
- S2 : *Iya*, Mam.
- T : *Koneksinya bagaimana?* (How is the connection?)
- S9 : *Putus-putus*. (Unstable)
- S1 : *Lemot*. (Very slow Internet connection)

Stated in FGD8, the teacher and the students discussed the internet connection provided by campus. Referring to S11, S9, and S1, the connection provided was not good enough. Either the connection was very slow or not connected at all. Coping with the above problematic situation, the teacher asked students to use their own internet connection (using their own internet data). According to Yunus & Salehi (2012), this classroom policy might tentatively be able to solve the problem, but not for longer time. Seeing this condition, it is suggested that the internet connection provided by the campus should be more accessible and bolster up teaching writing practice.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussions, it can be concluded into two main points related to the students’ perception on the strengths and challenges of the implementation of Instagram in the teaching of writing within an EFL classroom.

Firstly, the students’ perception on the strengths of Instagram-enhanced writing class was definitely confirmed. Most students believed that the process of writing with different teaching strategies on Instagram helped them to correct grammar, reduce error spelling, learn new vocabularies, find better ideas to construct writing, and raise awareness to check final writing. The above benefits were achieved with the help of social interaction nurtured by the students, knowledge of technology of the students, and teacher’s role to administer and control the classroom activity.

Secondly, another finding mentioned that the negative comments and over-corrected correction made the students frustrated; nevertheless, it forced them to read and to check more on their writing to avoid being commented negatively. In addition, many ads could distract the students focus when writing on Instagram. However, not all students could easily

be distracted by the ads. The other important weakness was related to the accessibility to use excellent internet connection. In this study, the problem was temporarily solved by using the students' own internet data.

Finally, the use of Instagram in teaching writing in EFL classroom is strongly recommended yet there are challenges that have to be coped well and overcome. In order to maximize its strengths, students' interaction, students' knowledge of technology, teacher's role, and accessible internet provided by the institution must be augmented. The teaching of English in the higher education is characterised by its nature that closely relates to particular academic and professional settings. The teaching of English in the higher education is characterised by its nature that closely relates to particular academic and professional settings.

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