

Engaging Students in English Writing via Instagram: An Action Research on Digital Literacy in High School

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Abstrak – Penelitian ini menyelidiki penggunaan Instagram sebagai media untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis bahasa Inggris dan meningkatkan literasi digital di kalangan siswa sekolah menengah atas. Menggunakan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) selama tiga siklus, penelitian metode campuran ini melibatkan 34 siswa kelas 11 dari SMA Negeri 2 Kota Tanjungbalai. Penelitian ini difokuskan pada penilaian peningkatan keterampilan menulis seperti tata bahasa, kreativitas, dan kosakata melalui tugas-tugas berbasis Instagram. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam tulisan siswa, dengan skor rata-rata meningkat dari 60 pada Siklus 1 menjadi 80 pada Siklus 3. Instagram mendorong keterlibatan siswa, mendorong kreativitas, dan menyediakan platform kolaboratif untuk umpan balik dari rekan sejawat, membuat proses pembelajaran lebih relevan dan menyenangkan bagi siswa Generasi Z. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Instagram secara efektif mengintegrasikan instruksi menulis dengan literasi digital, menawarkan alternatif yang menarik untuk metode tradisional. Penelitian lebih lanjut direkomendasikan untuk mengeksplorasi penerapan media sosial dalam konteks pendidikan yang berbeda

Kata Kunci: Partisipasi Siswa, Penulisan Bahasa Inggris, Instagram, Literasi Digital

Abstract - This study investigates using Instagram to improve English writing skills and enhance digital literacy among high school students. Using Classroom Action Research (CAR) over three cycles, this mixed-methods study involved 34 11th-grade students from SMA Negeri 2 Kota Tanjungbalai. The research focused on assessing improvements in writing skills such as grammar, creativity, and vocabulary through Instagram-based tasks. Results indicated significant improvements in student writing, with average scores increasing from 60 in Cycle 1 to 80 in Cycle 3. Instagram fostered student engagement, encouraged creativity, and provided a collaborative platform for peer feedback, making the learning process more relevant and enjoyable for Generation Z students. The study concludes that Instagram effectively integrates writing instruction with digital literacy, offering an engaging alternative to traditional methods. Further research is recommended to explore the application of social media in different educational contexts.

Keywords: Engaging Students, English Writing, Instagram, Digital Literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital and global era, mastering English writing skills is crucial for students, as it not only facilitates communication but also opens doors to a wide range of academic and professional opportunities (Gonulal, 2019; Handayani et al., 2018; Çakıroğlu & Oztürk, 2017). Writing in English has become an essential skill, particularly with the increasing demand for proficiency in global interactions across diverse fields. However, traditional teaching methods often fail to fully engage students, especially those who are more accustomed to the fast-paced, technology-driven environment of the modern world (Renaldi, 2020; Binti Ibrahim & Bashar, 2018). Many high school students, particularly those from Generation Z, are tech-savvy and heavily influenced by digital platforms in their daily lives. Traditional classroom approaches, which may rely on textbooks and paper assignments, can sometimes seem disconnected from students' realities, making it challenging to capture their interest and encourage active participation. This disconnect highlights the need for innovative teaching methods that align with students' digital habits while fostering the development of essential academic skills, such as writing in English (Akhiar et al., 2017; Handayani et al., 2018; Tess, 2013).

Instagram, a platform highly popular among Generation Z, presents a unique opportunity for enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Its interactive features, such as photo sharing, captions, and comments, provide a creative and collaborative space for students to practice and improve their writing skills. By integrating Instagram into the classroom, students can actively participate in writing tasks, receive immediate feedback from



their peers, and develop their digital literacy and writing proficiency (Renaldi, 2020; Gonulal, 2019; Al-Ali, 2014). One of the key challenges students face in learning English writing is their difficulty expressing ideas clearly and creatively. Many students struggle with constructing well-formed sentences and organizing their thoughts cohesively in written English. This challenge is compounded by their limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with various sentence structures, hindering their communication ability (Gonulal, 2019; Handayani et al., 2018; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). As a result, students often find writing tasks daunting, leading to lower confidence and motivation to improve their writing skills.

