

# DISCOVERING POTENTIAL USE OF PLATFORM "INSTAGRAM" AS SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES FOR EFL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *This research examined survey research on Instagram as the third-largest platform of Social Networking Sites (SNS). Instagram contains varied information from diverse language communities all around the world. It also serves as a field of learning target language for EFL students. Although it is one of the most popular SNS, it has attracted relatively less attention from the language research community. This study had two purposes: first, discovering how the Instagram SNS platform is appropriate for language learning environment especially for EFL students; and, second, what kind of learning contents or resources exist within the Instagram SNS platform. The result showed Instagram is beneficial to support EFL students in learning English and it provides English learning contents. Furthermore, this research gave some recommendations for further research.*

**Keywords:** *Social Media Learning Platform, Instagram, Social Networking Sites, EFL Competence, Student's Engagement.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The emphasis of technology on information sharing especially on pictures and videos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century gives different experiences with information sharing through Newspaper or Television News. There are many Social Networking Sites (SNS) that have already prevail for more than a decade such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and many other platforms. Instagram is also included as the latest popular SNS platform accessed by almost all language community throughout the world. In terms of the speed of information sharing, SNS is frequently faster than Newspaper or News Television although the information trustworthy is sometimes not reliable. However, SNS platform especially Instagram may serve as the right place for EFL students to engage directly with users of the target language community throughout any kinds of content that exist on Instagram. To implement Instagram in normal classroom activity, either teacher or researcher needs to keep up with the trend of blended online learning to give a new learning experience for the students. Related to this statement, Erjavec (2013) mentioned that despite all the possibility of the negative elements that may interrupt learning activity, it is believed that the use of a preferred mediator as a communication tool would increase students' enjoyment and motivation to participate and be proactive in learning. There are also some possibilities that students may withhold their true learning performance due to the presence of a strict formal educational structure. Therefore, the need for implementing teaching and learning through online social media may serve as an alternative medium that evokes interest from EFL students' points of view in learning the target language.

Previous research has shown that the Internet is rapidly transforming language learning patterns as new information and global communication technologies become part of social practices and learning skills. Lankshear and Knobel (2011) stated that they found a strong relationship between the development of Internet citizenship with new literacies practices, identity development, and self-expression. It means that the rapid development of technologies has balance followed up with the development of the Internet in which served as a place for language learners to communicate within their native and non-native language communities. Furthermore, the Internet also provides a new field for more accessible social interactions and opens new possibilities for communication and information with some tools such as instant messaging, social networking sites, and blogs (Greenhow, Robelia, and Hughes, 2009; Lewis and Fabos, 2005). However, EFL students may face some difficulties to perform their target language through the internet since they have different proficiency in the target language. Hosni (2014) emphasized that no matter how long EFL students have learned English, they will always face some difficulties in performing their English proficiency when communicating with a native speaker of the target language. The most basic problems are caused by the lack of exposure to English and the minimum

chance to use English in their daily life. This issue often leads to EFL students' low motivation and low interest in learning English as their target language. To evoke their interest in learning English, integrating EFL learning with technologies must be done. As new digital technologies and internet come along, they add new possibilities for the production and consumption of texts. Social network applications with interesting visual display screens make texts easily modifiable and quite manageable to be beneficially used, especially for language learning environments. In addition to these new ways of dealing with traditional texts, digital technologies also carry new kinds of possibilities in creating texts, allowing writing activities to be combined with voice, images, music, sound, and video in a single document. Couldry et al. (2014) have proposed that social media can facilitate civic engagement by creating opportunities for communities to share stories that ultimately create trust, build connection, and suggest a vision for community development. It means social media as one of the new digital literacy technologies provides an enhancement outside language classrooms, where many cultural conventions are analyzed and compared to discover the social values within the target language context. Therefore, the ultimate goal of learning through social media is to encourage EFL students to have a clear understanding of how they operate their non-native language in real-life communication within the target language context.

However, many questions will arise related to how the native speakers of English create their presentation in technology-mediated environments, especially social media. Native speakers that engage in text-only online communication have greater control of their self-image and expression than they do in face-to-face settings. This imagery of self-confidence can lead them to idealize themselves and overestimate other language speaker qualities, especially EFL students. It does not mean that this factor is a bad thing, but it is something EFL students should be aware of as they interact with foreign native speakers. It is also because these interactions are an important source for EFL students' impressions and generalizations about real-life communication of target language culture. Another thing that should be aware of is that text-based electronic communication can increase the risk of misunderstandings, interpersonal tensions, and even verbal attacks. Few incidents of actual verbal attacks were reported in the language learning research literature (see Beiz, 2003; Hanna and de Nooy, 2009; Kern, 2000; Kramsch and Thorne, 2002; Ware, 2005, for examples). Other than several random risks that may happen through online communication in social media, EFL students still get many benefits since it offers a limitless context of language discourse. It is suggested that EFL students need to be wiser in performing their target language through certain discourse.

