

Blended Language Learning Using Social Media Networks (Telegram vs. Instagram) as Pedagogical Tool to Enhance Reading Comprehension

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Received November 02, 2018; Revised December 11, 2018; Accepted December 24, 2018

Abstract This inquiry examined student teachers' perceptions on the advantages of using Social Networking Services (SNS) in an English teacher education program at secondary schools in Iran to ease the communication, supervision, discussion, and report submissions between supervisors and student teachers. New technology is changing the fundamental process of reading and communicating. An increasing amount of communication now occurs in text-based form on social networks. The objective of this study is to analyze the possibility of blending conventional instruction with online instruction via a social networking applications, Instagram and telegram, in EFL classrooms in order to motivate students and improve their reading comprehension ability learning. Thus, this paper seeks to examine specific ways in which EFL teachers can use Instagram and telegram as an educational tool, describing the benefits of this technological instrument and analyzing the potential pitfalls and challenges that it could create. Besides, it includes practical strategies that teachers can apply in order to overcome these pitfalls and get the most out of these social networks applications.

Keywords: *Social Networking Services (SNS), Instagram, telegram*

Cite This Article: Hamed Fathi, "Blended Language Learning Using Social Media Networks (Telegram vs. Instagram) as Pedagogical Tool to Enhance Reading Comprehension." *Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2018): 30-35. doi: 10.12691/jll-2-1-5.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the expansion of digital technologies, multimedia, and social networks, dramatically transformed our lives. Education in general and the area of foreign language teaching and learning have also benefited hugely from those developments and advances. Today people around the world are using information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the Internet almost anywhere and anytime. Technology is playing very crucial role in everyday life and in academic settings. These strategies consist of related nodes, skimming strategy, note taking by hand, summing the information up, and relying upon former knowledge. The term "blended learning" is used to describe the use of both face-to-face and online modes of instruction in an education program. Initially, the use of online instruction is more prevalent in distance education as a means of communication between course instructors and learners and a platform for ongoing and interactive social learning. The present study will investigate whether online, offline, and blended approaches through social networks (telegram/instagram) have any significant influence on reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners in an instructional program.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In recent years, new and exciting applications of digital technologies including mobile technologies, gaming, and social media, to name just a few, have been employed by teachers and researchers for second and foreign language learning [1]. The spread of technology has influenced different aspects of human life, and teaching and learning are not exceptions. Many researchers have tried to examine the possibility and effectiveness of integrating e-learning into medical curricula. Technology has made it possible for teachers to integrate different teaching methods based on the needs of learners. Many researchers believe that innovative technological methods foster the interest and the motivation of the learners and enable them to access the target language, more input, and interaction opportunities. Furthermore, they could help the teachers to manage their teaching methods and the class more effectively, and provide students with more authentic instructional materials. Although it may sound useful, many teachers do not use this technology in their classes because of the lack of time, knowledge, and interest. The traditional face-to-face learning system has been around for centuries, and pure e-learning might not meet the needs of all language learners in different communities since the Web cannot replace a human instructor. In that

way, the implementation sessions of this research were more dynamic based on the reality, it means based on technologies and applications, including the social networks, taking into account students' needs and interests and in this way try to improve their motivation and their reading performance.

1.2. Objectives

To introduce to the English classes authentic reading material to improve reading comprehension in ninth grade.

To demonstrate that social networks can be used as educational tools to present reading comprehension activities to students and in that way facilitate and promote reading comprehension levels on ninth grade students in a private school

To promote autonomous learning in students making use of the technological resources available in this century

1.3. Review of the Previous Studies

With the fast development of broadband internet and computer technologies, online courses and thus cyber asynchronous learning have been employed more and more often exchanging information between instructors and students, and between students and their peers [8]. According to [9], synchronous and asynchronous communication tools should not be evaluated in isolation, but rather how they can supplement one another. There is a great need to consider the learning value that these tools afford students, thus an informed pedagogy is critical in the development and use of these tools in online learning environments.

As [9] argue, learning - regardless of the context - is a social activity that is enriched through social interactions, collaboration and contextual experiences, thus positing the potential affordances of a blended synchronous-asynchronous online learning environment within a social constructivist framework that owes much to the work of [10] and [11] investigate the role of WhatsApp in the vocabulary learning improvement of Iranian junior high school EFL students and found that WhatsApp was an effective tool in vocabulary learning of the learners and improved their vocabulary gain.