Moreover, there is a noticeable gap in student participation and engagement regarding traditional writing tasks. Assignments such as essays or reports are frequently perceived as monotonous and disconnected from the students' everyday experiences, making it difficult to sustain their interest (Renaldi, 2020; Aragon et al., 2020). This lack of enthusiasm for conventional writing exercises often leads to poor engagement, with students completing tasks to meet requirements rather than actively seeking to improve their abilities. Consequently, their writing skills are often stunted, preventing them from reaching their full potential in English literacy (Akhiar et al., 2017; Soomro et al., 2021). Bridging this gap requires educators to adopt innovative approaches that align with students' digital habits and preferences. Teachers can foster a more engaging and interactive learning environment by integrating platforms such as Instagram, where students already spend a significant amount of time, into writing activities. This method promotes creativity and encourages students to take a more active role in their learning, leading to improved participation and a more meaningful writing experience (Handayani et al., 2018; Renaldi, 2020; Jovanovic et al., 2020).

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of using Instagram as a medium for improving high school students' English writing skills. Since many students already engage with Instagram daily, incorporating this platform into classroom activities may offer a more relatable and enjoyable way for students to practice their writing. By examining the improvements in writing proficiency, creativity, and sentence structure among students who utilize Instagram for their writing assignments, this study aims to determine how well social media can facilitate the development of essential English writing skills (Gonulal, 2019; Lim & Richardson, 2016). Additionally, the research seeks to assess how Instagram can enhance students' digital literacy and overall engagement in learning. Beyond improving their writing abilities, students can also benefit from using Instagram for digital communication and collaboration. The platform's interactive features, such as commenting and peer feedback, allow students to participate actively in discussions, fostering a sense of community and engagement. This study will explore whether Instagram improves student performance in writing, contributes to their digital literacy, and encourages more meaningful participation in academic tasks.

Previous research has highlighted the benefits of using Instagram as a learning tool in education. Handayani et al. (2018) conducted a study using Instagram to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) writing. They found that students improved their writing abilities, particularly in sentence structure and creativity. Instagram's visual and interactive elements helped students engage more deeply with writing tasks, offering a platform for peer feedback and collaborative learning. The study concluded that integrating social media into learning environments could foster students' language development and digital literacy (Handayani et al., 2018). Similarly, Renaldi (2020) explored using Instagram to improve students' ability and interest in writing descriptive paragraphs. The study revealed that students who used Instagram for writing tasks demonstrated higher engagement and produced more creative content than traditional methods. The combination of social media and education enhanced their writing skills and made the learning process more enjoyable and relevant to their daily digital habits (Renaldi, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology to investigate the use of Instagram in enhancing students' English writing skills. CAR was chosen because it systematically examines instructional techniques within the classroom, enabling educators to test new strategies and refine teaching methods based on real-time feedback (Gonulal, 2019; Lim & Richardson, 2016). The cyclical nature of CAR—comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection—provides a structured framework to assess how Instagram as a digital tool influences students' writing performance and engagement (Handayani et al., 2018; Çakiroğlu & Oztürk, 2017). A mixed-methods approach was used to gather qualitative and quantitative data to complement CAR. The qualitative component involved student reflections and teacher observations to capture the depth of student experiences, while the quantitative aspect included pre-and post-tests to measure improvements in writing proficiency (Renaldi, 2020; Binti Ibrahim & Bashar, 2018). This combination of methods comprehensively evaluated how Instagram impacts students' writing skills and digital literacy.

