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Using Instagram to raise the effectiveness of distance learning in English: The experience of Kazakhstani students

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Despite the fact that social media are commonly considered entertaining means of communication, they have educational potential, which grants the teacher an opportunity to influence the learning process carried out in a distance format by means of a targeted system of pedagogical interventions. The problem of the study lies in the fact that in practice, the educational potential of social media is hardly ever used by teachers in Kazakhstan in spite of great opportunities to influence the process of students' distance learning in the English language through a targeted system of measures, filling gaps in educational practice. The purpose of the study is to analyze the effectiveness of distance learning in the English language through the development and approbation of a teaching methodology using the Instagram social network. The main data collection methods used in the study are the survey method and a pedagogical experiment. Surveys of students and experts are employed in establishing the general appropriateness of using social media in educational activities in English lessons, as well as to assess the level of formation of students' general and foreign language competencies. The pedagogical experiment method is used to analyze the effectiveness of social networks in the process of learning English. A method of organizing a thematic online marathon on Instagram is developed and experimentally tested by the authors. The study establishes that social media platforms can become a powerful tool for teaching contemporary students in the distance learning format if the teacher knows how to use their potential in educational work.

KEYWORDS

distance learning, online marathon, teaching English, student competencies, social networking services, social media

Introduction

Modernity makes adjustments in all spheres of activity, contributes to the rapid transformation and informatization of society, the rise of socio-cultural innovation, and the entrenchment of social media (particularly social networks) and information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an integral part of society (Vinichenko et al., 2020; Annushkin et al., 2021; Bobrova et al., 2021).

The Wearesocial international agency, which specializes in research in the field of media, has released a report (*We Are Social*, 2020), which, compared to January 2019, shows a global increase in the number of users: (a) of the Internet by 7%; (b) of social networks by over 9%; (c) of mobile phones by 2.4%. However, the amount of time spent by people on the Internet varies between 4 and 9 h per day, depending on the country. Statistics also show that the Internet has become a common phenomenon in the lives of ordinary citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan and sometimes serves as the sole source of information (Zhusupova, 2021). Young people, having several profiles on various social networks, use them to communicate, search for information and news, view entertainment content, or as a leisure activity (Kuryshcheva et al., 2021).

Social networks are not only an entertaining means of communication between people but also a powerful component of the information and educational environment that has considerable educational potential (Aleksandrova et al., 2021; Tolmachev et al., 2021; Zenin et al., 2021). However, the problem of the study lies in the fact that in practice, the educational potential of social networks is almost not used by educators in Kazakhstan, despite the possibility of a targeted system of measures to influence the learning process of students in a distance format, filling gaps in educational practice (Novikova and Poberezhskaya, 2021; Vrazhnova et al., 2021; Ylina et al., 2022).

Given the recent rise in interest in social media with respect to their use in the educational process at the level of universities, there is still no proven methodology for teaching a foreign language via social media platforms supported by the teaching community. Although there is great potential for the implementation of such a methodology, teachers are satisfied with traditional, tried-and-true teaching practices and, for various reasons, do not incorporate innovative methods into the curriculum.

For these reasons, there is a need to experimentally analyze the effectiveness of the innovative practice of teaching a foreign language by means of social media platforms and outline the prospects of this method in teaching university students. This predetermines the relevance of the present study.

Literature review

The issue of using the educational potential of social networks and students' interaction with them is a debatable one and has already been considered by scientists from different perspectives.

As suggested by Downes (2010), we are now witnessing a social transformation that promotes communication far beyond the technological revolution. In the educational context, it is proven that opportunities for self-expression and authentic interaction positively affect students' academic performance, promoting their language proficiency and general motivation (Promnits-Hayashi, 2011). According to the findings of Yim and Warschauer (2019), social media should be closely integrated into the lives of new millennium students, who tend to be quite pragmatic and results-oriented; in addition, this type of online interaction has a positive impact on the student-student and student-teacher relationships and benefits the learning environment.

The positive and negative aspects of modern youth's interaction on social media are explored by Abradova and Kislovskaja (2018). The social aspects of Internet communication are considered by Gernsbacher (2014).

The use of the Internet, social networking services, and social media in the educational process is discussed by Gray et al. (2013) and McCarroll and Curran (2013); the advisability of their use in institutions of higher education is investigated in Tess (2013), Khan et al. (2016), and Zachos et al. (2018). An analytical review of the development of social networking technologies and the prospects for their use in education was carried out in a study by Khan et al. (2016), where among the didactic advantages of social networking services, the researchers point out the following: access to a large amount of information and systematized experience of others; organization of an active communication process; construction of new knowledge; formation of experience of collaboration.

