

Determining How Social Media Affects Learning English: An Investigation of Mobile Applications Instagram and Snap Chat in TESOL Classroom

Hind Abdulaziz Al Fadda

Curriculum and instruction department
College of Education, King Saud University
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

The purpose of this research paper was to explore the effects of social media in learning English speaking and reading skills. Although social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, are mostly used socially and for marketing, they also have a significant impact on learning English. In determining how social media affects learning English, this paper will be focusing on mobile Apps; Snapchat and Instagram. The paper investigates how user attitude, experience, and perception influence the use of Instagram and Snapchat in learning the English language in a classroom. The research was done on different databases, including Academic Search Complete, Education Source, ERIC, Library, Information Science, and Technology Abstracts, and Professional Development Collection. Research shows that learners with social media accounts are less enthusiastic about learning English, even if it means recreational reading. This differs from the learners without user accounts whose attitude of learning English speaking skills is positive. This research paper concludes that, in comparison to Snapchat, Instagram is a more effective social media platform for engaging and learning of the English language. This contributes to a greater understanding of the English language and its culture while providing more practical knowledge and promoting interactions. However, more research is needed to determine the impact of Snapchat on learning English speaking skills.

Keywords: Instagram, Language Learning, Snap Chat, Social Media. Teaching English

Cite as: Al Fadda Hind, A. (2020). Determining How Social Media Affects Learning English: An Investigation of Mobile Applications Instagram and Snap Chat in TESOL Classroom. *Arab World English Journal*, 11 (1) 3-11.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no1.1>

Introduction

Social media plays a prominent role in all over the world. Digital applications like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat enable users to communicate and share information, photographs, and videos digitally. Among these, Instagram is one of the fastest rising social media platforms in terms of use and popularity. It is a photo and video-sharing application first introduced to the market in 2010. Its features allow users to upload and edit photos quickly as well as post accompanying text and respond to other users. Instagram has retained its popularity due to its ease of use and the ability to meet the need for social interaction and entertainment (Hwang, & Cho, 2018). Similarly, Snapchat is an application that enables users to share photographs, videos, and text with other users. However, unlike Instagram, the information shared on Snapchat disappears after a certain amount of time (Utz, Mucanell & Khalid, 2015). After YouTube and Facebook, Instagram is the most widely used social media platform by 37% of United States adults and 75% of young adults between the ages of 18-24. Snapchat is less used, having attracted only 24% of adults and 73% of young adults in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Instagram and Snapchat are deemed relevant to mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) (Alzahrani, 2015). This paper reports on the use of attitudes and perceptions towards Instagram and Snapchat in the English language learning classroom. It is estimated that 37% of adults and 75% of young adults aged 18 to 24 years use Instagram. Snapchat, on the other hand, enjoys a user population of 24% adults and 73% young adults. The paper argues that, although Instagram and Snapchat are popular social media platforms, they are mostly used for casual purposes and not learning complex content like English speaking skills because they draw negative attitudes and perceptions because of the slang terms involved.

Literature Review

General Use of Social Media

In general, social media may trigger mixed perceptions among English language learners. Al-Adwani and Al-Fadley (2017) investigated the attitude of 812 fifth and sixth-grade students in Kuwaiti public schools toward reading based upon social media use. The results indicated that students with social media accounts reported less favorable attitudes toward reading in general as well as recreational reading in English than students without social media accounts ($p < 0.05$). However, Alnujaidi (2017) reported more favorable attitudes in a study of 103 university-level English learners within Saudi Arabia's higher education system. These students said that social media was not only useful for communicating with others but also learning English.

Snap Chat

Although Snapchat may be beneficial for English language learners, few studies directly address this platform. Freyn (2017) examined the frequency of use by nine university students in a single class over 11 days. The instructor sent Snapchats to students daily regarding the lesson or asking for opinions regarding course content. The frequency of responses by students over this time ranged from 0-16, indicating that variability existed in its use. Aloraini and Cardoso (2018) reported that beginner English language learners preferred Snapchat to WhatsApp for learning both listening and speaking skills.

Instagram

Instagram may be a motivating and engaging means of teaching English to students who speak another native language. Brebara (2018) reported that 88% of 152 graduate students in the Czech Republic viewed Instagram as useful in learning English. Yeh and Mitric (2019) integrated Instagram into a course, using it to help students engage in digital storytelling. Students reported that the activity increased motivation, enhanced oral and writing skills, and improved English proficiency. The students also increased their peer-peer and student-teacher interactions. Students demonstrate several preferences relating to the use of Instagram in learning English. For example, students prefer to use it to learn simple rather than complex concepts (AlGhamdi, 2018) and vocabulary over grammar (Aloraini, 2018). English language learners with more considerable personal experience using Instagram are more likely to communicate in English and follow English language content in the App than non-experienced users (Gonulal, 2019). However, not all students have prior experience with Instagram. Brebara (2017) reported that in a sample of university students, 35% did not have an Instagram account, while 15% had an account but did not use it.