The study involved 34 students from the 11th grade of SMA Negeri 2 Kota Tanjungbalai, selected based on their interest in social media and digital literacy. These students were chosen because they were familiar with platforms like Instagram, which is widely prevalent among Generation Z. Their participation provided valuable insights into how digital natives adapt to using social media as a learning tool and how this medium can be leveraged to enhance their English writing skills in a classroom setting. The research was conducted over three cycles, each following the planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages, in line with the Classroom Action Research (CAR) model (Handayani et al., 2018; Gonulal, 2019). In the planning stage, specific writing tasks were designed, requiring students to post their written work on Instagram. These tasks aimed to improve students' writing skills by focusing on structure, grammar, and creativity. During the implementation stage, students uploaded their writings to Instagram, where they received and provided peer feedback through the platform's commenting feature (Renaldi, 2020). This interactive process allowed for real-time communication and fostered a collaborative learning environment. Observation occurred concurrently, where teachers monitored student engagement and the quality of the feedback provided. Finally, in the reflection stage, the research team evaluated the outcomes of each cycle to adjust for the subsequent cycle.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative instruments was employed to collect data. Classroom observation was used to monitor student engagement and participation during the Instagram-based writing activities (Akhlar et al., 2017). Student writing assessments focused on evaluating the structure, grammar, and creativity of their posts on Instagram. These assessments provided quantitative data on writing proficiency. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students to gather qualitative data on their experiences using Instagram as a learning tool (Handayani et al., 2018; Renaldi, 2020). The interviews aimed to capture student reflections on how Instagram influenced their motivation and engagement in writing tasks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Writing Skills Assessment Results

The data from the three research cycles show a steady improvement in students' writing skills. In Cycle 1, the average student score was 60, indicating that many students struggled with sentence structure, vocabulary, and grammar. By Cycle 2, students had become more accustomed to using Instagram for their writing tasks, and the average score increased to 70, reflecting improvements in creativity, vocabulary usage, and the quality of peer feedback. In Cycle 3, students mastered sentence structures and grammar, with the average score rising to 80. On average, student writing scores increased from 60 in the first cycle to 80 by the end of the third cycle, demonstrating a substantial development in overall writing abilities (Handayani et al., 2018).

Table 1: Improvement in Writing Scores Across Three Cycles

Cycle	Average Score	Creativity	Vocabulary	Grammar
Cycle 1	60	Low	Basic	Frequent Errors
Cycle 2	70	Moderate	Improved	Fewer Errors
Cycle 3	80	High	Advanced	Minimal Errors

The most notable progress was in students' creativity and ability to express ideas more clearly and effectively. With its emphasis on visual content, Instagram encouraged students to think more creatively about how they presented their ideas, leading to richer and more dynamic writing (Renaldi, 2020). Vocabulary usage also expanded as students became more comfortable experimenting with different words and expressions. In terms of grammar, students made significant strides, particularly in constructing more complex sentences and reducing common grammatical errors (Akhlar et al., 2017). These results suggest that the integration of Instagram into writing instruction can be an effective tool for enhancing students' creativity, vocabulary, and grammatical skills.

2. Student Feedback on Instagram

Feedback from students revealed that Instagram significantly boosted their motivation to write in English. Many students appreciated the familiar and interactive nature of the platform, which made the writing process feel less formal and more enjoyable. Unlike traditional writing tasks, which are often viewed as monotonous, Instagram allowed students to engage with their peers in a way that was both fun and educational (Handayani et al., 2018). This dynamic environment helped reduce the anxiety typically associated with writing assignments, allowing students to focus more on expressing their ideas creatively. Additionally, the act of posting their work on Instagram fostered a sense of real audience engagement. Knowing that their peers would view and comment on their writing encouraged students to take more excellent care with their posts, thereby improving the quality of

their writing. This external audience made the writing tasks feel more meaningful, as students wrote for an audience beyond just their teacher (Akhiar et al., 2017; Renaldi, 2020). The platform's visual elements also sparked creativity, with students using images to complement their written content, leading to more prosperous and engaging writing pieces.

In terms of student feedback throughout the three research cycles, the results were overwhelmingly positive. In **Cycle 1**, students reported feeling hesitant about posting their writing publicly. They were unfamiliar with using Instagram for formal writing, which resulted in shorter posts that often lacked grammar accuracy and proper sentence structure. Peer feedback was minimal and often lacked meaningful content. By **Cycle 2**, students became more comfortable with the process, and feedback from their peers was critical in boosting their confidence. Posts became more detailed, reflecting increased creativity, and grammar errors started to decrease. Students also reported that Instagram's interactive nature encouraged them to put more effort into their writing, knowing their peers would be reading and commenting on it. In **Cycle 3**, students demonstrated significant progress in writing skills and engagement. Creativity flourished as students combined visual and textual elements more effectively, and peer feedback became more constructive and frequent. This resulted in more prosperous, more dynamic writing pieces, with students paying closer attention to the quality of their posts.