Several studies (Alloway and Alloway, 2012; Leyrer-Jackson and Wilson, 2018; Wakefield and Frawley, 2020) analyze the relationship between mental health, academic performance, and social media. Another group of studies (Manca and Ranieri, 2016a; Krasilnikov and Smirnova, 2017; Leonard and Vaast, 2017) looks into the instruments of social media as an educational resource. The role of social media in both real and virtual educational work of higher education institutions is covered in Wang et al. (2015) and Feng et al. (2019). The works of Manca and Ranieri (2016b) and Reychev et al. (2016) are devoted to the analysis of certain issues associated with the use of social networks in education (confidentiality, time losses, distraction, the mechanical nature of social networks). A study by Khan et al. (2021) experimentally confirms the impossibility of ignoring the discussed digital instruments in the academic sphere.

Thus, the use of social media in education is not a novel concept, but it acquires greater relevance and a new meaning with the widespread introduction of distance learning. Although the positions of researchers on the feasibility and safety of their use vary, more and more educational institutions are slowly but steadily starting to make use of social media in educational work. For this reason, the outlined issue remains a topic of inquiry.

The conducted review of literature suggests that at the moment, we can distinguish the following functions of the use of social networks in the study of a foreign language, which, as a rule, are realized simultaneously:

- social media as platforms for virtual interaction of people, for establishing communication (the student can ask questions to the teacher and get an answer; the discussion of a shared creative project usually takes place in specially created groups, dialogues, or videoconferences, where everyone expresses their opinions and ideas on the task) (McBride, 2009);
- social media as a means of direct management of the learning process (mandatory reporting by the student on the current status of the offered task, demonstration of work by sending photo and video files; administration of student surveys by the teacher on the complexity of the given topic, etc.) (Mondahl and Razmerita, 2014);
- social media as an opportunity to share and preserve published information (suggestions of interesting supplementary materials, which predominantly come from students: useful video stories, interviews, or music videos) (Blattner and Lomicka, 2012);
- social media as virtual “bulletin boards” (distribution of organizational information as part of academic and extracurricular activities, carried out by both the teacher and the students) (Blattner and Lomicka, 2012).

Meanwhile, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, opportunities to use social media in the educational process largely remain understudied, with the exception of a number of works of general theoretical (Bukaeva and Magzumova, 2015) and sociological nature (Zhumabaeva and Brimkulov, 2019). There are also no practically implemented methods of distance learning that utilize the educational potential of social media (Zhamalieva et al., 2017), which can be explained by the reluctance of teachers, who typically refer to students getting distracted from the educational process due to the use of social networks in teaching (Zhumabaeva and Brimkulov, 2019).

The purpose of this article is to analyze the effectiveness of distance learning in the English language through the development and approbation of a teaching methodology using the Instagram social network.

In connection with the formulated goal of the study, we pose the following research questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of students’ use of social networking sites?
- (2) Is the use of social networks in educational activities in English classes appropriate?
- (3) What is the effectiveness of distance learning in English with the use of the teaching methodology utilizing the Instagram social network?

Materials and methods

In order to achieve the research objectives, we conducted an experimental study conducted in April-May 2021 on the basis of three universities in Kazakhstan: the Aktobe Regional University named after K. Zhubanov, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, and the Yessenov University.

In the preliminary stage of the study, questionnaires for students and teachers were developed. Items of the questionnaires for students and teachers were evaluated by a team of 15 experts selected based on the criterion of having at least 15 years of experience in teaching a foreign language at the university. With minimal revisions, the questions submitted for examination were deemed sufficient to achieve the purpose of the study.

The experimental study involved a sample of 525 people, including 30 teachers of a foreign (English) language, teaching students of non-linguistic specialties in the first year of university and 495 first-year students of non-linguistic specialties who agreed to take part in the survey.

At the ascertaining stage administered from April 1 to 15, a survey of students was conducted to establish the general feasibility of using social networks in educational activities in English classes and determine the exact platform worthy to take advantage of during the pedagogical experiment.

The student survey is comprised of the following questions:

1. On which social media platforms do you have personal profiles?
2. How much time do you spend on social networking sites on a typical day?
3. What are the main reasons for using social networking sites?
4. Do you use social media to communicate with your teachers?
5. Are you interested in using social media as a learning tool?
6. Do you believe teachers need to learn how to use social media for teaching purposes?

