Improving English Language Writing Skills of Sophomore Students of Uzbekistan State World Languages University by Quora Digest

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Abstract: Mastery of writing skills is critical to an academic world and to bring breakthroughs to a field. This action research introduced the application of Quora Digest in English classrooms to analyze its effectiveness in enhancing writing skills of EFL learners. The procedure included using Quora Digest as a platform where students express their opinions in a written form and techniques (such as recognizing vocabulary in context with its context-specific meaning and using it in their expressions) introduced to students to give even better results. The empirical results of the study showed that sophomore students were able to improve their writing level from developing to expanding and fluent levels. In a nutshell, Quora Digest proved effective and successful in promoting students' writing skills in English classes.

Key Words: writing skills, social media networks, Quora Digest, language development, user-generated content, writing fluency, expanding level, developing level.

Introduction

Social media have brought about a number of opportunities to practice language in different contexts and it has made it possible for user to exchange information, to discuss their interests and develop their interests of content accordingly. Conclusions of many researches show that social networking sites have created spaces for autonomy in learning which is the most important aspect in language learning. There many forms of social media that can facilitate language learning through free practices without anxiety and they range from blogs, micro blogs, social networking sites to instant messaging, photo and video-sharing platforms. Noordeen, 2014 suggested that social networking sites have brought benefits to billions of people around the globe in different contexts such as profession, education, companies.

Accordingly, teachers who have technical expertise to use social media in teaching writing will give better results than those who are technologically illiterate or untrained to use social media as a facilitator in their writing classes.

Using Quora Digest as a teaching tool for writing in educational language settings is rare. However, it can be of great use if it is used as a technique in language teaching. Quora Digest is a data sharing platform where people express their feelings, opinions and share information in different contents making it possible for readers to convey their opinions related to posts. Nonetheless, it is not common in Uzbekistan among social media users and it can be the first research to analyze effectiveness in language teaching methodology in language settings of Uzbekistan universities such as Uzbekistan State World Languages university. Therefore, in this study, the researcher discusses if Quora Digest can be effective in improving writing skills of sophomore students at Uzbekistan State World Languages University.

Quora Digest is the newsletter where Quora sends several answers to your questions and the news that you are receiving from Quora is mainly based on your search history. It allows users to follow social networks and follow topics that are interesting for them. Furthermore, it enables users to vote on answers to highlight the most accurate information possible and they are also able to give comments to the content that is posted.

Though language classrooms are organized around communicative language teaching which focuses on meaningful communication and free use of target language, the students are still struggling to excel at in academic writing skills showing the lowest scores attained in writing section of

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standardized language tests such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or CEFR (Common European Framework Reference). Interestingly, they score maximum in listening and reading sections of these tests and they have rich vocabulary, yet anyway they have problems in expressing opinions and conveying information in a written form. Those students who have a good command of written English acquired their skills either through taking private courses or through autonomous learning.

Given this background, the action research was undertaken to improve students' writing skills by introducing Quora Digest as a teaching-learning tool. The action was taken among sophomore students in Foreign Language and Literature Department at Uzbekistan State World Languages University.

Review Of Literature

Writing has always been the most important aspect of any language and good writing skills are necessary for all members of a society no matter what position they hold, it is of equal importance for students, teachers, researchers as the most necessary way storing information, processing and transmitting it.

English is the most frequently used foreign languages among other languages and serve as lingua franca between two people of different nations. Writing skills in this language is especially important for academic life as the most of the information, breakthroughs in a field, discoveries are stored in this language. Acquiring good English language writing skills firstly make all accessible for to use and be aware.

Leki 2001, stated that writing skills are the most important aspect of all language performances. It is of high importance for non-native speakers of the English language to acquire good writing skills with grammatical competence and spelling-free script both in their professional and educational settings.

Graham, 2012 suggested that writing serves a purpose of informing, learning, persuading, entertaining and sometimes self-reflecting. It is therefore one of the core skills in which college students should excel.

Fink, 1998 claimed that creating something written does not comprise exclusively final draft, but writing process combines some other cognitive processes such as generalizing, summarizing, evaluating, analyzing, practices and strategies.

Writing process involves teaching written conventions of the language, genre-specific requirements, appropriate formats and styles for different pieces of writing. Friedrich, 2008 suggested that writing instruction rules vary greatly in terms of content, purpose in educational institutions.

Academic writing skills are critical to present arguments in a logical manner. Hayland 2002 stated that "Academic writing is not just about conveying an ideational "content"; it is also about the representation of self. Recent research has suggested that academic prose is not entirely impersonal, but that writers gain credibility by projecting an identity invested with proper authority, displaying confidence in their evaluations and commitment to their ideas'.

