Raising Student Engagement through '*Instagram*'

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Abstract: The study was to examine if an *Instagram* post could help to raise students' engagement towards a certain topic. The first step was to introduce and discuss with the students a topic in the class. The students were then asked to find more information about the topic at home, and when they found any, they were asked to post it on their *Instagram* accounts with a certain *hashtag*. Once students posted pictures on *Instagram*, they then were asked to give comments to each other's posts. The aspects explored were the student's engagement and involvement in a discussion off the class, while they were away from the school. Upon completion of the study, I found that there were more students engaged in the discussion; this was shown by the number of pictures the students posted on *Instagram*. This study offered another option for teachers to help students review and get ready for the next class.

Keywords: student engagement, Instagram, hashtag

1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The internet generation, digital natives, or millenials are terms used to describe people who have grown up with the internet. They are groups of young people who were born roughly between 1980 – after 2000.

In their 2008 book, 'Born Digital', John Palfrey and Urs Gasser of the Berkman Centre at Harvard Law School argue that digital natives are groups of people who are growing up with internet. These young people like to use new, digital ways to express themselves. They will likely shooting a Youtube video, for example, while their parents write an essay.

Students nowadays are digital natives; they value on-line interactions just like off-line interactions. They are social network heavy users. For students, social media, like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, or *Instagram,* is like 'an internet in the internet.' This means a social network is turning into a multi-tool service. These digital natives are not only socializing on-line but they also follow fan pages, seek for new information, shop, advertise, and even do campaigns on social media.

In addition, technology has shaped and changed the way students see education, particularly teachers and their classes. They now 'require' their teachers to be active on-line. They expect their teachers to be more aware of social media; they will ask if their teachers have social media accounts and would like them to check, befriend or follow theirs. With this, students feel that their teachers live in the same 'world' with them.

The implication of digital natives in education is real. Students eventually hope that their teachers will integrate technology in their classes. Generally, students think that it is always more interesting if classes utilise computers, internet, videos, or movies. And when technology is absent, they call it boring.

On the other hand, teachers have been increasingly focusing on student engagement as a pivotal point to help students with their achievement. It has primarily been related to increased achievement, positive behaviours and a sense of belonging in students. (Taylor & Parsons, 2011)

When dealing with students, student engagement is seen as a way to re-engage or reclaim students' focus. Teachers have been puzzled with how to get their students aware and ready for classes. Giving students homework assignments or asking students to read a chapter at home a day before the actual classes are often futile. Students often see traditional homework assignments out-dated and boring.

Thus, this paper attempts to observe whether social media, particularly *Instagram*, can help boost students' engagement towards a certain topic of discussion when they are not in the classroom so that students are aware of what they will discuss in class even before they attend classes.

1.1 Problem Identification

Students are digital natives and they are comfortable with the use of internet and social media. They are computer-savvy and often see traditional, pen-and-paper assignments out-dated and boring.

It is then assumed that social media can help raise students' involvement and participation about a topic of discussion. This paper is concerned with the use of social media, particularly *Instagram*, to raise students' engagement towards a certain topic of discussion outside the classroom setting.

1.2 Research Objective

Based on the problem identification above, it can be assumed that the use of on-line social media can help raise students' interest towards a certain topic.

Thus, the objective of the study is whether *Instagram* can be used to raise student engagement of 6th grade students in BINUS Serpong.

1.3 Problem Limitation

The research was conducted in the Elementary department of BINUS School Serpong. The subject of the research was 6th grade students in BINUS Serpong.

However, the research only focused on the students' engagement in the subject English.

1.4 Research Significance

It is expected that this research is able to give contribution to the institution, the teachers and the students.

For the institution, this research can help to justify the need of internet to support teaching and learning practices which in turn will be able to enhance the quality of education in the institution.

This research will also help to inform teachers about a possible way of raising student engagement using a social network service, *Instagram*.

Finally, students will find it interesting for they can utilise what they like to help them prepare for their classes. By interacting on *Instagram*, students' motivation is refined and thus raises their involvement and participation in the class.

2 THEORETICAL DESCRIPTION

2.1 Students' Engagement

Students' engagement started to get significant attention in the mid-1990's.It became the latest focus of attention for many educators to enhance learning and teaching.

Studies conducted on students' engagement concluded robust correlations between students' involvement in a educationally purposive activities and positive outcomes of students' success and development (Astin 1984, 1993; Berger and Milem, 1999; Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Goodsell, Maher and Tinto, 1992; Kuh, 1995; Kuh *et al.*, 2005; Kuh and Vesper, 1997; Pace, 1995; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

There are some education practitioners who propose definition of students' engagement. Among the definitions, there are those proposed by the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University and Kuh *et al*.

2.1.1 Definition of Students' Engagement

Students' engagement has been defined as a "participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes." (Kuh *et. al.*2007)

In addition to that, Coates (2007, 122) has defined engagement as 'a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience' comprising the following:

1. active and collaborative learning;
2. participation in challenging academic activities;
3. formative communication with academic staff;
4. involvement in enriching educational experiences;
5. feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities.

Similarly, in a journal published in 2010 by the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of the students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.