[12] also conducted a study on Iranian EFL learners via social networks to improve their reading comprehension gain and enhance their interest in learning reading comprehension. The findings of their study showed that the students in the experimental group outperformed the control group and the use of social networks were regarded as teaching tools that had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension learning. The study by Mashhadi Heidar and Kaviani [2] also confirmed that learning English through the use of Telegram can have unique technological and pedagogical advantages for Iranian EFL learners and could have a positive effect on the development of EFL learners' reading comprehension gain. [13] argue that students may likely feel less engaged with the course if the instructor relies primarily on the use of asynchronous communication. Blended language learning (i.e., integrating the use of technology into classroom-based learning and teaching) is still a relatively new concept, but recent research [1, 2] appears to indicate that when "appropriately" implemented, blended learning

can significantly improve the learning experience [3]. [4] states that a huge number of college and university academicians are found to be using social networking sites (SNSs) in their classroom" (p. 41). Among the SNSs, what's app messenger, Telegram, Facebook, and Viber have gained more attention [5]. [6] asserts that the rapid development and enormous advancement in computer technologies have been affecting all aspects of life for more than three decades. In addition, [7] represented the impact of mobile phones on learning English reading comprehension. The main objective of his study was investigating the role of mobile phones in EFL classes for the undergraduate student of the University of Tabuk for improving their English reading comprehension. The data were collected through questionnaires distributed among the teachers who teach to EFL students. Most of the teachers believed that mobiles were the new technological tools that should be regarded as useful devices and younger students and teacher can use new technology in their comfort level. Due to the popularity of applications like Telegram in Iran, many studies have been conducted on the use of such applications on the language, linguistic features, or gender differences in the textese [9-12]. There have been other studies which have focused on the use of different applications to help foster language learning. Some of these studies have focused on the use of applications to improve vocabulary knowledge of Iranian EFL learners. [14] introduced the present century individuals as "next generation" or "digital native" learners as almost all people including language learners are quite familiar with media and information technology. He defined hybrid learning as an approach which combines face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction. He maintained that the ultimate objective of hybrid learning is providing opportunities for learners and teachers to make learning independent, useful, and above all, sustainable. [15] believe that social media has a remarkable role in the future of language learning and teaching curriculum. However, he added that a sound language curriculum would be needed to be built on the pedagogical principles and educational psychology. Some of these tools and applications may be designed specifically for educational purposes and some others for a more general use. The choices of resources and the way they are used can be linked to different learning theories which may be invoked to explain or predict learning benefits from the use of ICT [10]. Every one of these tools has various attributes that affect suitability for learning goals [3]. For example, sending homework materials through Telegram ensures that all students receive the message, whether it is a video specified for class or a copy of an answer to an exercise sent outside the classroom hours [4]. According to Baran [5], university students have embraced the capabilities of social media channels. He explains that based on the statistics a major part of students' energy and time is devoted to reading formal and informal online texts on various social media channels, watching videos and following the tweets and updates related to the course content. [7] believed that these sites are ideal spaces for mediated intellectual engagement because of the kind of participation and informal knowledge sharing that they trigger. Therefore, as Rambe stated, cognitive scaffolding can be the most important outcome of using technology

mediated learning in instructional setting. The shift to learner-centered teaching approach in technology-mediated instruction has also created learning environment and experiences that enable student to construct their own knowledge rather than adhering to the traditional teaching method of knowledge transferal [7].

1.4. Research Questions

As a whole, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether online, offline, and blended approaches had any significant effect on reading comprehension achievement of Iranian EFL learners in an instructional reading program. More specifically, the study tries to answers to the following questions:

Q1: Does SSN to English reading teaching significantly affect Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension ability?

2. Methodology

This mixed method study was a quasi-experimental research and adapted a qualitative and critical ethnography approach. Telegram and Instagram as academic mediation and collaborative learning tools were taken as an independent variable. Cognitive scaffolding, motivational level and academic achievements were taken as dependent variables. By applying AT as a framework and by implementing critical ethnography approach, this study made use of triangulation to gather data on cognitive scaffolding. This research combined online ethnography of mined Telegram and Instagram data, direct observation of teacher-student and student-peer interaction while engaging in telegram and Instagram activities and discussions, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the participants.

