



Secondary School Students' Perception of Utilizing Instagram to Learn English Vocabulary: A case Study

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Abstract: Integrating social media platforms, particularly Instagram, into educational settings has garnered significant attention due to its potential for enhancing language learning, specifically vocabulary acquisition. This study aims to investigate the students' perceptions and utilization of Instagram's features specifically for English vocabulary acquisition. The study explores two key questions: Firstly, it seeks to understand students' perceptions regarding incorporating Instagram into their vocabulary learning process. Secondly, it aims to examine how students utilize the various features of Instagram to facilitate their vocabulary acquisition. The data are analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method, presented as the result of an interview transcript and document review. The result of the study shows that students have a positive perception of using Instagram for learning English. Participants expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity to practice English in real-life contexts through posting, receiving feedback, and interacting with native speakers and other learners worldwide. This positive perception is further supported by their increased motivation, confidence, and sense of accomplishment in improving their language skills. The students also utilize the various features of Instagram such as direct messages, caption, and post to facilitate their vocabulary acquisition.



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INTRODUCTION

Social media is growing rapidly and has permeated many aspects of life, including education. Social media offers greater access to information, enables collaborative learning, and facilitates innovation in learning and teaching. Social media programs serve four primary functions: entertainment, sociability, information dissemination, and academic pursuits (Yuniar, 2020). Hence, in contemporary times, numerous students utilize social media not only for communication and entertainment but also for educational purposes. The reason for this is that social media offers a benefit in efficiently, rapidly, and immediately spreading educational content or information.

In an educational setting, utilizing technology can help students to improve their academic performance (Agustin, 2021). Instagram is a highly famous and commonly utilized social networking platform. Instagram is a digital platform that allows users to share photos and videos through the internet and mobile devices. It also provides social networking features. Instagram was introduced in October 2010 and quickly garnered widespread

acclaim. Instagram can also be utilized as a substitute tool for educational purposes, particularly in acquiring proficiency in the English language (Mamudi, 2022).

The use of Instagram as a medium for learning English is no longer uncommon in the learning process. By watching Instagram content posts in the form of photos or videos, you can increase students' motivation to learn English and try to improve their English skills. Although it is not uncommon for students to get distracted from other content, opening Instagram every day and viewing English content can increase students' motivation in learning English so that they can use it for everyday (Hikmah et al., 2024; Khasanah, 2023) With the development of technology, the use of Instagram as a learning medium is considered effective and well received by students.

Instagram is considered capable of improving students' understanding and abilities in vocabulary, reading, listening and speaking. In the vocabulary aspect, students are able to add a lot of new vocabulary through captions or any writing on Instagram. This is supported by research by (Handayani & Pratiwi, 2023) with the results that students' perceptions agree that captions can add new vocabulary and master vocabulary. Through Instagram, it can increase students' interest in learning English and broaden their knowledge as a preparation for learning English. Apart from that, research by (Anindita & Noveintine, 2022) stated that in their research students always open and play Instagram every day. By using Instagram students can engage with content in an interactive manner. Through Instagram, students can connect with various channels, such as native speakers to special English learning accounts. Students feel that Instagram is not only a medium for communication but can also be used as an interesting learning medium.

Instagram could be an educational platform for submitting assignments, creating videos, sharing images, and engaging in other activities. Instagram has gained the interest of teachers as a social media platform that can be utilized to improve students' vocabulary skills in language study (Hairul & Nurhayati, 2023). Vocabulary is one of the language components that must be considered when learning English and other languages. In order to enhance students vocabulary, teachers must furnish them with an approach for obtaining new vocabulary. An essential factor in vocabulary acquisition is the development of student interest in the topic matter. The teacher's role in teaching vocabulary is closely linked to technological advancement, and Instagram offers an engaging alternative that captures students' attention in vocabulary acquisition (Agustin & Ayu, 2021).

Instagram provides students with the opportunity to enhance their English proficiency, hone their interpersonal abilities by engaging with others, and foster a sense of self-directed learning. Instagram offers several elements that enable users to acquire a multitude of language-learning skills, including the expansion of vocabulary. Instagram is a good resource for gaining knowledge about the English language, specifically for improving vocabulary (Agustin & Ayu, 2021).

