Adapting Social Media to English Language Teaching: 'Dialogue on Instagram Story'

Ezgi Irem Bekci

Abstract *The social media use in language learning has become increasingly popular due to its potential to increase learners' motivation and engagement in English classroom activities (Ali et al., 2020). The present chapter focuses on the use of Instagram as a tool to enhance learners' vocabulary in a collaborative peer work environment by using social media for educational purposes. During the activity, students work in pairs to create avatars and write a small dialogue for their avatars. The pairs post their avatars and dialogues on Instagram story and use the direct message function to provide feedback. This activity aligns with key theoretical and methodological principles, such as MALL principles (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013), cognitive load theory (Mayer, 2005, cited in Fageeh, 2013), constructivism (Sherif, 2015), learner-centered teaching, collaborative learning (Ali et. al., 2020) and authenticity in language learning (Hwang, 2005). By using avatars and creating short dialogues on Instagram story, learners are encouraged to use the vocabulary of the session and engage in peer-feedback through the direct message function of Instagram. Additionally, learners can develop their formative assessment skills by providing feedback, which will make them active learners. Moreover, teachers can use this activity to evaluate students' use of vocabulary and provide feedback accordingly. Overall, this chapter contributes to the ongoing discussion of the potential of social media in language learning.*

Keywords *social media; Instagram; vocabulary learning; peer feedback; language learning*

1.   Introduction

The popularity of digital tools and social media platforms in daily life and their spread to educational settings changed traditional learning and teaching methods into new and contemporary learning approaches. These often have positive outcomes. Using social media in language learning has become popular because it has the potential to increase learners' motivation and engagement in English classroom activities (Ali et al., 2020). Based on the positive impact that social media have on effective learning (Arif, 2019) and learners' engagement, I designed a classroom activity that can be used in ESL and/or EFL

settings. The activity aims to contribute to the research on using Instagram in English language learning settings in a collaborative way to improve vocabulary acquisition. In the activity, pairs work collaboratively to create avatars on an online platform and write small dialogues for their avatars. Following this, they post their avatars and dialogues on Instagram and use the direct message function to provide feedback. Among the key theoretical and methodological principles that the activity aligns with are MALL principles (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013), cognitive load theory (Mayer, 2005, cited by Fageeh, 2013), constructivism (Sherif, 2015), learner-centered approach, collaborative learning (Ali et al., 2020) and authenticity (Hwang, 2005). Additionally, learners can develop their formative assessment skills by providing feedback, making them active learners. Moreover, teachers can use this activity to evaluate students' use of vocabulary and provide feedback accordingly.

2.   Literature Review

With the advancement of technology, educational techniques and methods stepped into a new era. Technological devices and the internet have become indispensable parts of the classroom. Internet channels and websites created for educational purposes help teachers to educate students in innovative ways. Among these, social media is the most popular tool nowadays. The potential of social media to improve English skills has been studied and discussed by many researchers and it has had mainly positive impacts so far. Arif (2019), for instance, states that social media provide opportunities to improve students' English language skills because the language used in social media is mostly English and it is used all over the world to communicate. Arif addresses an important point, i.e., that English is the most common language in social media channels, and therefore its potential to help people learn English naturally and unconsciously is very high. Additionally, teachers and students also use social media consciously to learn English. For instance, Li (2017) suggests in her article that students liked using social media for their English courses and even kept using the Facebook page after graduation to communicate and practice English. Moreover, Li's students reacted very positively while using social media in a constructive way in the classroom because they had an attachment to their phones as she implies (Li, 2017).