The paramount importance of the English language as a means of communication demands to use innovative techniques and methods to tackle the problems that student face and overcoming low levels of English language proficiency to use it as an academic language (Barri, 2017; Dajani, 2014, Ramahi, 2015; Bianchi& Abdel Razeq, 2016). Furthermore, learning how to write has received great attention as a tool for both communication and research work (Dar & Khan,2015). Mahboob 2014 stated that it should be based on using the language with "structural accuracy" and "communicative potential". Writing is a cognitive process that activates memory, thinking and analyzing before uttering in a written way (Alfaki,2015; Perkins, & Smith,2014).

When Rong and Noor (2019) conducted a research to analyze the effectiveness of social media, specifically Digital Storytelling Tools to enhance writing skills of English language learners, the findings show that there has been a great improvement in students' performances when overall achievement level is compared.

Fareed, Ashraf, Belal (2016) discussed hindering factors to writing skills of undergraduate ESL students. They state that one of the main reasons is that students are not encouraged to be good writers and speaking is comparatively more appreciated than other language skills while writing

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remains ignored. They further stated that national examination systems do not encourage to master writing skills opening a better way to plagiarism and memorization instead.

Social media is defined as "group of internet-based applications" that allow exchange of user-generated content. Social media is also considered as enablers of lifelong learning of formal and informal contexts (EACEA, 2013).

Mobile and web-based technologies support social media to offer highly interactive platforms in which people and communities co-create, share, discuss, vote user-generated content. They offer substantial and pervasive features for people, businesses and communities (Rajesh & Michael, 2015).

It is believed that social media can potentially bridge formal and informal learning via participatory digital tools. Educational benefits of social media in teaching and learning environments are highly debated. Greenhow& Lewin, 2015 state that right implementation of social media in teaching and learning environments yields to better results with opportunities for inquiry, communication, information and resource sharing, feedback giving and comfortable distant communication. Gupta, 2015 indicated that social media can be a bridge between professors and students outside the classroom as well as to be in contact with former students. Furthermore, social media is efficiently applicable to use for teaching purposes as it makes information sharing to a large audience possible at once.

Rajesh & Michael (2015) stated that social media is absorbing larger and larger audience day by day. They found that students are excessively using blogging services, interaction services and group services. Traditional teaching is appearing as time constraint where formal feedback mechanism does not exist. Vervaart (2013) suggested that social media best facilitates teaching and learning as it allows for prolonged interaction between the provider and the recipient with a later access to the same content when needed.

According to Jiménez (2014), higher education institutions should make use of advantages of ICTs ensuring quality and maintaining high standards for teaching practices and outcomes with a wider access to equal opportunities; new technologies allow for innovation in teaching methods and renewing course content. Dabbagh & Kitsantas (2011) examined the relation between self-regulation in learning and social media, the use of social media yields interaction in learning and this helps students practice formal learning in an informal environment. They describe social media "highly self-motivated, autonomous, and informal" way of learning.

Sámano (2014) suggested that English or any other language cannot be learned exclusively by social media, but the use of social media as a teaching tool facilitates teaching and give better results. Social media also allows enhancement of topics as it triggers self-motivation and reinforces skills such as writing and creativity in through a snowball effect. Samano found that 78 per cent of teachers believe that social media help to improve learning outcomes of their students.

Alfahadi(2017) conducted a study that aimed to investigate how well social media networks improve students' English language skills at Tabuk University and which sites are commonly used by them in order to practice their language skills. The researcher concludes that social media can be incorporated into EFL syllabi since it enables students to get direct remedial feedback.

On the other hand, researchers warn against excessive use of social media in educational contexts. Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) found that college grades were negatively affected by time spent on Facebook. Likewise, Junco and Cotton (2013) examined students' multitasking habits with Facebook and negative correlation between overall college grades.

Methodology

The subjects of the research

Sophomore students of Uzbekistan State World Languages University were included as research participants. As the research problem is centered around improvement of writing skills, the participation and performances of participants in their Reading/Writing classes were evaluated as a part of the research. The level of students who are studying at language-oriented universities should be above intermediate level and, in this level, some fundamental elements of writing are already acquired by language learners, sophomore students of Foreign Language and Literature

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Department were chosen as the research subjects. Since the research aims at investigating the positive effect of Quora Digest in enhancing writing skills, their performances were observed before and after using Quora Digest in their writing classes.

The Venue of the Project

The project took place at one of the language departments of Uzbekistan State World Languages University in the last three weeks of March, 2022. Since the research attempts to improve different aspects of writing skills such as strengthening lexical resource and reaching grammar range within sentences rather than reaching overall writing fluency, the researcher decided to conduct the study in one of the language departments. Data collection was completed both in online platforms and in face-to face meetings during writing classes.