Table 2. Student Progress and Feedback Across Three Cycles

Cycle	Average Writing Score	Student Comfort with Instagram	Creativity	Quality of Peer Feedback
Cycle 1	60	Low	Low	Minimal and lacking substance
Cycle 2	70	Moderate	Improved	More detailed and thoughtful
Cycle 3	80	High	Flourished	Frequent and constructive

Cycle 1: Students initially struggled with using Instagram as a formal writing platform. The posts were short, and students often neglected grammar and sentence structure. Peer feedback was minimal and lacked substance, as many students were not used to giving or receiving feedback in this format.

Cycle 2: There was a notable improvement in Cycle 2 as students began to take the feedback process more seriously. Posts became more detailed, creativity increased, and grammar errors decreased. Students were more comfortable using Instagram for writing tasks, and they started to view feedback from peers as an essential part of the learning process.

Cycle 3: Students demonstrated significant progress in both writing and engagement. Creativity flourished as students effectively combined visual and textual elements in their posts. Peer feedback became more constructive and frequent, helping students refine their writing skills and produce more prosperous, engaging content.

DISCUSSION

As a social media platform, Instagram offers a unique and dynamic environment that can enhance students' writing skills and overall engagement in the learning process. The platform's interactive nature allows students to actively participate in writing tasks by posting content, providing feedback, and engaging with their peers in real time. This immediate interaction fosters a collaborative learning atmosphere, where students feel motivated to improve their writing skills for academic purposes and to present themselves effectively to an external audience (Akhiar et al., 2017; Gonulal, 2019). Using Instagram in the classroom encourages creativity as students integrate visual elements into their writing, creating more prosperous, engaging content (Renaldi, 2020).

When comparing traditional methods of teaching writing, such as essays or reports, with social-media-based approaches, it becomes evident that Instagram offers several advantages. Traditional methods focus on formal structure and are often perceived as monotonous by students, leading to disengagement and a lack of motivation (Handayani et al., 2018). In contrast, Instagram's familiar interface, combined with its visual and interactive content emphasis, makes the writing process more enjoyable and relatable for students. Using Instagram, students can also receive immediate feedback from their peers, a feature typically absent in traditional approaches, where feedback is provided only by the teacher (Renaldi, 2020).

Furthermore, social-media-based approaches, such as using Instagram, align more closely with the digital literacy that students need in the 21st century. The platform provides opportunities for students to develop their writing skills and their ability to navigate and communicate effectively in a digital environment, which is essential for their future academic and professional success (Gonulal, 2019; Handayani et al., 2018). This comparison highlights the potential of social media as an innovative tool for enhancing writing instruction, offering a more engaging and interactive alternative to traditional methods.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Instagram effectively enhanced writing skills and digital literacy among high school students. The interactive nature of the platform allowed students to engage more deeply with writing tasks, improving sentence structure, grammar, creativity, and vocabulary. The ability to post their work publicly and receive real-time peer feedback contributed to a more meaningful and collaborative learning experience, which helped boost students' motivation and confidence in their writing abilities. Moreover, Instagram made learning more engaging and relevant to Generation Z students, who are already familiar with the platform in their everyday lives. By integrating social media into the classroom, educators were able to bridge the gap between students' digital habits and academic requirements, making the learning process both enjoyable and effective.

To fully harness social media's potential in education, teachers must have further support. Professional development and training programs can help educators understand how to integrate platforms like Instagram into their teaching strategies to enhance learning outcomes. This support will ensure that social media is used effectively and appropriately in educational settings. Additionally, future research should explore the use of social media in different educational contexts, such as other subject areas or age groups, to validate these findings. Investigating how various social media platforms can be leveraged to improve different skills will provide a broader understanding of digital tools' role in education. This research will help further refine strategies for integrating social media into the classroom.

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