Furthermore, as part of the ascertaining stage, a questionnaire survey of teachers (30 people, as indicated above) was conducted to determine the level of development of

the following general and subject-specific competencies in their students:

- (1) ability to think critically and analyze information;
- (2) linguistic (knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar) and speech competencies (in its four types of activities);
- (3) ability to generate and implement ideas, particularly through online instruments;
- (4) ability to cooperate in a team;
- (5) overall engagement and interest in learning in English lessons.

No teachers who subsequently refused to answer the questions (potential sampling error) were found. At the formative stage in the period from April 16 to 30, the feasibility of using social networks in educational activities in English classes was tested. A thematic online marathon is a clearly structured form of work in social networks, the didactic purpose of which was to develop students' language and speech competencies through the completion of a number of specific tasks within a certain time frame. A thematic online marathon was introduced as part of work on the topic "Mass Media and Internet" in English classes. The thematic online marathon was introduced in the process of teaching English to first-year non-linguistic students (495 people).

The conduct of the online marathon on social media is conventionally divided into several stages:

- (1) Preparatory stage. Teachers, working on the theme "Mass Media and the Internet," developed a series of related thematic tasks, focusing on the goal set. The teachers were given the goal of creating tasks as close to real-life situations as possible. On the one hand, this raises students' interest, engaging students in an online marathon. On the other hand, the instructor can help students apply what they have learned in practice in an interactive way. The conduct of an online marathon on social networks is notionally divided into several stages.
- (2) Organizational stage. The teacher informed students of the rules of participation in the online marathon, generated and distributed links to their tasks among students.
- (3) Implementation stage. The teacher progressively gave students access to new tasks on Instagram at intervals of several days, recorded group work, and gave students feedback. The study of each new section of the topic was accompanied by group homework assignments:

1. creating a slogan and/or a didactic cinquain on the topic;
2. creating a brief survey of peers and relatives regarding the most popular media and communication platforms;

3. filming a video recording of answers to the teacher's questions on the topics of "Mass Media on the Internet."

The final assignment of the thematic Instagram marathon was to create a visual message on the Canva platform on one of the topics: "Modern mass media," "Information consumption," or "The Internet environment: comfort and danger." The messages were required to contain corresponding slogans and notes in English and posted on Instagram under a special hashtag. Each teacher proposed a common hashtag for the students in their group so as to easily find the completed assignments on the social media platform. Furthermore, to ensure greater exposure for their posts, students could use various other hashtags within the topic, which essentially are keywords from the studied topic/section. Posting hashtags under the post also allows for more followers and preferences, which in turn provides additional motivation for students to complete the assignment.

- (4) Final stage. The teacher draws up the results of the online marathon, provided feedback to students on the results of their work and provides recommendations for students for further educational activities.

At the control stage of the study administered from May 11 to 20, a follow-up questionnaire survey of teachers (the number of teachers remained the same throughout the study and amounted to 30 people) who took part in the online marathon was conducted to find out quantitative and qualitative changes in students' competencies. The significance of these changes is established by means of mathematical statistics.

In mathematical processing of the results of the study, the percentage increase of the number of students with high and sufficient levels of development of competencies was determined using the *G*-test.

The null and alternative hypotheses are formulated as follows.

H0: the increase in the number of students with high and sufficient levels of competencies is random.

H1: the increase in the number of students with high and sufficient levels of competencies is not random.

Critical *G*-test values: 76 ($p < 0.05$); 71 ($p < 0.01$).

The *G*-test is calculated by compiling the respective table in Microsoft Excel.

Results

Let us review the results of the student survey regarding the peculiarities of their use of social networks. The results of the

TABLE 1 The main reasons to use social networking sites.

| No. | Answer option | % of respondents |
|-----|---|------------------|
| 1 | Creating one's own posts, photos, and videos | 42% |
| 2 | Watching videos and reading posts by bloggers | 62% |
| 3 | Looking at photos of friends/relatives | 86% |
| 4 | Searching for news | 71% |
| 5 | Communicating with friends/relatives | 98% |
| 6 | Searching for information on hobbies | 68% |

first questions show that the majority of students (89%) have a personal profile on Instagram. For this very reason, further work focuses on the educational use of Instagram, which, among other things, is distinguished by the illustrative nature and simplicity of creating visual messages, posting, and searching for and spreading information.

