

The Use of Instagram to Improve Paragraph Writing of Vocational Certificate Students

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this research were (1) to compare the improvement of the vocational certificate students' English paragraph writing abilities, and (2) to examine the perceptions of the vocational certificate students after using Instagram in a writing course. The samples, obtained through a purposive sampling technique, were 21 students studying at Chitralada Vocational School, Chitralada Technology Institute. The research instruments were: (1) a written test and (2) a questionnaire on students' perceptions towards the use of Instagram in paragraph writing. The statistics for data analysis were mean (\bar{x}), standard deviation (S.D.), and paired sample t-test.

The findings revealed that Instagram was an effective instructional tool for improving the vocational certificate students' paragraph writing abilities. Based on the results of data analysis, the post-intervention scores were higher than the pre-intervention scores (Pre-test: $\bar{x} = 5.16$, S.D. = 1.35, Post-test: $\bar{x} = 5.89$, S.D. = 0.79). The learning effectiveness was significant at the level of .05. The vocational certificate students' perceptions towards the use of Instagram in teaching and learning paragraph writing were at the level of agree ($\bar{x} = 4.29$, S.D. = 0.68).

Keywords: Instagram, English Paragraph Writing

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Background of the Study

English is a global language which can be used for communication with native-speakers and non-native-speakers, especially in the education section. Schools and universities worldwide strive to be internationalized, many are offering English-medium education for improving the quality of teaching and learning (Khader & Mohammad, 2010). In the context of Thailand, there have been moves towards bilingual education. English has been used as a medium for studies, instruction and leisure inside and outside of the classroom and to obtain knowledge worldwide through technology resources (Kirkpatrick, 2012).

With the high demand of English in business communication, having a good command of English is a prime requisite for gaining better employment or career advancement (Panyawong-Ngam, Tangthong & Anunvrapong, 2015). English language was also highlighted for enhancing educational outcomes and attainment. English language learners who have difficulties with their English abilities may not function effectively in a test content or in academic work (Sarathong, 2013). Another recent study in 2012 reported that the academic success of students is associated with students' language capability (Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012; Trakulkasemsuk, 2012). As a consequence of the need to communicate in English, language learners should express themselves in the target language effectively and in real-life situations that require communication.

In order to become a well-rounded communicator, language learners need to be proficient in four language skills. Writing appears the most problematic among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, according to a study assessing the students' capacity to master English as a communicative tool (Ahmadian,

Rahimi & Asefi, 2016; Cedar & Setiadi, 2016; Black & Nanni, 2016; Dueraman, 2015). Results from previous studies reported that writing requires proper and strategic use of language with mechanical accuracy and communicative capability (Dar & Khan, 2015; Mahboob, 2014).

The same situation is true for Thai EFL learners. Much research revealed that a few main factors contributing to Thai students' low English proficiency involved teachers' incompetence, inappropriate teaching methods, students' background, motivation and learning styles, and other supporting factors such as teaching media, class sizes, and time allocation (Ahmad et al., 2013). These are challenges that confront the teachers for effective training and innovative teaching methods to improve students' language proficiency and attitudes toward language learning. Apart from teaching practice, several previous studies showed that the failure of English teaching and learning process was caused by students' low interest, a lesser amount of practice, low grammar mastery, and limited vocabulary (Haider, 2012).

Since vocational certificate students have to master the English writing skills and produce written texts, they must concentrate on many characteristics of language, such as vocabulary, grammar structure, punctuations, and other writing mechanics. Several studies have shown similar results. Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016), for example, stated that the main problems of EFL learners' writing were inadequate linguistic aptitude (comprising vocabulary, grammar, and syntax), writing anxiety, dependence on the first language (L1) and poor structure organization. Nuan (1989) also pointed out that writing is a difficult activity which requires learners to employ cognitive processes to overcome various factors, including

academic background, personal interest, psychological and linguistic factors.

To help overcome these difficulties for language learners, information and communication technology (ICT) could be utilized as a supplementary tool in language teaching and learning writing. A study conducted by Al-Munawwarah (2014) revealed that the use of ICT in English language instruction could help teachers to design and implement interesting and enjoyable learning activities.

Instagram is considered a popular online social networking tool among young people and has been integrated in many present-day educational contexts and implemented for language learning purposes. A study by Salomon (2013) indicated that when using Instagram, it appeared that the level of engagement of college students on the network was higher. Moreover, Instagram was available in most hand held devices which were easy to access, with high-resolution screens, fast internet connectivity, and user-friendliness (Kanthawongs, Jiwajaroenchai & Boripun, 2011, Kajornboon, 2013). Moreover, Al-Ali

(2014) and Wiktor’s (2012) studies revealed that Instagram had the potential to be a language learning tool in improving writing skills. The students uploaded photos or videos and shared among classmates, followed by questions from the teachers. The students were also encouraged to give comments or feedback on pictures or videos they chose on Instagram.

