

INVESTIGATING INSTAGRAM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: EXPERIENCES OF INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Information and communication technology (ICT) use in English language learning has developed rapidly, especially with the emergence of social media platforms like Instagram. It is considered one of the instructional technology media in the teaching-learning process. Studies have shown that social media can be used to learn English. This study, at the beginning of the even semester of 2023, examined how students perceive the benefits and the challenges they face using Instagram for English language study. The researchers used the qualitative method of a single case study to examine and understand the phenomena carried out at the English Education Department, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. A purposive sampling method was employed to select the respondents. The respondents must complete the Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) course and have an active social media with a minimum of 500 followers. As such, five students were selected to be involved in this research. The results of the study demonstrated that Instagram, through its features such as reels, stories, or live-streaming features, was perceived as beneficial by all respondents as it enabled them to browse and research materials, helping them in the process of learning English skills. It also provides them with entertainment and revenue opportunities if used professionally. The findings also revealed that besides the benefits gained, social media also posed negative effects such as inappropriate content, fraudulence, and perplexity that may arise from rich content.

Keywords: Social media, Instagram, Instructional technology, English language learning

INTRODUCTION

Today, technology affects our daily lives. Recent technological advances have also benefited English language instruction. "The proliferation of technology, especially with the invention of Web 2.0, the second internet generation, has amplified its integration into teaching, including language teaching"¹ Integrating ICT into English language learning improves students' listening skills.² Social media is an ICT product that is often used to learn languages. Studies have shown that social media can be used to learn English. Social media is known for

¹ Muluk, S., Habiburrahim, H., Safrul, M. S., Hakim, L., & Amiruddin, A. (2023). Scrutinizing online instructional approach: What drives faculty to adopt synchronous virtual classroom. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 11(1), 270-288. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v11i1.19656>

² Az-eddine Khaloufi, and Hicham Laabidi. "An Examination of the Impact of Computer Skills on the Effective Use of ICT in the Classroom," *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics* 2, no.1 (2017): 53-69.

allowing people to share knowledge and information. Students can communicate and make acquaintances in numerous places and countries. Instagram, for example, lets students see images and videos from various countries, allowing them to update local information faster than newspapers.

Instagram, a popular social networking platform, can help with language learning. Instagram helps students learn languages by using Instagram Reels to let students make and share short videos.³ Zaidieh investigates Malaysia's educational challenges and opportunities regarding social media. He found similar results showing that students were relaxed and less stressed, which boosted question time.⁴ This phenomenon differs from their usual classroom reaction to inquiries. Khalitova and Gimaletdinova suggested that Instagram can help students improve their listening comprehension, as Instagram videos help students learn and understand.⁵ Al-Ali argued that using Instagram tools helps students improve oral communication by allowing them to practice a song or describe things to improve speaking skills.⁶

Instagram also has four benefits related to the efforts to hone English skills, such as writing. “The first advantage of using this technique is that it will motivate students to write. Second, using Instagram is convenient and easy. Then, using Instagram needs less paper. Finally, using Instagram is more flexible in terms of time.”⁷

However, social media for English language learning brings several obstacles. Students need interactive communication, which is often difficult. Due to social media's constant presence, students need more motivation to learn. Some students can use social media as an educational tool, but most need help so that they are not distracted by using it just for entertainment purposes.⁸ “Nevertheless, it is frequent to observe students so engaged in social media that they neglect their academic responsibilities. The negative influence of social media

³ Diah Royani Meisani, Nidaan Nungky Chofiyaya, and Reli Handayani, “Captions writing in Instagram: Understanding the Meaning And The Communicative Function In Learning A Language,” *Jambi-English Language Teaching* 1, no. 2 (2016): 90-97.

⁴ Ashraf Jalal Yousef Zaidieh, “The use of social networking in education: Challenges and opportunities,” *World of Computer Science and Information Technology Journal (WCSIT)* 2, no.1 (2012): 18-21.

⁵ Liliia Khalitova and Gulnara Gimaletdinova, “Mobile technologies in teaching English as a foreign language in higher education: a case study of using mobile application Instagram,” *ICERI2016 Proceedings*, 1 (2016): 6155–6161. <https://doi.org/10.21125/iceri.2016.0395>

⁶ Sebah Al-Ali, “Embracing the selfie craze: Exploring the possible use of Instagram as a language m-Learning tool” *Issues and Trends in Educational Technology* 2, no. 2 (2014). https://doi.org/10.2458/azu_itet_v2i2_ai-ali

⁷ Jepri Bobby Sirait, and Leni Marlina, “Using Instagram As a Tool for Online Peer-Review Activity in Writing Descriptive Text for Senior High School Students”, *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(1), 2018: 291–302.