Responses regarding the amount of time spent by students on social media on a typical day indicate that 20% of the surveyed students spend at least 1–2 h on social networks in a day and 67%—2–3 h a day, which is fairly expected given that their need to perform other types of activities during and after school h.

Answers to the question “What are the main reasons for using social networking sites?” are distributed as follows (Table 1).

As demonstrated in Table 1, students mostly use social networks to communicate with their friends and/or relatives (98%) and browse the photos they post (86%). A considerable share of the respondents look for and get news on social media (71%) and search for information related to their hobbies (68%). However, of note is the significant proportion of first-year students invested in creating content for their social media pages, filling them with posts, photos, and videos of their own making (42%). Thus, contemporary students are active users of social networks, which needs to be taken into account when planning educational work.

Analysis of students' responses to the last questions in the survey shows that the overwhelming majority of them are interested in using social media in learning (95%), already use

them to communicate with teachers in the after h (89%), and consider it a necessity for teachers to master social networks for teaching purposes (99%).

The results of the survey of teachers regarding the levels of students' competencies at the ascertaining stage are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that according to the teachers' observations, only a little more than half of their students (54%) have high and sufficient levels of the ability to think critically and analyze information, while 15% show a low level; just under half (47%) have high and sufficient levels of the language and speech competency, while 14% are at a low level; 69% of the students are able to generate and implement ideas (particularly through online tools) at a high and sufficient level, 6% showing a low level of this competency; most (85%) have developed the ability to cooperate in teams at a high and sufficient level, and 5% have a low level; 59% are actively involved and interested in activities in English classes, but 21% show little involvement in these activities.

Results of the survey of teachers on the level of development of students' competencies at the control stage after the end of the online marathon “The influence of mass media on young students” on Instagram are presented in Table 3.

Comparing and analyzing data from Tables 2, 3, we can state that a positive dynamic is detected in each particular competency. In particular, the analysis of results on the development of the “ability to think critically and analyze information” reveals that the number of students with the high (29%) and sufficient (43%) levels has increased by 9%, each.

The statistical probability of a rise in the number of students at the high and sufficient levels of development of this competency at the two levels of significance is confirmed using the G-test ($G_{emp} = 27$; $G_{emp} < G_{cr}$).

Advancement is also observed in the development of students' language and speech competencies: 33% of students show a high level and 37% have a sufficient level, a difference of 13 and 10%, respectively. The statistical probability of an increase in the number of students with the high and sufficient levels of this competency at two levels of

TABLE 2 Levels of students' competencies at the ascertaining stage.

| No. | Competency | Level of development | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------|---------|------------|------|
| | | Low | Average | Sufficient | High |
| 1 | Ability to think critically and analyze information | 15% | 31% | 34% | 20% |
| 2 | Linguistic (knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar) and speech competencies (in its four types of activities) | 14% | 39% | 27% | 20% |
| 3 | Ability to generate and implement ideas, particularly through online instruments | 6% | 25% | 35% | 34% |
| 4 | Ability to cooperate in a team | 5% | 10% | 43% | 42% |
| 5 | Overall engagement and interest in learning in English lessons | 21% | 20% | 32% | 27% |

TABLE 3 Levels of students' competencies at the control stage.

| No. | Competency | Level of development | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------|---------|------------|------|
| | | Low | Average | Sufficient | High |
| 1 | Ability to think critically and analyze information | 6% | 22% | 43% | 29% |
| 2 | Linguistic (knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar) and speech competencies (in its four types of activities) | 5% | 25% | 37% | 33% |
| 3 | Ability to generate and implement ideas, particularly through online instruments | 3% | 21% | 39% | 37% |
| 4 | Ability to cooperate in a team | 2% | 7% | 46% | 44% |
| 5 | Overall engagement and interest in learning in English lessons | 7% | 10% | 42% | 41% |

significance is confirmed using the *G*-test ($G_{emp} = 15$; $G_{emp} < G_{cr}$).

Results on the competency “ability to generate and implement ideas,” too, show an increased proportion of students at the high (37%) and sufficient (39%) levels. The “ability to cooperate in a team” competency has also undergone a positive change: the prevalence of the relatively high level of development is 2% higher, and that of the relatively sufficient level is 3% higher.

Significant improvement is found in the competency “overall engagement and interest in learning in English lessons”: the number of students with a high level of engagement has grown by 14%, and the number of those with a sufficient level—by 10%. The statistical probability of an increase in the number of students with high and sufficient levels of this competency at two levels of significance is confirmed by the calculation of the *G*-test ($G_{emp} = 8$; $G_{emp} < G_{cr}$).