Therefore, the researcher is interested in acknowledging the students' perception of using Instagram to learn vocabulary. The researcher is interested in researching the tenth-grade students of one private school in Yogyakarta. Because, in general, students use social media, such as Instagram, to communicate with their friends, get information, or learn English. The research explores two key questions: Firstly, it seeks to understand students' perceptions regarding incorporating Instagram into their vocabulary learning process.

Secondly, it aims to examine how students utilize the various features of Instagram to facilitate their vocabulary acquisition. By exploring these aspects, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness and potential of Instagram as a supplementary tool for enhancing English vocabulary learning among students.

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

In this study, there are two main points used as the underlying theories. The first one concerns the Instagram application, while the second relates to the theory about perception. Those theories are elaborated as follows.

Instagram is a valuable tool for improving vocabulary levels among students due to its easy-to-use interface, engaging features, and language learning benefits, with all agreeing on its usefulness for vocabulary development (Wulandari & Kunci, 2022). Learning vocabulary through Instagram is possible because the platform has become more than just a place to share photos. Instagram has several features that support learning, such as posting pictures, videos, stories, and reels. Kamal (2019) discovered that students who utilized Instagram as a tool for learning English vocabulary substantially enhanced their comprehension of vocabulary.

Many teachers and educational institutions have utilized this platform to share knowledge, offer study tips, and promote discussions on certain topics. Many accounts are dedicated exclusively to education and language learning, providing varied and useful content. Content creators creatively create learning videos that are short in duration but the material explained remains structured, clear and the material is well received. This is supported by research by (Saputro & Erzad, 2023) who stated that in their research students like to explore English learning content on Instagram rather than conventionally. This is because students do not feel bored and can listen to English directly from native speakers. In line with these findings, Gómez-Ortiz et al. (2023) emphasized that students reported having a very positive experience acquiring new vocabulary and communicating in English through Instagram, reinforcing the importance of learners' perception in the effectiveness of Instagram as a learning tool.

Interestingly, the use of visuals also plays an important role in learning. Instagram allows words and phrases to be presented with attractive pictures or illustrations, making it easier for learners to remember them better. Not only that, many accounts also present quizzes or games aimed at interactively improving vocabulary. Through interaction with an active learning community, users can share new words and support each other in learning. Features such as videos and stories on Instagram allow content creators to provide more in-depth explanations of certain words and phrases so learners can learn by listening and seeing the use of words in different contexts.

Students' perceptions of Instagram's use for learning also play an important role in its successful use as a learning tool. The notion of perceptions derives from the idea of viewpoints or perceptions about media like Instagram as the media in English Language Teaching (Bestari, 2020). Acquiring proficiency in the English language can be challenging, prompting educators to create innovative resources and instructional tools to facilitate English language acquisition among their students. In order to avoid misinterpretations, it is

crucial to understand students' perspectives. To prevent any misconceptions about students' comprehension of the teaching and learning process, it is imperative for teachers to be aware of their students' perspectives on the materials and media used in the classroom.

Perception is a cognitive process through which individuals analyze and comprehend sensory input from their environment. It is shaped by internal factors such as personal experiences, needs, and expectations, as well as external factors including stimulus characteristics and environmental context (Karang et al., 2023). In the context of educational research, perception is operationally defined as students' evaluative responses and attitudes toward the use of Instagram in blended learning—particularly regarding aspects such as convenience, motivation, engagement, and perceived usefulness (Sari & Wahyudin, 2019).

According to Irwanto (2002) in Ilma (2023), perception can be classified into two primary categories: positive and negative. Positive perception is the subjective evaluation of an object, event, or circumstance regarded favorably or in line with expectations. It is a positive perspective that motivates individuals to observe their surroundings. It refers to perceiving information in a favorable or relevant way concerning the item being assessed. This perception is shaped by individual happiness with the thing, the presence of particular knowledge, and the personal experience of perceiving the object.

Negative perception is the subjective evaluation of an object, event, or circumstance seen or understood negatively. Adverse perception can give rise to unpleasant inclinations, such as avarice, hatred, wrath, and affective states.

Karang et al. (2023), students' perceptions of the learning process are really important and deserve to be investigated. Teachers can use this perception to evaluate the systems, methods, or learning materials that they use with their students.

Students' perceptions of using Instagram for learning also play an important role in its successful use as a learning tool. Students' personal experiences influence these perceptions, their expectations of the learning process, and the quality and relevance of the content presented on the platform. Students who feel that Instagram provides relevant, interesting, and useful content for learning will tend to have a positive perception of its use as a learning tool. On the other hand, students who feel that the content presented is irrelevant or uninteresting may have a negative perception towards using Instagram in learning.