Therefore, the study examines how the use of Instagram could improve the writing performance of vocational certificate students, which have not been conducted before. The results would provide guidelines for better teacher practice and could be beneficial to both vocational certificate students and teachers.

Research Objectives

The purposes of this research were to study whether Instagram would improve paragraph writing of vocational certificate students in a private vocational school or not, and to examine the perceptions of the vocational students after using Instagram in a writing course.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shows the relationship of variables in this study. It is believed that integrating Instagram in teaching and learning would not only improve student’s paragraph writing in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics but also would help bring positive perceptions toward learning English writing.

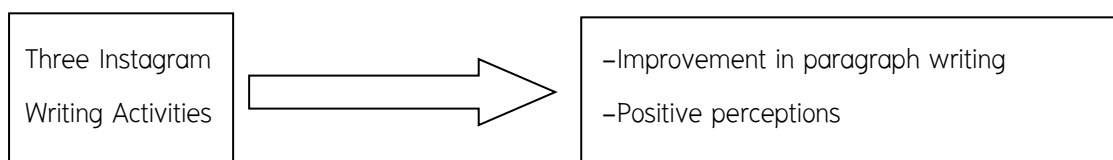


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

This research employed a quasi-experiment, which was conducted using Instagram as a teaching tool in paragraph writing and a questionnaire was administered after the intervention to determine students' perceptions regarding the use of Instagram in teaching English writing.

The samples, obtained through purposive sampling technique, were 21 vocational certificate students aged between 16 and 18. They were second-year students majoring in Business Computer and were in lower intermediate English level enrolled in the Daily Writing course in the second semester in the academic year 2018. The participants were selected to participate in the study based on three factors: smartphone ownership, Instagram account, and being active Instagram users.

The instruments used for data collection were: a written test and a questionnaire. The written test was administered to measure the students' writing ability. The questionnaire was employed to determine the students' perceptions regarding the use of Instagram in teaching English writing.

In scoring the paragraph writing, there were two raters involved. The first rater was the researcher and the second rater was a native speaker. Each rater assessed the students' written tests by using a scoring rubric of descriptive text adapted from Brown (2007). The data from the written test were analyzed by paired sample t-test.

The questionnaire was adapted from Handayani, Cahyono and Widiati (2018); and to avoid misunderstanding of the questions it was translated into Thai by a competent Thai teacher who was competent in English. The questionnaire was approved for content validity by three experts who had at least

10 years of teaching experience. Each expert was asked to evaluate whether the items measured the intended objectives in four-option Likert Scale with values, varying from "very suitable" (4), "suitable" (3), "not suitable" (2), to "not at all suitable" (1). Results revealed that almost all items were at a very suitable level.

In addition to this, a pilot test was conducted with 20 students majoring Marketing in the second year of vocational certificate level who were not participating in the experiment to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. The result showed that the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha value obtained was 0.96 which was higher than 0.70 indicating the reliability of the instrument.

The final questionnaire had 14 items which were divided into three parts: writing competence (Items 1-5), interest (Items 6-9), and process of learning (Items 10-14). The responses to the items were in five-option Likert Scale with values, varying from "strongly agree" (5), "agree" (4), "neutral" (3), "disagree" (2), to "strongly disagree" (1). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, namely mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (S.D.).

Findings and Conclusion

The results of this study are presented in three parts: Effect of using Instagram on students' writing ability; students' improvement in their writing ability after being taught by using Instagram; and students' perceptions on the use of Instagram.

1. Effect of Using Instagram on Students' Writing Ability

All participants completed the written test. The means of two sets of scores were compared. The descriptive data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Test Scores for WrittenTest

	N	MEAN	S.D.	t	Sig.
Pre-test	21	5.16	1.35	-2.751	.012
Post-test	21	5.89	0.79		

The above table showed that the mean score of pretest was 5.16, while the mean score of posttest was 5.89. In order to know whether the two means differed significantly or not, a paired sample t-test was applied. The result of the data analysis revealed that the observed significant level was .012 which is lower than .05 ($.00 \leq .05$). It means that there was a significant difference between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores. From the result above, it can be concluded that the students performed better in mastering their paragraph writing after using Instagram.

2. Students Who Improved Better Ability in Writing

The paired sample correlation was employed to verify the correlation between students' pretest and posttest scores.

