

A Study on Facebook as a Platform to Develop Descriptive and Narrative Paragraph Writing Skills for Tertiary Level ESL Learners

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Facebook is one of the most visited social media sites in the world as well as in Sri Lanka that is identified as an exceptional source of influence on language learning. However, while Sri Lanka is making efforts to modify its paper-based traditional education system and adhere to worldwide trends of integrating novel technologies and social media into educational purposes, Facebook consumption among undergraduates for teaching/learning processes remains a rarely studied topic. The problem of the present research is sprung from learners' low achievement, lack of motivation in writing and lack of interest in paper-based learning. Thus, this study aims to investigate the impact of adopting Facebook in developing descriptive and narrative paragraph writing skills for tertiary level learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) and their perceptions on the efficacy of using Facebook as a medium for learning. A mixed-method research design was implemented in the study as data was collected through a pre-test, post-test and five semi-structured interviews. A purposive sample of 60 intermediate level ESL learners from the University of Kelaniya who study in the first year "English for Social Sciences" course participated in the study. By conducting the pre-test the participants were grouped, and the 30 students of the experimental group were taught for six weeks using a closed Facebook group, while the remaining 30 students of the controlled group were taught using paper-based methods in regular classrooms. The lessons on 'descriptive' and 'narrative' paragraph writing were posted on the Facebook learning group while the same lessons were conducted for the controlled group using the paper-based method. The study's findings revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the scores of the experimental and the controlled groups in favour of the experimental group exposed to Facebook-based learning, reflecting upon its innovative learning setting that is appealing instead of traditional teaching practices. This study serves ESL practitioners to adopt an effectual approach such as Facebook in teaching language skills to solve existing issues in the teaching sphere.

Keywords: Facebook learning, Social media, Paragraph writing, Facebook groups, Writing skills