⁸ Cathy Mae Dabi Toquero, “Inclusion of people with disabilities amid COVID-19: Laws, interventions, recommendations,” *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research* 10, no. 2 (2020): 158–177. <https://doi.org/10.17583/remie.2020.5877>

could be characterized as a misdirected priority in time management, requiring students to pay close attention to their educational responsibilities.”⁹

In addition, internet connection and bandwidth issues also play essential roles in successfully utilizing social media in learning. For instance, poor internet availability would prevent students from completing and submitting homework. Few studies have examined students' views on using social media for language learning, especially in the context of the State Islamic University in Indonesia. This limits our understanding of how students view social media gadgets. To fill the knowledge gap, this study examines Indonesian university students' views on using Instagram to learn English and their challenges. Therefore, the study examined how students perceive the benefits and the challenges they face using Instagram for English language study.

People have different views about social networking. One view is that social media can improve learning as students can improve self-expression, engagement, cooperation, information retrieval, knowledge sharing and storage, and writing.¹⁰ They can also get teacher feedback, reflection, and collaborative learning. Social media effectively represents the communication of native speakers in relationships. Instructors should motivate students to document foreign terminology encountered on social media platforms for class discussion. To stimulate student engagement and foster active involvement and cooperation among classmates both in the physical classroom and in virtual environments, social media can enable students to provide assistance and guidance to one another, enhancing cognitive abilities in analytical reasoning in which the teacher will facilitate the discussion to encourage students to engage in more profound thinking.

Social media can also potentially dehumanize individuals by fostering indifference towards their immediate environment.¹¹ Children may develop a dependency on social media, leading to a decline in their enthusiasm for academic pursuits. Consequently, educators and parents must supervise children's social media usage and educate them on appropriate usage. In their study, Drahošová et al. discovered that most respondents, specifically 72.2%, identified the European Union's internet addiction as the most prominent negative aspect.¹² Subpar security measures, excessive information overload, and diminished social connections were among the issues commonly referred to. The amount of time dedicated to social media is a significant disadvantage. These barriers will hinder the student's acquisition of English language skills.

⁹ Kevin Caratiquit and Lovely Jean Caratiquit, “Influence Of Social Media Addiction On Academic Achievement In Distance Learning: Intervening Role Of Academic Procrastination” *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 24, no. 1 (2023): 1-19.

¹⁰ Ana E Sancho-Ortiz, “Analysing the functionality of Twitter for science dissemination in EFL teaching and learning,” *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development* 26, no. 1 (2024): 133–147. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v26n1.105685>

¹¹ Khan, Muhammad Naeem., Ashraf., Muhammad Azeem., Seinen, Donald., Khan, Kashif Ullah., and Laar, Rizwan Ahmad, “Social media for knowledge acquisition and dissemination: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on collaborative learning driven social media adoption” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648253>

¹² Martina Drahošová and Peter Balco, “The analysis of advantages and disadvantages of use of social media in European Union” *Procedia Computer Science* 109 (2017): 1005–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2017.05.446>

RESEARCH METHODS

The researchers used the qualitative method of phenomenology. Qualitative research is used in this study as it aims to examine and understand the phenomena of an individual or group that is considered a social or human problem¹³ and when the distinctions between contexts and phenomena might not be accurate.¹⁴ Within the context of this research, the researchers tried to understand respondents' experiences related to using Instagram in language learning to assess and illustrate participants' opinions and strategies for overcoming challenges encountered while utilizing Instagram as a tool for language acquisition. The authenticity of the sample condition is essential to ensure the study setting is realistic by actively including people and considering their perspectives on the subject. This method generates statistical data on participants' utilization of Instagram or other social media platforms for language learning.