Additional Applications

Several other social media applications exist which may be relevant to learning the English language. WhatsApp is a mobile phone application that allows users to send texts, voice messages, documents, images, and make voice and video calls. In a study involving university-level English language students, Hamad (2017) reported that students perceived this App as beneficial in developing English skills and improving English vocabulary. Tumblr, another social media application, allows users to share not only photos, video, and text but also provides blogging functions. According to Rahmanita and Cahyono (2018), this application is associated with improvements in argumentative essay writing skills among undergraduate English language learners in Indonesia. Twitter enables users to share text, photos, and video, as well as respond to other users about posted content. Research suggests that Twitter is viewed as useful by English language learners, particularly in reading, vocabulary, grammar, and writing (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2018).

Methods

To investigate the use of social media, particularly Instagram and Snapchat, in the teaching of English to students who speak other languages, several databases were searched. These included Academic Search Complete; Education Source; ERIC; Library, Information Science, and Technology Abstracts; and Professional Development Collection. The following search strategy was used: (Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) OR foreign language OR language learner OR English Language Learning(ELL) OR English as a second language (ESL) OR English teaching OR Teaching English as a Foreign Language(TEFL) and (Instagram or Snapchat). This strategy returned 37 results, of which the abstracts were read to determine relevance to the research question. The 13 most relevant articles were retrieved and are included in this discussion. An additional search was performed adding the keyword “social media” to the second set of terms, returning 1,595 articles. After scanning the abstracts of the first 25 most relevant articles, two additional materials were selected for inclusion in the research.

Results

There are many perceived advantages and disadvantages of using Instagram in English language learning.

Table 1. *Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Instagram in Learning English*

	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Readily available	Lack of privacy
2	Affordable	Academic use may inhibit personal use
3	Allows one to become immersed in an English language environment	The information posted on Instagram may contain spelling and grammatical errors
4	Informal learning context	Learning experiences based on Instagram may be too informal or unstructured
5	Opportunity to use language in an authentic manner	
6	Increases interest in learning English	
7	Increases motivation for reading English materials	

(Yeh & Mitric, 2019; Aloraini, & Cardoso, 2018; Brebara, 2018; Gonulal, 2019)

Preferences in Using Instagram to Learning English

English language learners may prefer to use Instagram as a vehicle for lessons with a simple rather than complex structure. Alghamdi (2018) reported that Instagram lessons with a simple lesson structure received more views, likes, and comments than those with complex ones. Figure 1 illustrates these differences.

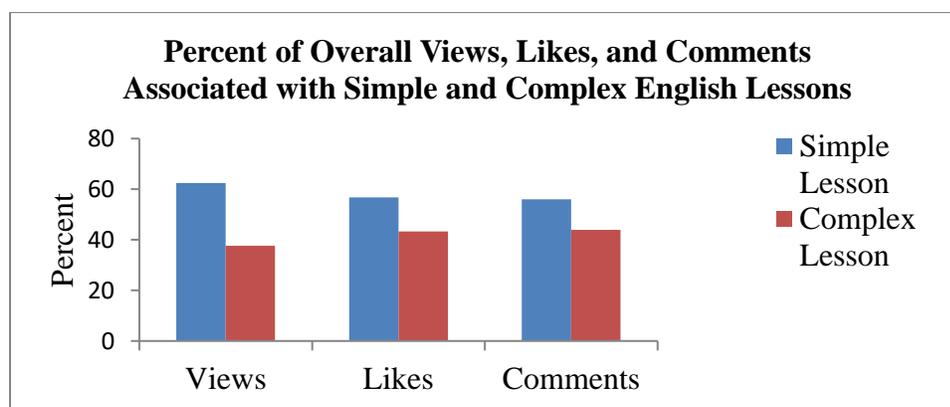


Figure 1. *Percent of Overall Views, Likes, and Comments Associated with Simple and Complex English Lessons*

English language learners may also prefer using Instagram for learning vocabulary over grammar. According to Aloraini (2018), English language learners wrote a higher number of words per Instagram post relating to vocabulary lessons than grammar lessons, at a mean of 7.53 and 6.04, respectively ($p=0.17$). A Cohen's d of 0.438 indicated a small effect in size for Instagram on

the output of words relating to vocabulary and grammar. As such, there was no statistically significant difference between the error rates of vocabulary and grammar posts (Aloraini, 2018). These differences are shown in Figure 2.