2.1. Participants

In order to investigate the impact of blended learning approach in EFL teaching on students' achievement, a homogenous sample of 42 intermediate level students from two intact classes who study intensive English at Shokouh English Institute, Karaj Branch will participate in the study. Students will range in ages from 18 to 20. The participants were 42 out of 54 Persian-speaking students who were selected in line with their scores on the Oxford Placement Test [15] Shokouh English Institute, Karaj Branch, Iran. The participants will be 15-19 years old and all were female. They will identify to be at upper-intermediate level. They all had more than 3 years of experience in using computers and the Internet for studying and entertainment goals. The reasons for selecting the intermediate level were that, firstly, such group was a comparatively large number of L2 learners. Secondly, the lower level may not have been able to employ the reading strategies effectively to comprehend the hypertexts because they have a limited knowledge of grammar and reading comprehension to comprehend hypertext; thus, more time and effort may be needed in terms of applying L2 through telegram based instruction strategies. Thirdly, advanced groups have already made up the necessary knowledge for appropriately applying L2 Telegram and Instagram based instruction strategies; therefore,

they may not need to participate in a training program. Lastly, the upper-intermediate learners are more interested and motivated to achieve academic success. All the participants assigned to two experimental groups and a control group in order to limit the (possible) effect of other variables on the results of the study. The experimental groups exposed to explicit training through an app-based condition. A communicative approach with an emphasis on real communication was followed in the class. The teaching methodology included consciousness-raising tasks using a text from the Internet, followed by teacher-to-student discussions about the applied strategies. The participants were required explaining and verbalizing their employed strategies.

2.2. Instruments

For the data collection, different instruments were designed: a pretest, a posttest, and an attitude questionnaire, not to mention a Placement Interchange Test, which was administered to the learners at the outset of the study to make sure they were homogeneous in terms of language proficiency before the treatment. Then, the pretest was given to the learners, the aim of which was to make sure the learners' wont familiar with the target words which were to be taught during the instructional period. The test was consisting of 40 multiple-choice questions, and it was approved by 3 university professors for validity concerns.

2.3. Telegram and Instagram Application

Telegram and Instagram are non-profit cloud-based instant messaging service. Telegram and Instagram client apps are available for android, iOS, windows phone, Windows NT, mac OS and Linux [6]. Users can send messages and exchange photos, videos, stickers, audio and files of any type. The latest version (3.18) was used as the main application for instruction in this study.

2.4. Reading Comprehension Test (Pre-Test)

The reading comprehension test, which served as the pre-test of the study, was used to examine the participants' initial knowledge of reading comprehension. The pre-test included 20 questions of reading comprehension will provide based on a reading passage given to the learners. Total score will estimate at 20 in that participants who get 20, it meant that he succeed in coping with reading comprehension. The questions of the pre-test will involve various types of questioning such as reading, true and false, filling the blanks, and short and long answer formats to be aware of the participants' initial understanding of reading comprehension. Reading Comprehension Test (Post-Test) Similar to the pre-test, a reading comprehension test, which served as the post-test of the study, will be utilized to check the participants' performance of reading comprehension and look into their probable progress as a result of receiving the treatment on IT instruction through technological software. The same as the pre-test, the post-test contained 20 questions of reading comprehension will provide based on a reading passage given to the learners. The questions of the post-test as well as the scoring rate will the same as the pre-test [15].

2.5. Procedures

The main goal of this study was to investigate the impact of using Telegram and Instagram and in on learning reading comprehension by EFL beginners. At the outset, the teacher gave the learners an Interchange Placement Test to measure their level of proficiency and to ensure their homogeneity in this regard. The teacher also administered a pretest, which aimed to check whether the target words to be taught to the learners were new and unfamiliar to them. In the course of the experiment, the teacher taught a number of reading comprehension items in classroom every session, and some other words in Telegram and Instagram as the online instruction and practice. At the end of the instructional period, the teacher was give the learners a posttest, which was intend to compare the learners' knowledge of words taught in class and those taught through Telegram and Instagram. Finally, the attitude questionnaire was given to the learners to unearth their perceptions of using Telegram for reading comprehension learning purposes [16].