Sampling and Population

The population for this study consisted of 92 students accepted in the 2017 batch in the English language education department at Ar-Raniry State Islamic University in Aceh. A purposive sampling method was employed for this study. To be eligible as respondents of this study, the students must complete the Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) course, in which they used social media to study English. The students were also required to have an active social media presence, specifically Instagram, with a minimum of 500 followers. By having at least 500 followers, the researchers wanted to ensure that the students recruited as respondents in the research had pretty active Instagram accounts. Out of 92 students, five were selected to participate in this research as they fulfilled the requirements.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were sourced from semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview consisted of open-ended questions and lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. The researchers inquired about the students' utilization of Instagram for language study, including their challenges and strategies to overcome them. The researchers also observed the participant's Instagram activity, which included tracking the frequency of photo and video posts and the number of views on their stories. Each of these characteristics signifies Instagram engagement.

Data analysis refers to inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modeling data to discover useful information, conclude, and support decision-making. The researchers transcribed the data from the interview sessions to extract pertinent information. The data was classified into several categories and examined using three interconnected coding techniques: open, axial, and selective coding.¹⁵ The researchers found common emerging themes from the interview data, which were then coded and classified to create a conceptual framework. The thematic analysis

¹³ John W. Creswell and David J Creswell, *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed)*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.

¹⁴ Robert, K Yin, *Case study research and applications: design and methods (6th ed)*. Los Angeles, LA: SAGE Publications, 2018.

¹⁵ Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory, (4th ed.)*, SAGE, 2015.

involved a coding process, which was a crucial step in the data processing stage. These issues were further examined and expanded upon by referencing the existing literature. This implies that the data obtained from thorough interviews after being transcribed comprehensively, were meticulously analyzed using open coding, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss, in order to identify prevalent emergent patterns in the data. Once all the steps are done, we finalize the analysis by arriving at propositions derived from the research questions and interpreting data from other sources, including literature and/or surveys. On the other hand, rationalized codes are primarily generated when coding parts of case study data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of the research are presented based on the research questions. The first part of the research questions deals with the potential benefits of using Instagram to acquire the English language.

Research question 1: Students' perception of the advantages of Instagram for acquiring the English language.

The primary research inquiry investigates the perceived advantages students associate with utilizing Instagram as a tool for learning English. The data analysis unveiled the following themes.

a. Media for information and learning.

An initial significant discovery of the extensive investigation is that students utilize Instagram as a means of acquiring knowledge, as demonstrated by the excerpt from the TF interview:

“For me, Instagram provides information and educational accounts about computers and sometimes about English learning that we can search for. I usually use Instagram twice a day and maybe more. I think there are many benefits from Instagram, not only for getting news but also for getting many things we want to learn, like learning computer skills or especially a foreign language, including English” (TF, interview, November 16).

Based on the interview, TF uses Instagram to examine news articles and computer tutorials. In addition, he believes that Instagram facilitates the acquisition of English language skills for its users. TF's comment is logical, as Instagram offers many courses and videos facilitating language acquisition, particularly for English.

Instagram aids individuals in distinguishing between American and British English pronunciation. English learners found Skinny Fabs and other educational Instagram accounts to be popular. In an interview on November 18, ZR disclosed that:

“There are a lot of educational accounts on Instagram, like skinny fabs, that used to be popular with those who wanted to learn English. He taught us about American English and British English to us and so much more”.

Concerning task submission, Instagram can be a valuable tool for submitting assignments, as suggested by TF.

"Our instructor mandates that we submit our assignments on Instagram and provide them with the link for evaluation. This approach is advantageous as it enables us to improve and make our tasks more captivating."

According to TF, Instagram is an excellent platform for enhancing English language skills as it stimulates creativity and facilitates learning. ALZ stated that he sometimes comes across educational profiles and English learning stuff on Instagram but does not utilize it for educational purposes.

"I generally do not utilize Instagram for educational endeavors." Occasionally, when I see an account sharing informative stuff, I follow them. I am convinced that this is advantageous for us, especially in acquiring proficiency in the English language, specifically by enhancing our pronunciation skills".

According to the ALZ statement, Instagram offers a variety of educational resources to assist students in enhancing their language skills. ALZ claims that Instagram postings can contribute to improved English-speaking abilities. This is feasible due to the abundance of free English-related content on Instagram.

In an interview on November 21, Participant AF acknowledged that social media, particularly Instagram, might be advantageous for students based on their objectives.

"Instagram is widely used daily by almost everyone. Personally, I find it difficult to detach from my phone as I use Instagram more than five times a day. While Instagram offers numerous educational accounts, we selectively engage with and learn from them based on our personal preferences. For instance, if one desires to learn a language, exploring options such as Kampung Inggris and similar platforms would be advisable. If you desire to acquire knowledge about technology, it is advisable to direct your attention to the study of technology".