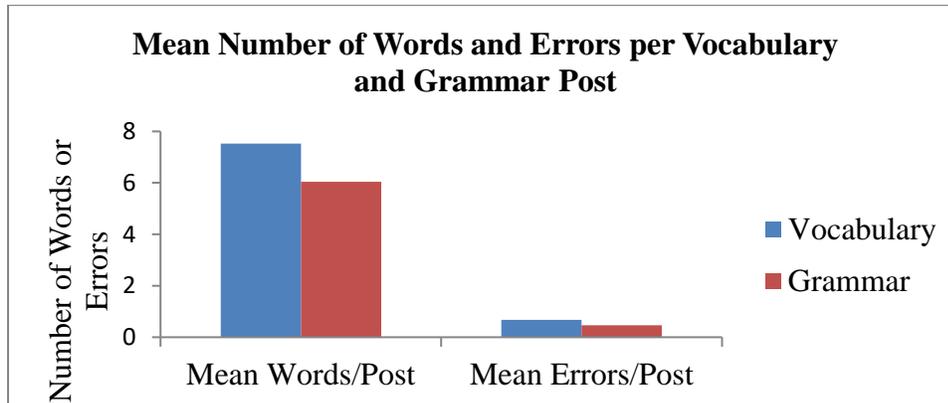


Figure 2. Mean Number of Words and Errors per Vocabulary and Grammar Post

Gonulal (2019) classified Instagram users as either novice or experienced-based upon the number of years of using this social media outlet and its use in learning English. For example, 24% of novice users, who reported less than five years of experience using Instagram, used the platform to learn English, compared with 77% of experienced users. These two groups differed significantly on the number of hours spent using Instagram to learn English, the percentage that communicated in English while using the platform, and the percentage of English content followed by the user.

Novice users spent less time (hours) using Instagram ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 1.09$) than the experienced users ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 2.03$), $U = 1.595$, $p = 0.002$. A smaller percentage of novice users communicated in English on Instagram ($M = 30.02$, $SD = 27.99$) than experienced users ($M = 57.35$, $SD = 24.19$), $U = 1.856$, $p = 0.001$. In addition, a smaller percentage of novice users followed English content on their accounts ($M = 13.20$, $SD = 16.68$) than experienced users ($M = 36.19$, $SD = 29.10$), $U = 1.717$, $p = 0.001$ (Gonulal, 2019). The latter of these two differences are shown in Figure 3.

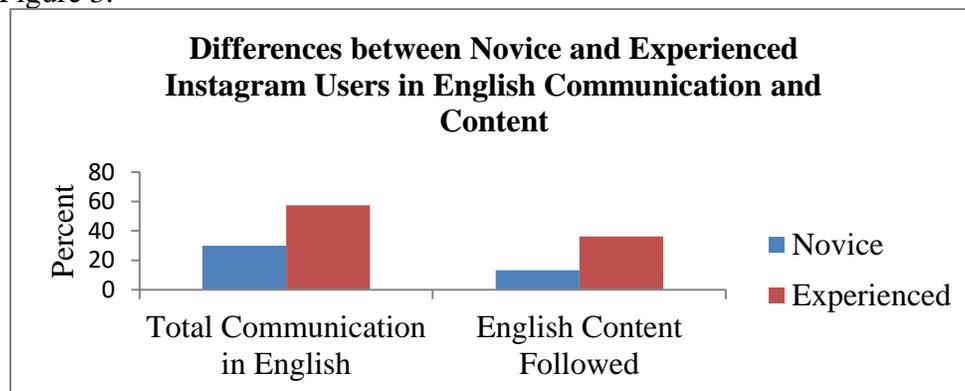


Figure 3. Differences between Novice and Experienced Instagram Users in English Communication and Content

Use of Snapchat by English Learners

English language learners vary in their use of Snapchat for language lessons. Freyn (2017) reported that seven out of nine university students responded to 11 daily instructor-initiated Snapchat posts regarding the daily lesson or opinions about topics discussed in class. The results from this study showed the number of posts by each student over 11 days ($M = 5.6$, $SD = 5.3$).