This research study is limited to students majoring English at UzSWLU during the academic year 2021-2022 who were enrolled in the academic course "Reading and Writing" The researcher faced a number of challenges while conducting the study. First of all, selecting the subjects of the study became difficult as students were unwilling to participate in the study. Furthermore, providing full attendance of participant in face-to-face meetings became another hurdle for the researcher.

Instrumentation

To achieve the purposes of this research paper, the researcher will prepare the following instruments:

 1. An attitudinal questionnaire
2. Pre-tests to be applied before the treatment
 3. Post-tests to be applied after the treatment

The attitudinal questionnaire is a scale comprised of 25 items under five subscales namely motivation to write, potential of technology, comparative use of technology, creativity, and potential of development. The items followed Likert scale of five responses, and were scored as Strongly agree =5, Agree = 4, Not sure= 3, Disagree =2, Strongly disagree = 1. The overall score yields students' attitudes towards the ICT and social media. The scale was found to be reliable (Cronbach's reliability co-efficient on the overall scale measured 0.72) and valid.

This method was adopted from the research by Alda Mohammad All Bakeer at Al-Quds Open university.

The criterion which determines the success of the action research is writing scores between expanding and fluent levels. The action research should help students move from "developing" level into expanding and/or fluent level after the implementation of Quora Digest into teaching writing.

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The spiral of action research
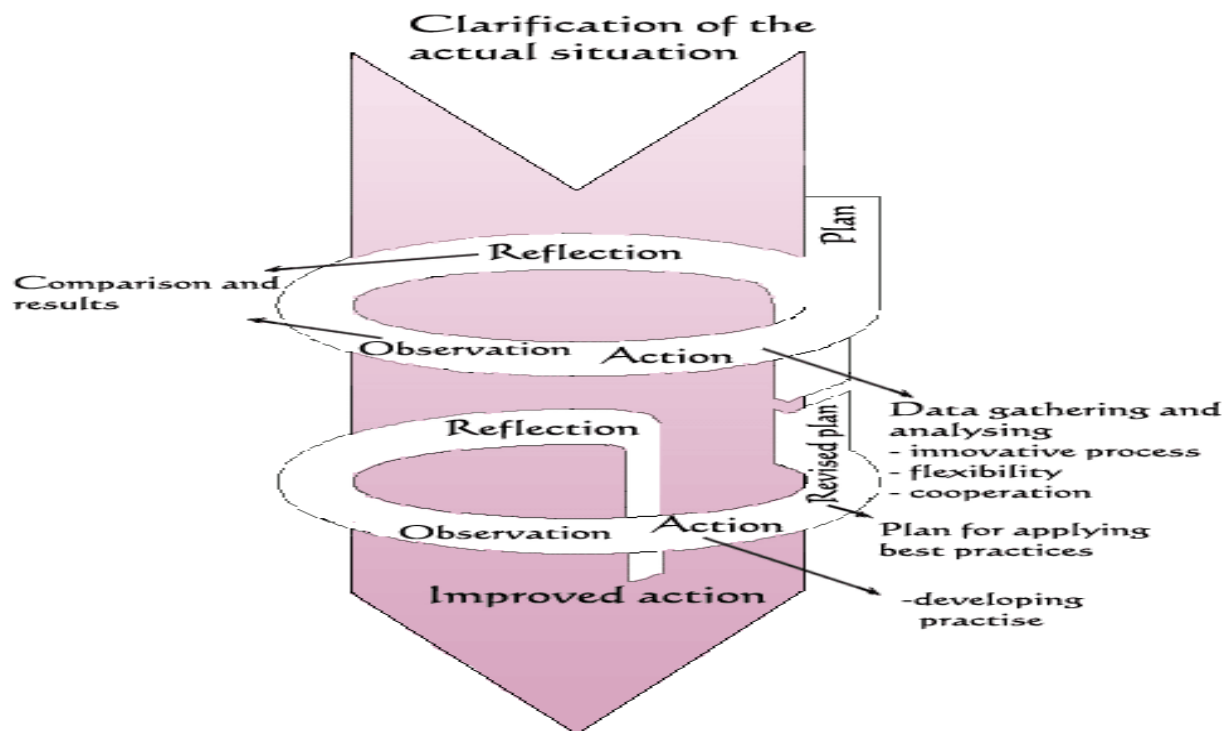
Source: Modified from Suojanen 1998