For clarity, we present the results of the participants' tasks at the beginning and at the end of the thematic online marathon (Table 4).

The results of the thematic online marathon tasks demonstrate that students' performance of the final task, which was to create a visual message in the Canva application, is much better compared to the preceding tasks to creating a slogan and/or a didactic sequin on the topic, a brief questionnaire of peers and relatives about the most popular media and communication platforms, and film a video recording of responses to the teacher's questions on “Mass Media on the Internet.”

Thus, we can observe not only an increase in the studied competencies of students, but also a rise in the quality of performance of assignments on social media.

Since the pilot study has proven the effectiveness of using social media in teaching a foreign language, we faced the question, “What are the reasons for not using social media in teaching?”

For this reason, it was decided to continue the study. The teachers who participated in the online marathon were asked two questions:

1. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of social media in teaching students?
2. For what reasons have you not previously used social media in teaching students?

The results of the supplementary survey are presented in Tables 5, 6.

The most significant positive factor for teachers turns out to be the communication factor, specifically, teacher-student interaction (the presence of students online, student motivation). In this case, we can refer to student-oriented teachers.

The main disadvantage of social networks was noted to be “a multitude of distractions.”

When answering the question posed, half of the teachers (50%) note no significant disadvantages of social media, but point to the self-sufficiency of traditional teaching methods. Teachers also speak about the diversion of students' attention from the learning process, which they explain by the fact of the involvement of personal communications apart from the educational process. One comment by a faculty member reads that “social networks are for free communication, not for learning.”

Discussion

Summarizing the data obtained in our study and in research on the use of social media to improve students' English proficiency, we argue that combining interactive forms and methods of work as part of a thematic marathon contributes to (1) the formation and development of first-year students' vocabulary, their practice in grammatical structures, and improvement of pronunciation; (2) improvement of the speed of speech, as well as communication and cooperation (similar conclusions are made by Mondahl and Razmerita, 2014); (3) advancement of writing skills (when commenting on messages and/or videos of other marathon participants, discussing and debating ideas); (4) identifying gaps in students'

TABLE 4 Results of the thematic online marathon.

| Task | Level of performance | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------|------------|------|
| | Low | Average | Sufficient | High |
| Assignments for the first section of the topic | | | | |
| Creating a slogan and/or a didactic cinquain on the topic | 36% | 30% | 24% | 10% |
| Creating a brief survey of peers and relatives regarding the most popular media and communication platforms | 45% | 26% | 21% | 8% |
| Filming a video recording of answers to the teacher's questions on the topics of "Mass Media on the Internet" | 58% | 21% | 15% | 6% |
| Final assignment | | | | |
| Creating a visual message in the Canva application | 10% | 23% | 37% | 30% |

knowledge and skills [which is observed in training in various types of specialties, for instance, by Khan et al. (2016) on the example of accounting students]; (5) formation of the ability to perform assigned tasks in a limited period of time, highlighting the key aspects of the work (the formation of these skills has become especially relevant in teaching students in the format of remote (distance) learning in the pandemic, for example, as per the study of Khan et al. (2021); (6) development of creative and critical thinking, as indicated, for example, by Alloway and Alloway (2012) analyzing the development of cognitive skills through social media; (7) expansion of the outlook and awareness in a particular subject of study, which is characteristic of students in a variety of specialties (Wakefield and Frawley, 2020); (8) the development of the foundations of information-media and technological literacy, which is stressed in a study by Wang et al. (2015); (9) formation of the habit of learning by doing, which is confirmed base on the example of using Facebook (Promnits-Hayashi, 2011).

TABLE 5 Advantages and disadvantages of social media (teachers' opinions).

| Answers | % of respondents |
|---|------------------|
| Advantages | |
| Students' living environment | 33% |
| Broad accessibility | 10% |
| User-friendly interface | 7% |
| High student motivation | 7% |
| Simple organization of the learning process | 7% |
| Promptness of communication | 3% |
| No answer | 33% |
| Disadvantages | |
| Prior preparation is necessary | 13% |
| A multitude of distractions | 23% |
| The learning process is on display for all to see | 10% |
| No answer | 57% |

The obtained results can be explained by the novelty of students' activities in learning English and their active use of the instruments (social networks) that are part of the real life of modern youth and motivate them.