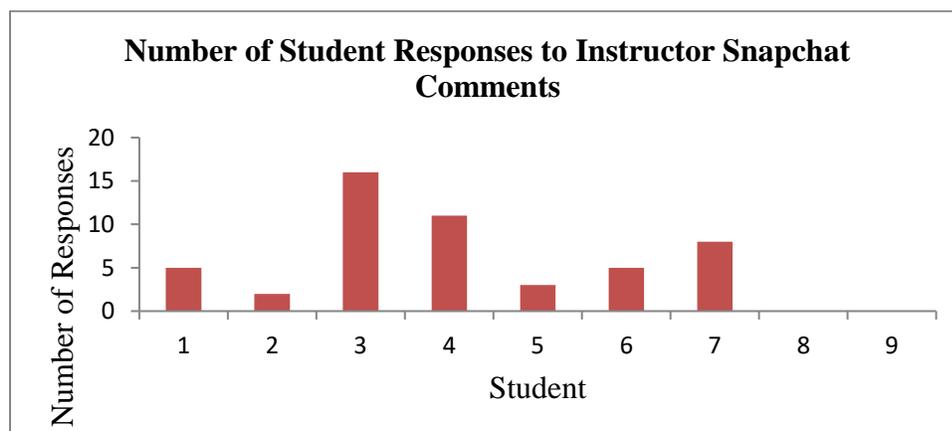


Figure 4. Number of Student Responses to Instructor Snapchat Comments

Discussion

Overall, the findings suggest that Instagram may be an effective platform for engaging and learning of the English language. The advantages of using this form of social media include the ability to immerse the learner in an English language environment, the use of English in an authentic manner, and increased interest and motivation in learning English (Yeh & Mitric, 2019; Aloraini, & Cardoso, 2018; Brebara, 2018; Gonulal, 2019). These findings can be interpreted in light of the social constructivist theory. This theory explains that learners construct knowledge in an active process by linking new content to the existing concepts.

Learners interpret ideas within the context of their interests and experiences, and as such, understanding is influenced by life experience and dialogue with others (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). It is perhaps the latter that is most relevant to Instagram. Whether it is responding to a teacher's or peer's question or comment or sharing a new post about a personal interest, the learner is actively engaged and immersed in using English to communicate. Besides, Gonulal (2019) reported that just over one-third of experienced Instagram users follow English content on their account. Connections exist between knowledge and popular culture (Beck & Kosnik, 2006), and the ability of English language learners to follow the content of posters from another culture may help to increase knowledge of that culture, including its language.

The findings also indicated that English language learners might prefer to use Instagram in specific ways over others. For example, students preferred to use the social media platform for learning vocabulary over grammar (Aloraini, 2018) and identified improved vocabulary knowledge as one of the advantages of using Instagram in the English classroom (Gonulal, 2019). Learners readily connect to vocabulary terms and meanings in English to those existing in their language than they do grammar conventions. Learners also expressed a desire for more

straightforward lessons over the more complex ones (AlGhamdi, 2018). This suggests that Instagram may be limited in the amount of information that can be effectively presented to the learner at a given moment. Revesz (2011) reported that as task complexity increased, English language learners demonstrate greater accuracy in their use of the language and more advanced constructions. However, more complex tasks were also associated with decreased syntactic complexity (Revesz, 2011).

Regardless of preferences, Instagram may be most beneficial to learners with prior experience in using the social platform. Gonulal (2019) reported that more experienced Instagram users communicated more frequently on the platform in English and followed English content on their accounts than novice users. Social constructivism explains that learners interpret ideas within the context of their own experiences and interactions (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). Learners with more exceptional Instagram experience may be more adept at and interested in using the platform in a novel way, to learn English.

Unlike with Instagram in the English language learning classroom, a shortage of research exists about the use of Snapchat. Freyn (2017) reported that learners varied in their use of Snapchat in responding to instructor questions. Aloraini and Cardoso (2018) argued that novice social media users perceive Snapchat, as well as Instagram, as more useful in learning English than WhatsApp. Also, both novice and advanced users preferred Snapchat for learning listening and speaking skills. However, significant limitations exist in the case of both studies. Aloraini and Cardoso (2018) only presented a summary of their findings without any numerical data to support their contentions. Freyn (2017) included only nine subjects in the study, which limits the generalization of the results. Further research is needed regarding the use of Snapchat in the English language classroom before any recommendations can be made.

These findings confer several important implications for English language teachers. Instagram provides an effective platform for immersing learners in the English language and may be particularly beneficial for teaching vocabulary. When using Instagram, learners prefer straightforward lessons over intricate ones. Although the latter may be more helpful in learning, students' interest and motivation may increase with simpler lessons. If students are not interested in or motivated to engage with a lesson then learning is not likely to occur. In addition, prior experience in using Instagram seems to be beneficial in using it to learn English. Learners with little experience using this platform may benefit from instructions and time spent using it for social purposes in their language before using it as a tool to learn English.