Table 2 Correlation Testing Using Paired Sample Correlation

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Pretest & Posttest	21	.452	.040

The table showed the positive correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores. The observed significant level was .04 which was lower than .05. This meant that a student who had a higher score in the pre-test

also had a higher score in the post-test. Similarly, a student who had a low score in the pre-test still had a lower score in the post-test.

3. Students' Perceptions

The participants responded to 14 questions to determine their perceptions on the use of Instagram in teaching and learning paragraph writing in three areas: writing competence, interest, and learning process. Results of the analysis showed that the participants agreed ($\bar{x} = 4.29$, S.D. = 0.68) to all of the criteria, as the average of the students' responses fell around the value 4, which meant that students were quite satisfied with using Instagram in a writing course. The results are presented as follows.

3.1 Perceptions on Writing Competence

The results of the students' responses are presented in Figure 1.

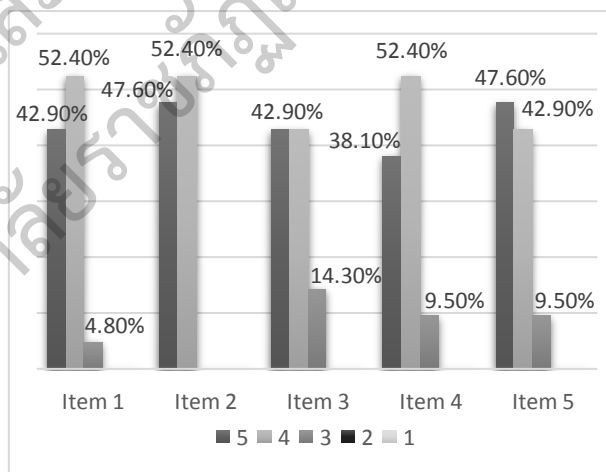


Figure 1 Participants' Agreement to Writing Competence

Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each of the items using a 5-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

In terms of writing competence, 52.4% agreed that they could convey ideas based on the given topic properly (item 1), they could organize ideas based on the given topic in their paragraph writing (item 2), and

they could apply correct grammar in expressing ideas suitably based on the given topic (item 4). The participants strongly agreed and agreed (42.9%) that they could use the appropriate vocabulary to write about the given topics (item 3). Lastly, 47.6% strongly agreed that they could use appropriate spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in expressing ideas based on the given topic correctly (item 5).

3.2 Perceptions on the Interest

Four other statements of the questionnaire were about students' interest in Instagram. The results of the students' responses are displayed in Figure 2.

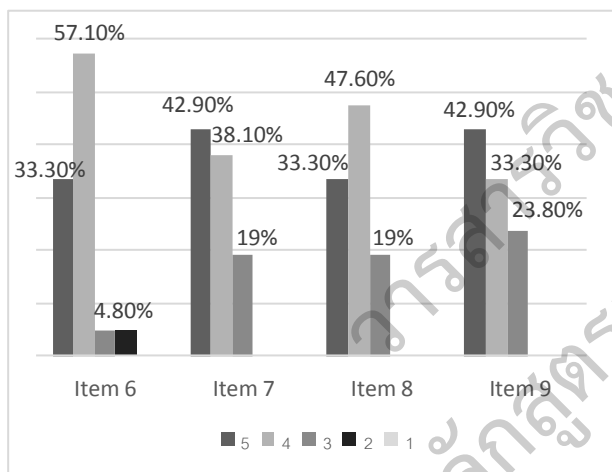


Figure 2 Participants' Agreement to Interest

Respondents indicated their degree of agreement using a 5-point rating scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

In terms of interest, the results showed that 57.1% agreed that they enjoyed posting writing assignments on Instagram (item 6). Moreover, 42.9% strongly agreed that it was interesting to provide feedback through Instagram (item 7), while 47.6% agreed that it was interesting to get feedback through Instagram (item 8). Finally, 42.9% strongly agreed that posting writing activities on Instagram motivated them to write better (item 9).

3.3 Perceptions on the Process of Learning

The results of the students' responses to the five statements concerning learning process are shown in Figure 3.

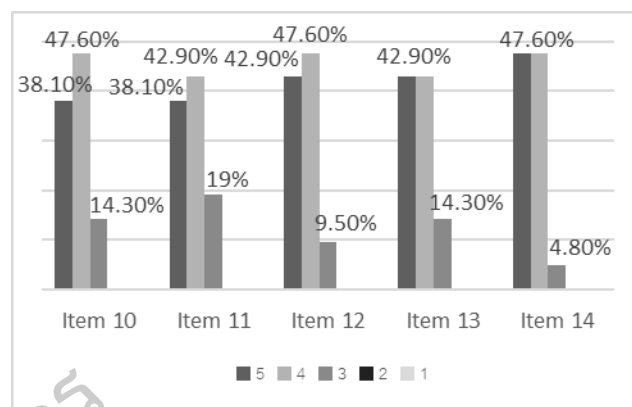


Figure 3 Participants' Agreement to Process of Learning

Respondents indicated their degree of agreement using a 5-point rating scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