In the context of using Instagram for learning, students' perceptions are influenced by various factors. Their past experiences with the platform, their individual learning preferences, and their expectations of what constitutes effective learning all contribute to how they perceive Instagram as a tool for education. Additionally, the characteristics of the content presented on Instagram, such as its relevance, quality, and format, also impact students' perceptions of its suitability for learning purposes.

Understanding the intricacies of perception can help educators and content creators tailor their approach to using Instagram as a learning tool. By considering both the internal factors that shape students' perceptions and the external factors related to the content and context of learning, educators can design educational experiences on Instagram that resonate with students and enhance their learning outcomes.

Conversely, if students perceive the content on Instagram as irrelevant or uninteresting, they may develop a negative attitude towards using it for educational

purposes. This highlights the importance of curating high-quality and relevant content on the platform to enhance students' learning experiences and foster positive perceptions. Educators and content creators should consider students' preferences and interests when designing educational content for Instagram. By creating engaging and meaningful content that resonates with students, educators can cultivate a positive perception of Instagram as a valuable learning resource. Additionally, providing opportunities for student feedback and participation can further enhance their sense of ownership and engagement with the learning process on Instagram.

Some previous research has been done to determine the students' perception of using Instagram to learn vocabulary. The first study was conducted by Ratnasarie (2023), entitled *Investigating Students' Perception Toward the Use of Instagram in EFL Learning*, observes students' perceptions of the use of Instagram in EFL learning. The subjects are 90 XII grade SMAN 1 Jatiagung, South Lampung, and Lampung Province students. The data were obtained using a questionnaire. Then, they were analyzed using the descriptive qualitative method. The results indicated that most students positively perceive the use of Instagram in their EFL learning.

Another research proposed by Verawati et al. (2021), in their research entitled *Students' Perception of Instagram-Assisted Vocabulary Learning with Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy*, examined high school students' perceptions of survival vocabulary learning through Instagram. The results showed that students positively perceive the use of Instagram. They consider Instagram to be an interesting application. Through Instagram, students can share ideas and thoughts with friends; group activities make students more confident and enthusiastic. They can actively and independently learn words, increase their vocabulary list, and improve their cognitive ability to learn words.

Furthermore, Wilda (2023), in her study entitled *Students' Perception towards the Use of Instagram Carousel Content in Learning English Vocabulary in Third Semester at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta in the Academic Year of 2022/2023*, shows that students show positive perception. Based on cognitive, conative, and affective effects, utilizing Instagram as a medium of language learning can increase concentration and arouse students' interest in any uploaded learning content. Instagram Allows students to study anywhere and at any time, the learning flexibility needed to study comfortably without coercion.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore students' interactions with Instagram in an educational context. Qualitative research is a methodology that seeks to understand people's experiences and perspectives through in-depth analysis of non-numerical data. It is a powerful tool for gaining insights into complex issues and generating new ideas

The case study approach is a qualitative research methodology that involves an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon or case within its natural setting. This approach is particularly useful when there is a need to gain a detailed understanding of a complex issue, event, or phenomenon in its real-life context (Priya, 2021).

The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews, which aligned with the case study approach to capture detailed student experiences. Through in-depth interviews, the researchers were able to explore the complexities and nuances of the students' interactions with Instagram, uncovering underlying motivations, attitudes, and behaviors related to their academic pursuits. Additionally, the use of digital documents complemented the interview data by providing additional context and supporting evidence. Then, the researcher utilized document as supplementary data source. Those methods were combined to gain the detail information.

The researcher conducted interview to five students of X grade combine data collection from digital document. The researchers selected this population because wanted to focus on students who are active users of Instagram, assuming that their social media activity might have an impact on their academic performance. By conducting the study within this specific group, the researchers could gather relevant data to analyze the relationship between Instagram usage patterns and academic achievement.

The qualitative data collected from interviews and document reviews were analyzed using the interactive model of analysis promoted by Miles and Huberman (1994). This model provides a systematic framework for organizing, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data in a rigorous and comprehensive manner. In this approach, data analysis involves several interconnected stages, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perception of Using Instagram to Learn Vocabulary

Students learn English through Instagram for several reasons. Some of them are because students feel that learning through Instagram is fun. After all, the content on Instagram is exciting.

