

Facebook Profile Pictures as Writing Prompts to Develop Students' Writing Interests and Skills

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Abstract

This article is intended to show the benefits of the use of Facebook profile pictures as writing prompts to develop students' writing interest and skills in the English language and how its application can enhance the teaching of writing in English classroom. In addition, this paper also discusses the potentials of facebook use, profile pictures and writing prompts and how they can be attractive teaching and learning media that can help generate students' writing and help improve their English writing skills. Furthermore, this paper suggests steps that can be applied in relation to using Facebook profile pictures as writing prompts to develop students writing interests and skills.

Keyword: *Facebook, profile pictures, writing prompts, writing interests and skills*

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing well is not just an option for young people—it is a necessity. Along with the reading comprehension, writing skill is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in the society and in the global economy (Graham and Perin: 2007) . Nevertheless, the frequency of writing activities of high school students are very low. This is reflected by lack of ability of students to express their thoughts into writing. Some findings show that high school students are not even able to compose paragraph cohesively and coherently. This surely, in turn, will affect their higher education in which they have to write academic writings. Since the definition of literacy includes both reading and writing skills, poor writing proficiency should be recognized as an intrinsic part of this national literacy crisis. This phenomenon rouses a number of teaching techniques that are hoped to be beneficial for students' writing skills.

As technology develops rapidly, there is a shift in educational paradigm. Materials for teaching vary from the conventional textbook to computer technology. The emergence of the internet as a medium for teaching and learning is an important revolution in education. Teachers are greatly inspired by the new technique in the teaching and learning of the English language. There are many examples of the use of internet in English teaching and learning. One of them is the use of dialogue journal through email technology in Malaysia. According to Razak & Adelina (2004), email turns out to be an attractive teaching and learning medium that can help generate interest among the students and improve their learning. The introduction of the internet has brought many changes in teaching techniques as well as significant changes in writing instructions.

As an online social media, Facebook is one of the internet features that can engage students in interactive English teaching and learning process. Through this social network website which has a huge numbers of users, students are now able to experience written communication interactively with teachers and friends via Facebook. They can create their profile with unique profile picture to display in order to invite other people to be friends with. Pictures have been proven to be effective to stimulate students to get ideas to write. There are some findings on how picture use helps students in reading and writing. Carney & Levin (2002) state that picture or illustration can enable students to go 'beyond the information given' and

assist them in performing “higher order” cognitive application tasks like creatively write sentences for dialogue collaboratively.

This paper discusses how Facebook profile picture can work as writing prompt to develop students’ writing interest and skills. It also suggests steps that can be applied in classroom in relation to using facebook profile pictures as writing prompt.

2 DISCUSSION

2.1 Writing Interest and Skills

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four basic skills of English. They must be integratedly taught to the students. However, among those skills, writing is considered as the last and the most difficult skill to acquire.

It is considered difficult since it is not a natural activity. Msanjila (2005) asserts that writing is different from speaking. This is acquired by all normally endowed human beings without explicit instruction. Writing has to be taught.

Furthermore, writing skills are important because not only can writing be used as a tool for communication but it also plays roles as a tool for learning. Its functions as a tool for discovering, generating new ideas, clarifying concepts, absorbing and processing information even a tool for solving problems.

Writing as a skill involves complex rhetorical and linguistic operations which must be taught. The students with good writing skills will be independent, comprehensible, and creative in writing. With these skills, their writing is likely comprehensible by the readers who read the writing. According to Hampton (1999), there are writing objectives. They are as follow:

- Writers can be independent when they are able to write without much assistance.
- Writers can gain comprehensibility when they can write so that it can be read and understood by themselves and others.
- Writers can be fluent when they are able to write smoothly and easily as well as understandably.

Writers can gain creativity when they can write their own ideas, not copying what has already been written, so that they can be read and understood.

The followings are types of writing skills:

- Skills in comprehensibility consists of the comprehension that writing is communicating messages or information
- Skills in fluency consists of the following:
 - recognizing the linear sequence of sounds
 - mastering writing motions and letter shapes
 - recognizing the chunks of words
 - recognizing that there is a need for space between words
 - writing quickly
- Skills in the creativity are the skills write freely anything to write.

In order to master writing skills, students have to practice writing often. However students often are not motivated to write since they lack of ideas to write. They find it hard to start writing on blank paper. Thus, online writing practice with picture prompt might be a good idea in relation to the above problem.