2.6. Data Analysis

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of Instagram based instruction and reading modality oriented note taking methods on the improvement of the Iranian EFL students' reading skill. To achieve these goals, the following research question and its respective null-hypothesis were formulated [14];

2.7. Research Question & Null-Hypothesis

Q1: Is there any significant difference in the effect of telegram oriented reading practice; i.e. Instagram based instruction on developing reading skill?

The above mentioned question was investigated through one-way analysis of covariance (one-way ANCOVA) which had four assumptions; normality of the data, homogeneity of variances of groups, linearity of relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable and homogeneity of regression slopes. Except for the assumption of normality which will be tested in this

section, the other specific assumptions will be discussed when reporting the main results. Table 1 displays the values of skewness and kurtosis and their ratios over the standard errors. Since the absolute values of these ratios were lower than 1.96, it can be concluded that the present data did not violate the assumption of normality.

2.8. Inter-Rater Reliability

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients computed in order to probe the inter-rater reliability indices for the two raters who rated the participants' performance on the pretest and posttest of reading. Based on these results it can be concluded that there were significant agreements between the two raters on;

- Pretest of reading ($r(54) = .77$, representing a large effect size, $p = .000$), and
- Posttest of reading ($r(54) = .80$, representing a large effect size, $p = .000$).

2.9. Testing Null-Hypothesis

A one-way ANCOVA was run to compare the three groups' means on the posttest of reading after controlling for the effect of entry reading skills as measured through the pretest. Besides assumption of normality which was discussed under Table 1; ANCOVA has three more assumptions. First ANCOVA assumes that the relationship between the dependent variable (posttest of reading) and covariate (pretest) be a linear one. Based on the results displayed in Table 2 ($F(1, 50) = 21.66$, $p = .000$) it can be claimed that the statistical null-hypothesis as the relationship between the two variable was not a linear one was rejected. In other words; there was a linear relationship between the dependent variable and the covariate [19].

Second; it assumes that the linear relationship between the dependent variable and the covariate be the same across the groups, i.e. homogeneity of regression slopes. The non-significant interaction between the covariate and the independent variable (types of treatment) ($F(2, 48) = .927$, $p = .403$, partial $\eta^2 = .037$ representing a weak effect size) (Table 3) indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was met.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality Assumption

| Group | N | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Statistic | Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Instagram based instruction | Pretest 18 | -.295 | .536 | -0.55 | 1.038 |
| | Posttest 18 | -.173 | .536 | -0.32 | 1.038 |
| Telegram based instruction | Pretest 18 | -.097 | .536 | -0.18 | 1.038 |
| | Posttest 18 | -.118 | .536 | 0.22 | 1.038 |
| Control | Pretest 18 | -.295 | .536 | -0.55 | 1.038 |
| | Posttest 18 | -.713 | .536 | -1.33 | 1.038 |

Table 2. Pearson Correlations; Inter-Rater Reliability Indices

| | | Pretest Rater2 | posttest Rater 2 |
|------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Pretest Rater 1 | Pearson Correlation | .771 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 54 | |
| Posttest Rater 1 | Pearson Correlation | .802 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 54 | |

And finally; ANCOVA assumes that the variances of the groups be roughly equal; i.e. homogeneity of variances. The non-significant results of the Levene's test ($F(1, 51) = .043, p = .958$) (Table 4) indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met.

Based on the results displayed Table 6 it can be claimed that the Telegram based instruction oriented group ($M = 13.94, SE = .141$) had the highest mean on the posttest of reading. This was followed by the Instagram based instruction oriented ($M = 12.66, SE = .141$) and control ($M = 11.05, SE = .141$) groups.

The results of ANCOVA ($F(2, 50) = 105.97, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .809$ representing a large effect size) (Table 5) indicated that there were significant differences between the three groups' means on the posttest of reading after controlling for the possible effects of the pretest. Thus the null-hypothesis **was rejected**. The significant F-value associated with the covariate (pretest) ($F = 112.62$,

$p = .000$) indicated that the pretest was corrected chosen as a covariate, i.e. it had a significant role in this model.