"I like using Instagram because the content is very interesting and diverse. there are photos and videos. with interesting content, I can quickly understand and learning becomes less boring"
Participant A.

This quote illustrates that the multimodal nature of Instagram—which includes photos and videos—enhances student engagement. The variety of content formats can help maintain attention and make vocabulary input more memorable. This supports the idea that visual and interactive media contribute to more effective vocabulary acquisition, especially for visual learners. In addition, this was also stated by Participant C:

"I like learning English on Instagram because on Instagram the content is interesting and not boring. every day there are new vocabulary that I learn through Instagram. learning English through Instagram is more fun than learning through books" Participant C

This quote reflects that students perceive Instagram as an engaging learning environment that offers constant exposure to new vocabulary in an enjoyable way. The element of fun and the frequency of encountering English content contribute to vocabulary acquisition through incidental learning, where students absorb language

without formal instruction. This supports theories of informal digital learning and motivation-driven acquisition, suggesting that learners are more likely to retain language input when they are interested and emotionally engaged.

Instagram, as a visual platform, enables users to share images and videos, making content more contextual and easier to understand. This multimodal nature helps reinforce language comprehension, especially for visual learners.

Participants B, D, and E also emphasized Instagram's interactive features such as captions, comments, Direct Messages (DMs), and likes, which promote authentic language use and interaction with others.

“On Instagram, I like to make statuses or post photos and videos using captions in English. Usually my friends will give me comments in comment column feature. And I gain new vocabulary from that” Participant B

“I like using Instagram, because I like to make statuses in English. I think Instagram is a good social media to learn English because I like to write and share my daily life on Instagram. With Instagram, my writing can be read by many people, and I hope my writing can inspire others” Participant D

“I like learning English, because there are many native speaker accounts. Moreover, on IG there is a comments feature, so I can reply to comments with native speakers. thus increasing my English language skills, especially in vocabullary” Participants E

This shows that Instagram is interesting because it has various features that allow users to interact with others in English. For example, the caption feature allows users to add English text to their posts to practice writing in the language. In addition, the direct message (DM) feature allows users to communicate directly with others, either privately or in groups, to talk, ask questions, or share information in English.

Based on the data, Instagram could significantly enhance students' English skills. The analysis of the interview shows a positive response toward Instagram in learning English. In this study, students perceived highly positive attitudes, motivation, self-confidence and acquisition of English language skills after using Instagram. A positive response can be categorized as a positive perception; as stated by Oleh Irwanto in Irma (2023); positive perception is the subjective evaluation of an object, event, or circumstance regarded favourably or in line with expectations. It is a positive perspective that motivates individuals to observe their surroundings. It refers to perceiving information in a favourable or relevant way concerning the assessed item. This perception is shaped by individual happiness with the thing, the presence of particular knowledge, and the personal experience of perceiving the object.

The Instagram features that students use to enhance their vocabulary skills

Instagram encourages creativity and self-expression through the creation and sharing of content, which in turn supports the development of vocabulary skills. By using captions and posts on Instagram, students can express themselves in English, whether they are

sharing their thoughts, experiences, or insights. This platform offers them a unique opportunity to practice their English writing skills authentically. Students can experiment with various writing styles, tones, and vocabulary choices to effectively convey their messages. This process not only enhances their language proficiency but also fosters a sense of ownership and pride in their language learning journey.

“Using Instagram to enhance my vocabulary skills feels like a fun and interactive way to learn outside of traditional classroom settings. When I write captions or describe my photos in English, I'm not just practicing language; I'm using it in real-life situations. It's a practical way to apply what I've learned and explore new words and expressions. Seeing my progress on Instagram is incredibly motivating—it encourages me to keep learning and improving my language skills every day.” Participant B

“I love using Instagram! It makes learning English more enjoyable and meaningful because it allows me to connect with other learners and share tips and ideas. Engaging with this supportive community on Instagram not only enriches my vocabulary but also helps me refine my language skills through meaningful interactions and exchanges” participant C

Through the process of creating and sharing content on Instagram, students receive feedback from their peers and followers. This feedback can be constructive criticism, encouragement, or validation of their efforts. Moreover, validation of their efforts boosts students' confidence in using the language and reinforces their learning progress. Through reflection on feedback, students gain insights into their strengths and weaknesses in English communication. They can then apply these insights to refine their content creation skills, whether it involves writing captions, composing posts, or engaging in discussions:

“ I create posts on Instagram by writing captions or sharing photos of daily activities in English. This practice helps me strengthen my vocabulary as I describe my experiences and thoughts. Interacting with others who are also learning English allows me to exchange ideas and learn new expressions. When my friends leave positive comments on my posts, it boosts my confidence and motivates me to continue practicing and enhancing my English skills. Their encouragement reinforces my dedication to improving and striving for better language proficiency.” Participant A

“I often revisit my posts on Instagram to read the comments or suggestions given. This helps me gain new insights and develop better vocabulary skills in English. By reflecting on the feedback, I can identify ways to expand my vocabulary and enhance my language use, making my communication more effective and engaging”. Participant D

Participant A described, “When my friends leave positive comments on my posts, it boosts my confidence and motivates me to continue practicing and enhancing my English skills.” Participant D added, “By reflecting on the feedback, I can identify ways to expand my vocabulary and enhance my language use.” These reflections show that Instagram enables a reflective learning cycle where students not only produce language output but also engage in metacognitive strategies—reflecting on their language use, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and applying feedback constructively.

Additionally, access to diverse English content on Instagram helps students immerse themselves in authentic language contexts. Educational accounts, reels, stories, and posts allow learners to explore vocabulary in real-life usage and engage with English in informal yet meaningful ways. This aligns with Hairul (2023), who noted that Instagram in EFL learning can motivate students, increase their confidence, and develop positive attitudes towards learning English.

“I create posts on Instagram by writing captions or sharing photos of daily activities in English. This practice helps me strengthen my vocabulary as I describe my experiences and thoughts. Interacting with others who are also learning English allows me to exchange ideas and learn new expressions. When my friends leave positive comments on my posts, it boosts my confidence and motivates me to continue practicing and enhancing my English skills. Their encouragement reinforces my dedication to improving and striving for better language proficiency” Participant E

Collectively, these responses demonstrate that Instagram contributes to vocabulary growth not only by facilitating content production but also by fostering a collaborative and motivating environment that supports both language development and learner identity. The platform encourages consistent use of English, exposure to varied vocabulary, peer interaction, and self-reflection—all of which are essential to meaningful language learning.

By actively engaging with Instagram, students can enhance their vocabulary skills by leveraging feedback to refine their content and improve their language proficiency. Following educational accounts and posts in English allows them to immerse themselves in authentic language usage and cultural contexts. This exposure extends their learning beyond the classroom, enabling them to interact with native speakers and fellow learners globally. Participating in discussions, leaving comments, and receiving feedback further enriches their language learning experience, fostering continuous improvement in their ability to communicate effectively in English.

Many features on Instagram support users interacting with others in English, making it a great platform to learn and practice the language in real situations and relevant contexts. Instagram in EFL learning can motivate students, enhance their motivation and confidence, develop positive attitudes towards English, and consequently support learning (Hairul,2023).

Instagram serves as a valuable platform for students to cultivate creativity and self-expression through content creation and sharing. This process inherently supports the development of vocabulary skills as students engage in composing captions and posts in English. By using these features, students can articulate their thoughts, experiences, and insights, thereby practicing their writing skills in an authentic context. Besides that, Instagram offers a variety of English content, enabling students to conveniently access English content of their preference at any time and location. They encounter English through social media in an environment where they have the opportunity to engage with native English speakers, access news or English tutorials provided by others, and view English videos. They can engage in meaningful language exercise, which can enhance their language development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, students' use of Instagram for learning English is driven by several compelling factors. The platform's engaging and diverse content, including photos, videos, and interactive features like captions and direct messaging, offers a dynamic environment for language practice. Participants in this study highlighted how Instagram facilitates not only language learning but also self-expression and community interaction. They appreciate the instant feedback from peers and followers, which helps them improve their English skills through constructive criticism and encouragement. The result of the study shows that students have a positive perception of using Instagram for learning English. The platform's engaging and diverse content, combined with interactive features like captions, comments, and direct messaging, creates a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment. Participants expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity to practice English in real-life contexts through posting, receiving feedback, and interacting with native speakers and other learners worldwide. This positive perception is further supported by their increased motivation, confidence, and sense of accomplishment in improving their language skills. Overall, Instagram serves not only as a tool for language acquisition but also as a platform that fosters cultural understanding and community engagement, contributing significantly to students' positive attitudes towards learning English through digital media.

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