AF's response demonstrates that Instagram is a valuable source of contemporary technological knowledge. Individuals with an interest in technology can derive significant advantages from utilizing Instagram.

"The utilization of digital devices, specifically social media platforms such as Instagram, has enhanced convenience by eliminating the need to carry books physically." These platforms provide movies, facts, and animations that improve our learning experience and make it more captivating". (AF, interview, 21st).

The example demonstrates that Instagram facilitates students' learning by minimizing the necessity of carrying physical books to class. Participant AR suggests that Instagram can potentially enhance student learning due to its numerous reputable language-learning accounts.

The respondent mentioned that they discovered several beneficial Instagram pages, such as GIA and Kampung Inggris. These profiles offer TOEFL prediction examinations, registration services, and language study opportunities on the platform. The interviews revealed that most participants discovered many English learning resources that enhanced their linguistic proficiency. Notably, one participant specifically utilized Instagram as a platform for language acquisition.

b. Entertainment media.

Instagram's material, which is tailored to users' interests, serves as a means of alleviating boredom. It functions similarly to subscribing to preferred content creators. Some users actively follow foreign content creators on the platform, believing it enhances their language fluency.

"We can also surveil the actions of foreign actors or actresses and observe their daily schedules, as well as their participation in Islamic content or dawah videos."
(AR, interview, 25th)

AR's snippet suggests she amuses herself by following international individuals and her preferred actresses on Instagram. Meanwhile, participant ZR utilizes Instagram as a means to pass the time.

ZR observed that he frequently uses Instagram to pass the time and finds it engaging. Instagram has become an addictive habit for him, with approximately 10 visits per day. He turns to this application during boredom because he does not engage in gaming activities. ALZ and ZR have the same number of Instagram followers. However, ALZ distinctly utilizes Instagram compared to ZR. When ALZ becomes demoralized by a series of losses, he posts on Instagram.

"Instagram is a social media platform that I occasionally use to alleviate my boredom, although I do not use it frequently." I usually log into Instagram twice daily, or even more frequently." (ALZ, November 23).

Based on the ALZ extract, it is evident that he utilizes Instagram a minimum of two times daily, indicating that he is not hooked to it. ALZ prefers mobile games, particularly Mobile Legends, over Instagram. Participant AF observed that in contemporary society, individuals utilize technology and social media for amusement, engaging with mobile games and various social media platforms.

"Presently, Instagram is a highly popular application that is utilized by individuals on a daily basis. Detaching oneself from the cell phone has grown progressively challenging, and I personally find myself using Instagram more than five times daily." (AF, November 21).

According to interviewees, Instagram may be enjoyable and educational, particularly when following content creators from other countries.

c. Business media.

Social media marketing is widely embraced due to its user-friendly nature and accessibility across all age groups. Media platforms serve as hosts for product photographs and videos, enabling businesses to reach a vast audience. Participant ZR mentioned that Instagram has been beneficial for his company.

"Digital marketing is a highly popular and profitable field in the present era, particularly for individuals not interested in pursuing a career in teaching." Prior to expanding its scope, it is crucial first to attain fluency in English or another foreign language. Using platforms such as Instagram or other social media channels can successfully accomplish this objective".

The text ZR illustrates how media can advertise products, disseminate reviews, and expand sales into hitherto untapped markets. According to interviews, Instagram offers various advantages for student activities, particularly in real-life situations. The use of

Instagram allows us to have control over its usage. Educators can utilize films and photos on Instagram to enhance the appeal of learning. Additionally, it can be employed to promote and advertise products and services in real-life situations that necessitate the use of social media.

Research Question 2: Challenges posed by Instagram for students studying English as a second language.

Students encounter difficulties when using Instagram as a tool for language acquisition.

a. Require additional guidance.

Instagram contains substantial user-generated content, some of which may be unsuitable or lacking instructional value. Participant ALZ expressed that the content on Instagram can be inappropriate.

"Is it accurate to say that we do not exclusively use Instagram for educational purposes? Certain accounts regularly upload videos on a daily basis, and I perceive them as unsuitable," ALZ stated in a November 23 interview.

According to the extract, ALZ has discovered that the abundance of content on Instagram may not be suitable for English learners. Most interviewees were highly familiar with Instagram and expressed confidence in their ability to use it. However, one participant expressed dissatisfaction with a specific platform feature, as they solely utilize it for educational purposes.

b. False identities

Several Instagram accounts create parodies of well-known individuals or organizations, leading followers to follow these accounts mistakenly. These artificial profiles are created to accumulate followers and generate revenue.