Based on the explanation above, it is clear that students' engagement is mainly concerned with:

1. Active participation in educationally effective, challenging practices inside and outside the classroom.
2. Intention to enhance learning outcomes and enrich educational experiences.

Therefore, there are two behaviours that the researcher wants to observe in this study.

2.2 Instagram

Instagram is an online video-sharing and photo-sharing social network service which enables its users to connect and share their pictures and videos on other social network services such as *Flickr*, *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

There are more than 300 million people who sign up on *Instagram* and shares their moments through pictures and videos online.

2.3 Hashtag

A hashtag (#) is a type of code or label used on social network services that makes the users easier to use it to find messages, posts, pictures or videos under a certain theme or topic. The Oxford Dictionary defines hashtag as a word or phrase preceeded by a hash sign (#) on social media sites such as *Twitter* to identify messages on a specific topic.

For example, on *Instagram*, the hashtag #ESL will allow its users to search for posts, pictures and videos related to #ESL.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

The fact that students are often disengaged with their classes prompted the researcher to conduct this study. This is often caused by the teaching strategies and methods used by the teacher. The use of *Instagram* as an interactive, age-appropriate instrument to aid students with their engagement is expected to be a way of enhancing learning outcomes.

Classroom action research is a strategic way to conduct the study.

3.1 Significance of Classroom Action Research

Classroom action research is aimed at finding what works best in the classroom to improve teaching and learning practices.

Classroom action research is typically personal to a teacher's teaching practices; with this method, a teacher has opportunity to research his/her own impact of his/her own teaching. Therefore, this research has a huge significance for teachers for it is a very effective way of improving teachers' teaching practices.

3.2 Subject and Location of the Research

The subject of the research was 6th grade students of the Elementary Department of BINUS School Serpong.

The research itself was conducted for one moth which comprised planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

3.2.1 Research Variable and Data

The research focused on 'student engagement' which was shown by the students being actively participated in educationally effective, challenging practices inside and outside the classroom.

The data collected and used to observe student engagement in the research was the students' posts and comments on *Instagram*, students' statements, interactions and comments during discussion in the classroom.

Observation and interview were the two methods used in obtaining the data. In conducting this, the researcher, himself, was the one who directly did it.

3.2.2 Research Procedures

For its simplicity, the researcher followed Bridget Somek's action research. The action research process can be seen in the picture 3.2.2.
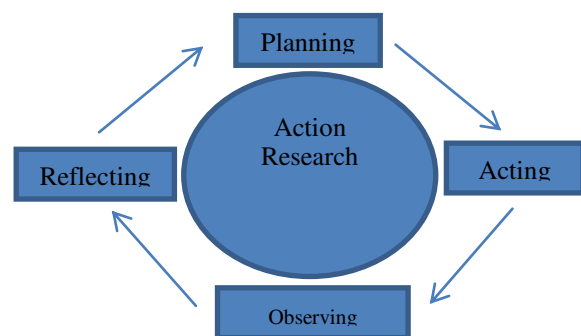

Figure 3.2.2 Action Research Process. (Somekh & Zeicher, 2009)

There were four main stages in conducting the research, namely planning, action, observation and reflection.

The planning stage started by conducting a mini observation and survey on the students' engagement of social media. He observed that the students were very engaged and focused when the teacher shared posts taken from *Instagram* and *Twitter*. This led to a mini survey

on how many students who having at least one social media account.

The mini survey was conducted spontaneously and directly in the class. It was done by the students showing a hand if they had at least one social media account. It was clear that the majority of the students had a social media account, and *Instagram* being the most popular.

The next stage was action. Here the students were informed that they could post pictures on *Instagram* using the hashtags '#6benglish', '#6cenglish', '#6denglish', '#6bidioms', and '#6fidioms'. The students then were asked to give comments and have a small discussion about the posts on-line. The students were given one week time to post.

After the students were explained and informed, the researcher did an observation and collected the pictures posted by the students. During this time, the researcher would share what posts he got from *Instagram* every day in the class and observe how the students were participating in the discussion.

The next stage, reflection, was aimed at evaluating the activities done by the students. It was done by the students discussing and commenting on the use of *Instagram*. They were asked to discuss with a partner and share their thoughts about it.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
4.1 Planning

Observation and planning were crucial in the process of the study. This stage was aimed at knowing the general condition, potential, strengths and weaknesses of the teacher's teaching practices in the class. The data was collected by interview and observation.

The researcher observed the students' homework assignments; on how well they have completed and done their assignment at home. In doing this, the researcher focused on the completed students' English worksheets and workbooks.

The findings were surprising, despite the finished assignments, many items were left unanswered. A small interview with some of the students was then conducted. This interview was aimed at knowing what made the students left many items in the assignments unanswered.

After the short interview, the word 'lazy' and 'forget' became the two most common answers. They, moreover, argued that they felt a bit bored with the assignments.

Based on the initial observation, the researcher can conclude that:
1. Students still did their homework assignments.
2. Students felt lazy and bored with the assignments.
3. Traditional, pen-and-paper homework assignments sometimes ineffective to help students with their schooling at home.