Meanwhile, Leonard and Vaast (2017) propose two ways of using social media instruments in educational work: (1) integrating these instruments into the current system of education as educational resources; (2) using social networks as an additional teaching channel to supplement modern educational programs, as well as extend the learning environment to the real world and enrich students' learning experiences with real-life practices. This, in turn, coincides with the previously determined functions of the use of social media (a platform for virtual human interaction, management of the learning process, exchange of published information and its preservation, a virtual "bulletin board") in learning a foreign language.

Our findings are also supported by the results of research suggesting that the main advantages of social networks in improving students' learning outcomes include:

1. Opportunity for communication and collaboration. Social networks contribute to learning by offering the features of joint use of documents, such as Google Docs. Students are able to receive a consultation from a teacher in a remote format (Leyrer-Jackson and Wilson, 2018).

TABLE 6 What are the reasons for not using social media in teaching (teachers' opinions).

| Answers | % of respondents |
|---|------------------|
| The need to learn how to use them | 7% |
| The platform is inconvenient/unfamiliar | 10% |
| The use of the platform takes a lot of time | 13% |
| Students get distracted from the learning process | 23% |
| Traditional teaching methods are quite enough | 50% |
| Other | 7% |

2. Search for specific information. Various social media platforms offer great volumes of information that can be of use to students depending on their interests. For example, Tumblr and Pinterest can be a source of inspiration for projects or practical problem-solving. A critical nuance, however, is the ability to distinguish credible and useful information from potentially dangerous, distorted, and/or promotional (Manca and Ranieri, 2016a).
3. Improvement of foreign-language grammar, communication, and reading skills. Social media provides a wealth of information that students often tend to read, especially if that information contains attractive animations and is interactive. Internet posts, comments, news, articles, and books contain an endless supply of information to be processed, which demands students to develop skills in working with foreign language materials and analyzing and summarizing what they read (Feng et al., 2019).
4. Distance learning opportunities. With the help of social networking tools, today's teachers engage students in educational activities during class and after-school hours in the course of distance learning, thus providing full access to education, particularly during the pandemic (Khan et al., 2021).

However, Wang et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of the purposeful use of social media instruments with consideration of their content and/or the educational activity: ICT must be an interactive resource that contributes to the effectiveness and accessibility of teaching and the improvement of students' skills and not replaces education. It is also worth pointing out the responsibility of teachers for the creation of a safe educational environment and the development of students' analytical and critical thinking skills (Reychav et al., 2016) while using social media.

To summarize, we should note that the majority of teachers (60%) initially showed excitement about the idea of the online marathon and enthusiastically implemented it in their teaching practice as an experimental method. After the completion of the online marathon, the number of teachers who agree to use this methodology in the future to increase students' interest in learning a foreign language increased to 73%. At the same time, despite the positive dynamic in the level of students' skills after the marathon and the demonstrated overall effectiveness of using social media in teaching a foreign language, a part of the teachers (27%) still prefer the traditional teaching methods, justifying their position by the high labor costs of preparing an online marathon. Furthermore, this problem is complex in its nature, as in order to effectively use social networks in their work,

teachers need to have a clear understanding of their capabilities (methodology, educational tools) and the methods of evaluation of their work by university management and have effective feedback from students (Arrellano et al., 2022). This leads us to conclude that to ensure a large-scale implementation of social media in university education in Kazakhstan, the first stage of implementation requires specific methods and approved educational technologies, the application of which would allow teachers to use social media in teaching students without additional efforts.

Conclusion

The study explores the educational potential of social networks, particularly Instagram, as a component of ICT in teaching English, including the peculiarities of students' interaction with social media, the advantages and challenges of social networks, and the expediency of their use in teaching English in the framework of distance learning.

The paper proposes and experimentally tests a method for holding a thematic online marathon on Instagram. It is found that social media platforms may become a powerful tool for teaching modern students in the distance format if the teacher knows how to use the potential of social networks in educational work. The results obtained give reason to conclude a positive dynamic in the level of development of each particular competency of a first-year student.

Surely, the implementation of such a form of work as a thematic online marathon requires the teacher to be masterful in pedagogics, have well-developed digital competency, and be ready to flexibly adjust the forms, methods, and techniques of their pedagogical work, guided, first and foremost, by the present realities: the active introduction of distance learning in the midst of the pandemic and the psychological characteristics and needs of modern students.

The prospect of further research could be a comparative study of the educational potential of social networks in the context of emergency remote teaching of the English language to students and effective tools for the evaluation of teachers by university management using innovative forms of teaching academic disciplines.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation was not required for this study in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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