Although the F-value of 105.97 indicated significant differences between the three groups' means on the posttest, the post-hoc comparison tests (Table 8) should be run to compare the groups two by two in order to detect any significant differences between pairs of means. Based on the results displayed in Table 6 it can be concluded that [19];

- The Telegram based instruction oriented group ($M = 13.94$) significantly outperformed the Instagram based instruction oriented group ($M = 12.66$) on the posttest of reading after controlling for the effect of the pretest (Mean Difference = 1.27, $p = .000$).

- The Telegram oriented group ($M = 13.94$) significantly outperformed the control group ($M = 11.05$) on the posttest of reading after controlling for the effect of the pretest (Mean Difference = 2.88, $p = .000$).

Table 3. ANOVA Table; Testing Linearity Assumption; Posttest of Reading by Groups with Pretest

| | | Sum squares | Of df | Mean square | F | Sig. | |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|------|
| Pretest Pretest | Between *Groups | (combined) | 40.799 | 3 | 13.600 | 7.348 | .000 |
| | | Linearity | 40.091 | 1 | 40.091 | 21.663 | .000 |
| | | Deviation from Linearity | .708 | 2 | .354 | .191 | .827 |
| Within Groups | | 92.534 | 50 | 1.851 | | | |
| Total | | 133.333 | 53 | | | | |

Table 4. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects; Posttest of Reading by Groups with Pretest

| Source | Type III Of squares | Sum Df | Mean square | F | Sig. | Partial Squared | Eta |
|----------------|------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|------|--------------------|-----|
| Group | .023 | 2 | .012 | .032 | .968 | .001 | |
| Pretest | 39.339 | 1 | 39.339 | 110.193 | .000 | .697 | |
| Group* Pretest | .662 | 2 | .331 | .927 | .403 | .037 | |
| Error | 17.136 | 48 | .357 | | | | |
| Total | 8646.000 | 54 | | | | | |

Table 5. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

| F | Df1 | Df2 | Sig. |
|------|-----|-----|------|
| .043 | 2 | 51 | .958 |

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Reading by Groups with Pretest

| group | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Instagram based instruction | 12.667 ^a | .141 | 12.384 | 12.949 |
| Telegram based instruction | 13.944 ^a | .141 | 13.662 | 14.227 |
| control | 11.056 ^a | .141 | 10.773 | 11.338 |

Table 7. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects; Posttest of Reading by Groups with Pretest

| Source | Type III Of squares | Sum Df | Mean square | F | Sig. | Partial Squared | Eta |
|---------|------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|------|--------------------|-----|
| Pretest | 40.091 | 1 | 40.091 | 112.628 | .000 | .693 | |
| Group | 75.444 | 2 | 37.722 | 105.973 | .000 | .809 | |
| Error | 17.798 | 50 | .356 | | | | |
| total | 8646.000 | 54 | | | | | |

Table 8. Pair wise Comparisons Tests; Posttest of Reading by Groups with Pretest

| Telegram based instruction | Instagram based | 1.278 [*] | .199 | .000 | .878 | 1.677 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|------|------|--------|--------|
| | Instruction control | 2.889 [*] | .199 | .000 | 2.489 | 3.288 |
| control | Instagram based instruction | -1.611 [*] | .199 | .000 | -2.011 | -1.212 |
| | Telegram based instruction | -2.889 [*] | .199 | .000 | -3.288 | -2.489 |

The Instagram based instruction oriented group (M = 12.66) significantly outperformed the control group (M = 10.05) on the posttest of reading after controlling for the effect of the pretest (Mean Difference = 1.61, $p = .000$).

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Technology plays a very important role in dealing with affective considerations by providing learners with opportunities to practice and improve their pronunciation in a private space and without presence of their classmates [7]. Third, it seems that despite the popularity and huge availability of new learning tools such as SNSs for language learning purposes, some learners may not be able to harness them effectively and they need guidance to deal with complexities of these dynamic learning environments [18]. In this regard, we believe that before integrating new technologies into language teaching, teachers need to spend some time on training learners. It is worth mentioning that the speed of SNS technology is growing drastically and it dominates all aspects of people's lives, hence, this technology plays a great role in education and learning. These days, as a result of the Internet and mobile devices, mobile learning causes the learners use the technology such as Telegram and Instagram more enjoyable and effective anywhere and anytime. Therefore, an interesting environment can be provided via SNS for language learners.

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