"When I choose to monitor an account or organization, they need to provide me with the necessary information." (Interviews with AR, November 25).

AR's comment highlights the abundance of counterfeit profiles on Instagram, creating a challenge for users to acquire knowledge and locate information. Participant AF concurs. Occasionally, a technology-oriented social media account shares stuff irrelevant to its primary focus. Despite having a substantial number of followers, the account gives the impression of being devoid of meaningful content. The AF sample indicates that Instagram has a multitude of profiles, albeit not all of them are genuine users. Certain individuals fabricate false accounts and follow their authentic accounts to obtain endorsements.

c. Novice users on social media platforms

Instagram beginners should acquaint themselves with its characteristics. Not all Instagram users are skilled, and they may occasionally feel perplexed when instructed by their instructor to submit assignments on Instagram.

"Certain individuals may encounter difficulties effectively utilizing Instagram, particularly in uploading their content on Instagram TV or reels."

The task committee posits that some students cannot utilize Instagram and require supplementary guidance.

DISCUSSION

In 2012, Facebook acquired Instagram, a widely used social networking platform launched in 2010. Instagram is available on various digital devices globally. It is designed for sharing photos and videos and also offers features such as direct messaging and live video chats. Instagram stands out from text-based social media platforms due to its emphasis on visual content.¹⁶ Educators may distinctly utilize Instagram compared to other social media sites.

Five students from Aceh Islamic University were questioned for the debate. Students exhibit diverse perspectives on using social media for English learning, presenting a range of advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, they employ several methods to address language learning issues on Instagram. Participants have identified that Instagram offers various potential advantages, such as opportunities for acquiring knowledge and education, independent learning, and social media learning. In this instance, Instagram is fun. This response is in line with the findings of the research conducted by Safitri et al., which states the versatility of social media in learning and practicing English.¹⁷

Several participants expressed that engaging in the activity aids in acquiring knowledge, provides amusement, and alleviates feelings of monotony. This includes tracking their preferred stars and actresses and viewing religious content on Instagram. Instagram is frequently utilized to submit coursework and assignments to lecturers. Engaging in English practice on social media enhances students' proficiency in technology, communication, creativity, and open-mindedness.

Certain Instagram profiles may be inactive, solely used to observe others, or devoid of content. These accounts have the deliberate purpose of increasing their number of followers in order to earn popularity or sponsorships. Individuals who are inexperienced in broadcasting content on Instagram TV or Reels and are also students or users of Instagram are commonly referred to as social media novices.

The study inquires about the methods by which pupils might rectify these problems. My participant proposed the thoughts. Following Skinny Fabs, GIA, and Kampung Inggris on Instagram is highly recommended. Ultimately, they furnish valuable information and instructional resources for individuals seeking to improve their English language proficiency. Alfahadi (2020) examined the use of social media in EFL programs at Tabuk University. The educational materials offered a combination of auditory, textual, and visual resources to enhance students' English language skills through interactive conversations and constructive evaluations from their peers.

¹⁶ Matthew Pittman, and Brandon Reich, "Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words", *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62, 2016: 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.084>

¹⁷ Mutia Safitri, Atik Yuliyani, Farida Hamid, and Amin Suriaman, "The use of social media for learning English: Students' perspective", *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 8(2), 2022: 269-276. <https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v8i2.6477>

Establish an independent Instagram account to investigate and analyze its functionalities in the context of self-directed education. This information can be utilized by the user's main account. According to Halverson (2010), social media users provide assistance and guidance to their students and mentor their friends. If the learner requires assistance in comprehending, he can seek guidance from a buddy who can act as a mentor on social media platforms such as Instagram.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to gather participants' viewpoints on the advantages and disadvantages of using Instagram to learn the English language. These opinions will be evaluated against reliable sources to conclude. The findings of this study demonstrate that Instagram is beneficial for individuals learning the English language

The platform provides various English language content such as TOEFL forecasts, instructional video courses, and writing exercises supported by photos. It contributes to English language acquisition as it offers essential and informative content. Student films and educational materials produced by these creators assist in learning English. However, the respondents also mentioned the downsides of using Instagram as a learning media, especially those related to inappropriate content, fraudulence, and perplexity that may arise from rich content.

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