Using social media in the classroom has many advantages, especially for language learning. First of all, Ali et al. (2020) suggested in their article that one of the most important aspects of social media in the classroom is its easiness to use and adapt as it does not require practical concepts or proper training for learning methods. It made a huge change in the learning and teaching process as it helped students learn effectively and innovatively while engaging them more and more (Ali et al., 2020). This helps create a learned-centered teaching atmosphere in language learning settings. In most traditional learning and teaching settings, the teacher has occupied the dominant role with a focus on delivering lectures and explaining concepts (Ali et al., 2020). However, using mobile phones and social media can make learners active agents of their own learning processes. Additionally, in Arif's (2019) study, findings indicated that motivation, improvement, and effectiveness were among the main advantages of using social media in

learning environments. It is further suggested that the use of social media improves students' motivation through student-centered learning, it develops language skills such as reading, speaking, vocabulary, etc. and lastly, it makes learning more effective. Overall, using social media for educational purposes has had positive effects so far.

3.   Theoretical and Methodological Principles

Over the years, teaching and learning methods have changed and been developed along with technology. The latest phenomenon in English teaching is using social media. Li (2017) suggests that in English language teaching, the use of social media has evolved over the years (p. 148). Most importantly, it has positive impacts. Based on this, I designed an English learning activity for ESL and/or EFL classes. This activity aligns with the following theoretical and methodological principles.

(1) Cognitive load theory: The activity, firstly, aligns with cognitive load theory. The theory implies that the learning material should be designed to minimize the learners' cognitive load during the learning process (Mayer, 2005, as cited in Fageeh, 2013). This activity is designed to avoid overwhelming learners' working memory. The aim is to improve vocabulary acquisition in a way that learners can enjoy the process without feeling overwhelmed.

(2) Constructivism: The role of the teachers in constructivist theory is to act as facilitators who develop materials to help learners acquire language skills properly. Additionally, constructivism fosters learners to be in charge of their own learning (Sherif, 2015). In this activity, learners are able to participate and learn on their own. The role of the instructor is to provide information regarding media use, and how to complete the task. Apart from that, the learners are free to engage and perform as they wish.

(3) MALL principles: In terms of using technology in the activity, the activity benefits from the ten principles that serve as the initial basis for developing and implementing mobile language learning (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). For example, based on principle 8, which aims to let the language learning task fit the technology and environment and let technology and environment fit the task (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013), I have prepared a task that is relevant to the topic of the session and the social media that are used.

(4) Learner-centered approach: Most importantly, this activity is designed in a way that learners are the active agents of the learning process. The inclusion of technology in the classroom changes teacher-focused learning into learner-focused (Ali et al., 2020). In designing this activity, I followed this approach and considered the needs, preferences, and interests of learners.

(5) Authenticity: Once students are hooked on authentic materials, which trigger the process of natural language acquisition, effective EFL education can be realized (Hwang, 2005). In order to help students learn English through everyday and real-world language, teaching benefits from a topic that learners encounter every day. Additionally, in this activity, learners gain knowledge about social media use for education.

(6) Collaborative learning: Faggeh (2013) suggests in his article that collaboration among students is important for enhancing vocabulary. In the collaborative activity described below, learners participate, discuss, and interact with their peers.

4.   Activity Description and Discussion

The title of the activity is "Dialogue on Instagram Story". It is a follow-up activity after a vocabulary learning task and it aims to foster students' creativity in a foreign language and help learners use social media (Instagram) for educational purposes, such as language learning. Throughout the activity, students have the chance to repeat and learn the vocabulary of the session. It is a peer activity designed for high-school learners with A2-B1 language proficiency. Moreover, the number of students in this activity is planned to be 10 to 12. It is intended for face-to-face settings; however, it can be conducted in online and/or blended settings as well. To complete this activity, students need Instagram accounts which are created before the activity, as well as a mobile device to use Instagram. It is important that students create separate accounts from their private accounts for data protection reasons. Additionally, each student should follow the teacher's account as well as their class members in order to be able to see the content that is posted on Instagram (see chapter 12 by Schluer on social media feedback in this volume). Other than that, the students will benefit from the materials from the previous vocabulary activity (on Padlet) that was conducted in that same session.