These findings then drew the researcher's attention and led to an assumption that the students would be more engaged with their homework assignments at home if there were some small changes in the types of assignments a teacher gave.

The researcher then assumed that technology and internet could be an effective way to help the students with their assignments.

4.1.1 General Description

This study involved 73 students of the 6th grade in the Elementary Department of BINUS School Serpong.

The initial aspects observed for the success of the study if the students had a mobile phone, internet access at home, at least one social media account and *Instagram*. The general condition of the students based on the initial observation can be seen in the table 4.1.1.

No	General Description of 6th grade students BINUS School Serpong			
	Population		No. of Students	%
1	73	Students with mobile phone	72	98.6
2		Students with internet access at home	73	100
3		Students having a social media account	73	100
4		Students with *Instagram*	62	84.9

Table 4.1.1. General Description of 6th grade students BINUS School Serpong

4.2 Action and Observation

This stage was done by explaining the students that they would need to post pictures on

Instagram about a topic given by the researcher. The students were given one week to post their pictures using two hashtags, *#6benglish, #6bidiom, #6cenglish, #6denglish*, and *#6fenglish*, Then, the students were informed that they could give comments about the posts. Moreover, the students could post their pictures at their own convenience and disposal.

The researcher observed the students' posts on *Instagram* through the hashtags. In the classroom, the researcher show what he found on *Instagram* with the students.

Some samples of the students' posts on *Instagram* could be seen in the figure 4.2.
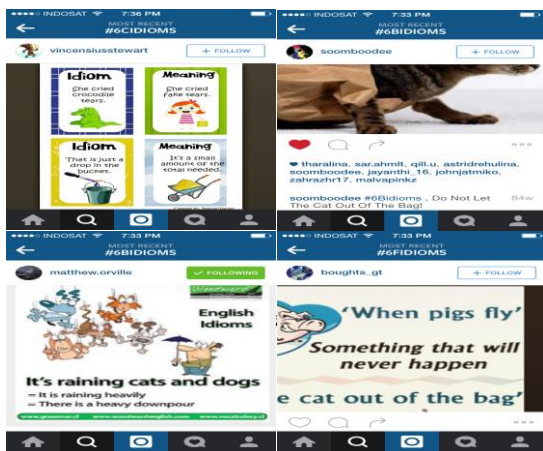
During the observation week, the researcher found that there were many students posted and shared pictures on *Instagram*. The number of students' posting pictures on *Instagram* could be shown in the table 4.2

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No. of students with *Instagram*	No. of students posting pictures on *Instagram*	%
62	57	91.9

Table 4.2. Students' *Instagram* Posts

With 91.9% students' posting pictures on *Instagram*, it was clear to the researcher that students were highly engaged in the activities. Moreover, when brought into class discussions, the posts could be a good instrument to initiate discussion amongst students. The researcher observed that students were more enthusiastic when discussing the posts with their peers in the classroom.

4.3 Reflection

Reflection was done towards the process of planning and how the students reacted to the task on *Instagram*.

Based on the researcher's observation, students were more engaged when they were to post pictures on *Instagram*. It was shown by the numbers of the students' posts and comments. Compared to traditional pen-and-paper homework as homework assignments, using *Instagram* could draw more of students' attention.

A small survey on students' feedback towards the use of *Instagram* in the class showed a promising result. 89% of students described that using *Instagram* in class was interesting, not boring, entertaining, fun, and helpful.

The details of the survey can be seen in the table 4.3.

Students' Feedback on the Use of *Instagram*		
	No. of Students	%
Positive feedback	65	89
Negative feedback	8	11

Table 4.3. Students' Feedback

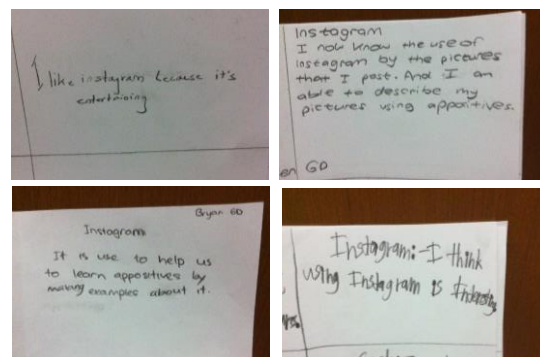Some samples of the students' feedback can be seen in the figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Samples of Students' Feedback

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion above, it could be concluded that the use of *Instagram* in the class was:

1. able to draw more students' attention. This was shown by the number of picture posted by the students on *Instagram.*

2. able to increase the number of students involved in the discussion in class. Students were more focused and attentive when discussing the *Instagram* posts compared to when discussing the traditional pen-and-paper assignments. This was also supported by the feedback from the students.

These two indicators showed that the use of *Instagram* is effective to raise student engagement towards a certain topic.

Suggestion

Based on the summary above, the researcher would like to point out a few things to consider for further study.

Though the research was restricted to the use of *Instagram*, it was arguably possible that in general, students were more engaged to their classes when there is an involvement of technology and internet. Therefore, a study on the use of other social media such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* in class can be conducted.

Moreover, Educational institutions can now start to provide more training for their teachers on the use of technology in education.

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