In addition to implications for educators, recommendations for further research exist. The studies included in this discussion primarily addressed the attitudes and perceptions of learners. Future research should address the effectiveness of using Instagram in improving reading, writing, and speaking skills among English language learners. Thus, studies might compare standardized test scores of students that do or do not use Instagram in the classroom.

Conclusion

The purpose of this discussion was to report on the use of, attitudes, and perceptions towards Instagram and Snapchat in the English language learning classroom. Findings indicated that

learners perceive Instagram as advantageous in learning how to read and communicate in English, learning vocabulary, immersing the learning in an English language environment, and providing authentic learning experiences. Disadvantages of this platform include a lack of privacy, inhibition of personal use, lack of structure in learning opportunities, and the existence of grammar and spelling errors in public posts across the Internet. People prefer to use Instagram to learn vocabulary rather than grammar, and they prefer simple to complex lessons. This is because the learners are actively engaged and immersed in using English to communicate with others. Learners with prior Instagram experience may benefit more from using this platform to learn English than those with limited previous experience. Overall, the finding suggests that Instagram may be a viable educative platform for English learners to holding their interest and motivating them to learn. As with Snapchat, additional research data is needed before any conclusions can be drawn about its actual effectiveness in producing quantifiable learning outcomes.

About the Author:

Dr. Hind Al Fadda is an associate professor in the field of TESOL. She had many papers published related English teaching methods, with special emphasis on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and writing methods. She participated in lots of educational conferences.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7049-9324>

References

- Al-Adwani, A & Al-Fadley, A. (2017). The attitudes of fifth and sixth graders in Kuwait governmental schools towards recreational and academic reading in English. *English Language Teaching*, 10(12), 37–49.
- AlGhamdi, A. (2018). Arabic learners' preferences for Instagram English lessons. *English Language Teaching*, 11(8), 103–111.
- Alnujaidi, S. (2017). Social network sites effectiveness from EFL students' viewpoints. *English Language Teaching*, 10(1), 39–49.
- Aloraini, N. (2018). Investigating Instagram as an EFL learning tool. *Arab World English Journal*, 4, 174–184. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/call4.1>
- Aloraini, N & Cardoso, W. (2018). Social media in language learning: A mixed-methods investigation of Saudi students' perceptions. Retrieved from ERIC database [ED590632]
- Alzahrani, H. (2015). Examining the effectiveness of utilizing mobile technology in vocabulary development for language learners. *Arab World English Journal*, 6(3), 108–111.
- Beck, C., & Kosnik, C. (2006) : A Social Constructivist Approach. *Innovations in teacher education* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brebera, P. (2017). Micro learning in foreign language courses: A threat or a promise? *Proceedings of the European Conference on Games Based Learning 2017*, 85–93.
- Brebera, P. (2018). Formal, informal, and non-formal language learning contexts for university students. *Proceedings of the European Conference on E-Learning*, 54–59.
- Frey, L. (2017). Experimenting with Snapchat in a university EFL classroom. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(10), 35–37.

- Gonulal, T. (2019). The use of Instagram as a mobile-assisted language learning tool. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 10(3), 309–323. <https://doi.org/10.30935/cet.590108>
- Hamad, M. (2017). Using WhatsApp to enhance students' learning of English language "experience to share." *Higher Education Studies*, 7(4), 74–87.
- Hwang, S & Cho, J. (2018). Why Instagram? Intention to continue using Instagram among Korean college students. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 46(8), 1305–1316. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.6961>
- Pew Research Center. (2019). Share of U.S. adults using social media, including Facebook, is mostly unchanged since 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/>.
- Rahmanita, M & Cahyono, Y. (2018). The effect of using Tumblr on the EFL students' ability in writing argumentative. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 9(5), 979–985. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0905.11>
- Revesz, A. (2011). Task complexity, focus on L2 constructions, and individual differences: A classroom-based study. *Modern Language Journal*, 95, 162–181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01241.x>
- Utz, S., Muscanell, N & Khalid, C. (2015). Snapchat elicits more jealousy than Facebook: A comparison of Snapchat and Facebook use. *Cyber Psychology, Behavior & Social Networking*, 18(3), 141–146. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2014.0479>
- Yeh, E & Mitric, S. (2019). Voices to Be Heard: Using social media for digital storytelling to foster language learners' engagement. *TESL-EJ*, 23(2), 1–15.