Figure 1: Sample Features of the Avatar Maker
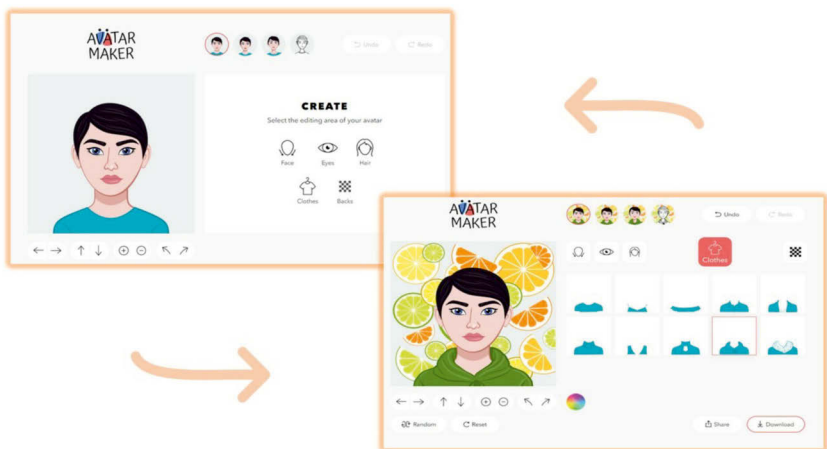
To complete the activity, students work in pairs. They create an avatar using an avatar-making website (https://avatarmaker.com/) (see Figure 1). Additionally, they will write a dialogue for their avatars using the vocabulary that they learned in the previous session. Avatars are better options than real pictures for this task in terms of

data protection. The avatar-making website offers different features to create avatars; however, students can also use the features of Instagram to create their avatars. Lastly, they will share their avatars and dialogues on Instagram. While posting their stories on Instagram, students should pay attention to the following aspects:

(1) For each sentence of the dialogue, there should be one separate story (see Figure 2).
(2) The stories should be posted in the order that the users can read the dialogue properly.
(3) They can use different features of the Instagram story and add stickers, emojis, background pictures, etc.

Figure 2: Use of Avatars on Instagram Stories

At the end of this activity, students will use the Instagram Direct Message function to provide peer feedback. Moreover, the teacher can evaluate the outcomes of the activity with a pre- and post-test. The teacher can also give feedback on learners' performance while using the vocabulary in different contexts and provide further feedback if necessary.

The possible challenges during the activity can be technical problems related to the internet connection, electricity, etc. These problems can be addressed easily by rescheduling the activity. Another challenge could be the learners losing their interest. In that case, the teacher should take the learners' interests and preferences into consideration and replace the activity with another one. The last challenge I want to state is that social media is full of distractive content and thus, learners' attention could be distracted while using Instagram. Li (2017) also suggests in her article that social media can be distractive, and teachers should therefore be careful. She is also conscious of not overusing different social media during a class, using it at most twice during a 3-hour class (Li, 2017). To prevent the problem, teachers should be very mindful about the time spent using social media and guide learners to use it effectively.

5.   Conclusion

The positive outcomes of using social media in English language learning settings are one of the latest phenomena in English teaching and they have been discussed by several researchers so far (Ali et al., 2020; Arif, 2019; Li, 2017). I designed a classroom activity in which learners can use social media to learn and practice English in and outside the classroom while engaging in a collaborative peer activity. The main goals of the activity have already been discussed above. However, the aim of this activity goes far beyond the already mentioned goals, reaching a deeper point. At the end of this activity, learners will be able to use social media with a wider perspective other than just entertainment. To conclude, I must mention that this activity has not been tested yet. The teachers who want to implement the activity in their own classrooms should take the following points into consideration. First, they should adapt the activity according to their learners' needs. The aim of the activity is to help enhance vocabulary; however, teachers can use such an activity to improve grammar, reading, speaking, etc. Secondly, they should inform learners about using social media properly when engaging in a classroom activity. They can prepare guidelines for the specific usage of social media beforehand. Lastly, they should pay attention to the time spent during the activity to prevent distractions that may stem from other social media contents.

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