Suojanen (2001) differentiates education-oriented and project-oriented action researches. The education-oriented trend mainly focuses on improving learning processes while project-oriented trend puts an emphasis on developing the research object itself rather than learning. Here, the researcher decided to use action research spiral by Suojanen which is education-oriented. According to this action research spiral, actual situation is clarified by the researcher. It implies that the researcher discovers a controversial problem in educational setting and comes up with a technique or method to improve the situation. The researcher may depend on previous techniques used to overcome the same problem. Afterwards, the researcher made up a plan for the whole process, selects the subjects, the place of the study and chose instruments and aids to conduct his/her study. In the next stage, the researcher collected data with the instruments and tools used and analyzed them. During this process, the researcher took innovative processes, flexibility and cooperation into account. Subsequently, the researcher observes and discusses the results. If the research fails and the research question remains unanswered, the researcher revised the plan and generated best practices that would prove effective in the end. Similarly, the researcher collected data with the instruments and tools used and analyzed them before reflecting the whole process and giving recommendations for further researchers in the field. Having revised the whole plan and made use of other practices to prove effectiveness of this method, the action became successful with improvements of overall grades in writing of sophomore students.

Results And Discussion

Mean Value of Students' Scores with Respect to Subscales of Attitude Scale of the Experimental Group

Subscale	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Motivation to write	24	4.07	0.42
Potential of technology	24	4.03	0.39

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Comparative use of technology	24	4.02	0.38
Creativity	24	4.70	0.48
Potential of development	24	4.80	0.49
Overall attitude	24	4.05	0.44

Results as presented in Table 1 reveal that in each subscale, the mean value of scores lies in between 4 and 5. This may imply that most of the students strongly agree/ agree with the items given in the attitude scale. Overall attitudes of students are found to be positive towards the use of technology.

Planning the first cycle

The researcher introduces students the platform of Quora Digest and features to use it effectively for development of writing. The participants were required to search on topics that compare/contrast two or more items and review the content before giving comments to the posts. The procedure lasted a week. After a week, their writing skills were assessed in their "Reading/Writing" course according a writing criterion which rates the performance as proficient, fluent, expanding, developing, beginning, emerging. The table below shows that the action has not reached its aim because the participants score should have been averaged around 5. However, it shows that the students scored 3 minimum and 5 maximum, but the mean is only 3.675.

Descriptive Statistics

	Writing score
Valid	20
Missing	0
Mean	3.675
Std. Deviation	0.693
Minimum	3.000
Maximum	5.000

Afterwards, the researcher revised the plan and decided to make modifications to techniques and introduced them to students. The researcher again instructed to browse contexts that make comparisons between different items. However, the researcher encouraged them to apply the useful phrases and expressions directly to their comments which is slightly different from the first cycle. Another point that is modified in the second cycle is the duration of the process lasting two weeks. Furthermore, the researcher continuously gave recommendations through online platforms to achieve the purpose of the study. The performance of students was graded online after collecting their writings. The table below shows the results of the second cycle.

Frequencies for Writing score

Writing score	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
4	4	20.000	20.000	20.000
4.5	5	25.000	25.000	45.000
5	11	55.000	55.000	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	20	100.000		

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Frequencies for Writing score

Writing score	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

The table illustrates that the most frequent score that was recorded is 5 scored by 11 students out of 20. The students whose performance deserved a score between the level of "fluent" and expanding consist 5 students. It means that the research could achieve its aim proving effectiveness of Quora Digest in improving writing skills of EFL learners.

Descriptive Statistics

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Writing score	20	0	4.675	0.406	4.000	5.000

This table highlights data on the minimum and maximum scores recorded in the second cycle. As it is clearly seen from the chart, the score averaged between 4 and 5 (expanding and fluent levels) showing the mean of 4.675 which determines the success of the research. In a nutshell, the statistics shows that Quora Digest can really facilitate acquiring writing skills in the English language.

The research was conducted with an aim to explore efficacy of social media, particularly Quora Digest in improving writing skills. The study discovered that students at UzSWLU had a lack of exposure to written language practice. However, their writing skills can be enhanced by adapting techniques and methods and integrating social media into language teaching process. As a teacher-student, the researcher realized a great role of social media and technological expertise in development of language skills planning to integrate social media networks in organizing classes from this time on. If the researcher had an opportunity to conduct this action research again, the researcher would select students of language-oriented and not language-oriented universities to come up with even different interpretations on the role of social media in language teaching which would be a new discovery to find other contributing factors to language development. While conducting the research, a new idea sparked in the researcher's mind to find correlation between continuous reading and writing improvement, how reading before writing can affect writing development. Therefore, the researcher would recommend other researchers to make investigation on this side of this study. Conduction of this study gave necessary experience to the researcher which can be applicable for both future studies and renovation of methods being used by the researcher in language classrooms. This also formed a new understanding about an action research which requires enough researching skills from the author rather than reviewing, analyzing, evaluating previous works in the field. The researcher further believes that this experience will put foundation for other successful studies.

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