In terms of process of learning, 47.6% agreed that notes posted by the teacher on Instagram helped them to understand the material better (item 10); 42.9% agreed that pictures posted by the teacher on Instagram encouraged them to give opinions (item 11); 47.6% agreed that they enjoyed giving feedback/corrections to their friends on Instagram (item 12); 42.9% strongly agreed and agreed that the teacher's feedback helped them in making their writing better (item 13); and lastly, 47.6% strongly agreed and agreed that the features available on Instagram helped them to discuss their writing problems with the teacher (item 14).

Discussion

This section presents discussions of the findings.

1. Improvement of Students' Writing Ability

The result of the post-test scores showed that the students improved their paragraph writing ability

after being taught using Instagram. The result was consistent with Listiani's (2016) research which showed that the students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group as a result of the implementation of Instagram.

It was found in this study that the quality of the students' writings improved as well. Some mistakes, such as forming a sentence, grammatical mistakes, missing thesis statement in a paragraph writing, and insufficient content in a paragraph, decreased. In general, the students were able to compose a well-developed paragraph. Moreover, they were able to express their ideas, stated their opinions as well as provided plausible reasons in the paragraph writing with the given topics. By using Instagram, the students were given immediate feedback about their paragraph writing. They also could ask for further explanation about the feedback through the same comment box on Instagram. Dron (2003; cited in Moriarty & Rajapillai, 2007) agreed that technology was relatively easy to employ as for giving and receiving feedback since students have adjusted to it.

2. Students Who Improved Writing Paragraph

The study showed positive correlation between the students' pre-test and post-test scores. Students who had high scores in the pre-test and post-test were those who showed interest and responsibility for all of the assignments. They always paid attention to the teacher's explanation, completed the tasks, and submitted the assignments on time. These students were highly engaged and motivated in learning. Students who obtained low scores in pre-test and post-test could be attributed to their lack of interest in the subject. Therefore, the use of technology in teaching and learning might not be sufficient. Motivation needs to be given to increase the engagement in instructional activities and

to be able to exchange ideas, broaden knowledge, and use it in real-life situations. Listiani (2016) in her research studied the consequence of the use of Instagram on junior high school students' writing in writing class. The study revealed that Instagram supported students with high and low motivation to have a better understanding of the given writing tasks

3. Students' Perceptions

As discussed earlier, students responded positively to all the statements in the questionnaire. To confirm the students' answers, their paragraph writings were checked. Results showed that the quality of their writing improved. Some mistakes were found in their paragraph writing, such as grammatical mistakes and mechanics, but those mistakes became less frequent in the students' latter writing assignments and posttest activities.

The other part of the questionnaire was students' interest in the implementation of Instagram. Results proved that Instagram could be implemented in the educational context. This was in line with Anggraeny's (2017) statement that the use of Instagram in teaching and learning process is notable as today is the era of 21st century where social media technologies have been used to support the learning needs for both businesses and education. Some participants, however, did not enjoy posting writing assignments on Instagram, probably because of individual preference or not wanting other people see their work as demonstrated by the results showing that 4.8% disagreed with posting writing assignments on Instagram.

The last part of the questionnaire concerned the learning process on the use of Instagram in learning paragraph writing. A majority of the students showed positive attitude towards the use of Instagram.

The students believed that the uploaded pictures encouraged them in expressing ideas and writing better paragraphs. The students could access the tasks inside and outside the classroom as long as an Internet connection was available. This result showed that Instagram enabled its users to take pictures or photos, apply different filters to transform the appearance of the pictures, and share them instantly with friends (Hochman & Schwartz; cited in Ting et al., 2015). In addition, some students made use of it to ask questions regardless of their writing problems. Thus, it could be assumed that use of Instagram is beneficial not only for language learning but also results in an increased level of engagement and sense of community in the classroom.

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Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, it could be concluded that Instagram gave beneficial effects in improving students' language skill, and creating student-teacher interaction and communication that go beyond office hours and the classroom. Using Instagram as an education tool would allow students to generate ideas with contextually-relevant content and offer them a learning experience that they enjoyed. Finally, it could be emphasized that using Instagram in EFL learning could be an effective and innovative tool if appropriately used by students and teacher for educational aims.

As for future researchers, they could explore using other features of Instagram which could be used in teaching and learning. Further, similar studies with different levels of students and language skills could be conducted in order to gain a wider perspective of the use of Instagram in an educational context.

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หลักสูตรและการสอน
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