Kewin (2010) provides four reasons for writing to prompts:

1. Most of the times, it's hard to start writing when you are faced with a blank page. However, if you are prompted with something, even with an unrelated one, then the idea might come. If you write for just ten minutes on a prompt, you should then find it easier to return to the piece that is intended to write. Instead of thinking so hard about what to write switching the attention to the prompt will make the words and ideas come.
2. The prompt may give you ideas from which a complete story grows or you may get fresh ideas for another piece you are already working on. It's often surprising how much material will come up with the first start.
3. Writing to a prompt regularly helps to get you into the habit of writing. This sort of exercise will help find it easier and easier to write over and over again.
4. Prompts can also be a good way to be involved in a writing community. Occasionally writing groups offer a prompt for everyone to write about, with the objectives being for everyone to come up with something they can then share. This can also be a source of great encouragement, although it is undeniable that knowing that others will read what you have written can also inhibit your creativity.

2.2 Why Facebook Profile Pictures?

Facebook is the world's largest social network, with over 500 million users.(blog.facebook.com). Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in February 2004 which was initially as an exclusive network for Harvard students. It has some several features of social networking such as facebook chat, status, comments, note, and profile.

Facebook profile is a way to communicate with other users of Facebook. In their profile, the users can provide data on their personal information like family background, job and profession, interest and etc. They also have to display their profile pictures. They can upload any photo that they think can attract others to visit their wall and write comments on it. The saying of "A picture is worth a thousand words" will work on this as it has the power to convey a mood or share our insights with others. It has the power to capture not only perfect moments of happiness, but also expose images of cruelty and poverty.

The idea of using Facebook profile picture came as many facebookers upload unique profile picture. For example like *Garuda* picture was displayed during Asian Football Federation (AFF) football tournament was held in which our national football team was called as Garuda team. The unique profile pictures interest other facebookers in writing comments or even notes on it which will be re-commented by the profile picture uploader. Thus, it will lead to an online conversation written in the form of comments or notes.

2.3 Using Facebook Profile Pictures as Writing Prompt to Develop Students' Writing Interests and Skills

Through Facebook, online writing practice can be facilitated. It brings benefits both to the teacher and the students. For teachers, this kind of practice can help expand creativity in teaching writing. For students, online writing practice provides more fun writing activities. As Warnock (2009) asserts in his book that online writing practice is promising and intriguing for many reasons. It opens a number of opportunities for the students to create so much writing, much of it informal and developmental. It also provides a new learning environment in which the students are required to give their actively independent participation. Students not only learn through reading their writing, but also are engaged in reflective thinking over other students' writing.

Furthermore, this kind of activity provides entertaining ‘writing time’ for the students as they are prompted by pictures before they write. More unique pictures/photos mean more ideas to come and the more the students write, the better their writing skills are.

The following is suggested lesson plan that can be carried out in teaching writing using Facebook profile picture as writing prompt.

- First, create a group in Facebook by using the Groups tool in Facebook and clicking on the Create A New Group button. Be sure to follow the steps including making the group public. Add the students as the members of this group. Every student surely has to have a facebook account.
- Secondly, inside the group, assign the students to write a 100-150 words paragraph on one of profile pictures you display or you link to. Posted paragraph on the picture can then be printed and returned in classroom for revision and discussion. Make a competition every week for three best paragraphs which meet the grading criteria (Schall, 1991). They are:

Composition

1. A clear and logical presentation of ideas
2. Coherent and concise paragraph construction.

Grammar

1. Pronoun/noun consistency
2. Adjective/adverb use
3. Subject/verb agreement
4. Spelling

Punctuation

1. Commas, colons, and semi-colons
2. Hyphens/dashes, and parentheses
3. Other common practices (e.g. proper spacing, indenting, etc)

Sentence Structure

1. Coordination of subjects within the sentence
2. Clarity, lack of wordiness
3. Proper use of modifiers
4. Consistency in tenses, mood, and voice etc.

The grading criteria can be adapted or modified. It can also be presented in the form of writing rubric with a score range e.g. from 1-4 scale.

- Thirdly, invite “guests” into the group so that they can contribute to the discussion boards. There is a real benefit to get other experts talking to the students. The students might establish community with other students and much benefit can be exchanged.
- Finally, encourage the students to post a picture of their choice in order to stimulate their creativity and ask the other students to write a paragraph based on it.

3.CONCLUSION

Online writing practice with facebook profile picture prompt provides the opportunities for the students to practice writing in a new interactive way. It also enables the students to explore more ideas and sharpen their writing skills as well as interest. Not only it encourages students to practice writing more often but it also supports the use of ICT in language learning.

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