Despite its benefits, there is some major drawback concerning on EFL students with low proficiency levels that they might get different outcomes compared to the high proficiency students. Consequently, social media platforms may not be an effective environment for target language learning. Thus, instructors and researchers need to build the most effective supervision system to monitor EFL students' progress over their language learning on the SNS platform. If the language learning has been successfully applied to technology activity such as social media learning, it can enable students to develop and organize their proficiency through a particular area of their interest in the target language context. By constructing online communication directly with the native speakers, it will facilitate their learning process and engage them in many types of discourses, social practices, and target language skills (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006; Leu et al., 2014). When synthesizing their ideas and sharing their opinion throughout a particular context, they can foster their critical thinking through communication and enhance their creativity in using target language. Therefore, this study would like to discover a limited area of SNS platform learning from "Instagram" media to be broadly used as a target language learning environment by whole language communities, especially for EFL students. Thus, when EFL students have successfully applied their learning through this SNS platform, they are predicted to obtain many benefits for their competence. Their improved competence will be used in real-life settings where they can share some information with the native speaker.

Based on the previous discussion of how online communication through Instagram as an SNS platform has changed the conventional way of ELT learning for EFL students, two research questions are formulated. They are intended to find out EFL students' perceptions towards the academic potential on Instagram SNS platform, involving a description of the personal opinion through engagement in learning

and learning content using Instagram. The research questions are:

- I. RQ1. Is Instagram SNS platform appropriate to be a language learning environment especially for Indonesian EFL students?
- II. RQ2. What kind of learning contents or resources exists on Instagram SNS platform?

#### METHOD

This present study was conducted using a descriptive survey research design. It was attempted to find out EFL students' perceptions towards the academic potential secluded on Instagram SNS platform, involving a description of the personal opinion through engagement in learning through Instagram and reflecting the learning activity using Instagram. The participants were 109 EFL University students who are majoring in English education. Considering the participants, they have learned the basics of English Language Teaching materials and learning contents. Therefore, they understand how to apply language-learning materials in EFL learning situations.

To obtain the data, a questionnaire was used in this present study. A well-constructed and self-developed questionnaire entitled "Social Media and Academic Potential of Students Questionnaire (SMAPSQ)" was adapted from a similar previous study conducted by Osharive Peter (2015). The questionnaire was divided into two sections; section A (five items) and section B (seven items). Section A was about demographic data in form of yes or no questions and the frequency question that was aimed at collecting participants' data and general opinion through the learning interface of Instagram. Meanwhile, Section B used a Likert-scale consisting of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) to obtain students' perceptions in reflecting learning through Instagram. As mentioned by Lincoln and Guba's (1984), to establish trustworthiness, the adaptation of four-dimension criteria to assess large-scale survey research in the English Language Teaching context. The criteria comprised strategies such as building the rationale purpose of research; preparing data collection guidelines; defining and obtaining adequate participation; reaching data configuration and ensuring appropriate analysis from data findings. After constructing the questionnaire, the researcher distributed it through Google Form and the participants who filled it out would be the participants of this research. Hence, the participants came from different universities from several regions in Java Island, such as East Java, Central Java, West Java, and Jakarta.

After obtaining the data, the responses from the questionnaire were analyzed. The data were displayed in form of the descriptive statistic by using percentages, and descriptive analysis was used to describe the students' opinions and reflection from questionnaire responses in general to reveal the result of this research.

#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study, the students were asked to fill out the questionnaire in section A, which was the demographic data of their perception on Instagram learning activity. The purpose was to find out how Instagram was suitable to be used in a learning environment. Furthermore, reflecting on students' answers based on section B, they responded on how Social Media have Academic Potential of Students Questionnaire (SMAPSQ) on Instagram SNS platform by choosing an answer from provided options; strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

##### Instagram Platform as a Language Learning Environment

Based on the questionnaire section A, it was found out that the majority of the students had Instagram (97.2%) and they often used (43.1%) it. Moreover, they got the experience to utilize learning activity through Instagram (70.6%) and they thought that it was appropriate (83.5%) and gave benefits to the EFL learning process (88.1%). To get a vivid picture, see table 1;

**Table 1. Demographic Data of Instagram User**

Number of items	Questions	Responses	
		Yes	No
1.	Do you have Instagram?	97.2%	2.8%

2.	How frequent do you use Instagram?		
3.	Do you think that Instagram is appropriate for learning activity?	83.5%	16.5%
4.	Have you got experience in learning English as target language through Instagram?	70.6%	29.4%
5.	Do you think that Instagram may bring benefits for EFL Students' learning process?	88.1%	11.9%

Number of item	Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2.	37.6%	43.1%	11.9%	4.6%	2.8%

Based on this result, it can be inferred that the majority of Indonesian EFL students have their own Instagram account and they also often use it. This finding showed they were most engaged with social media activity through the Instagram SNS platform in their daily life. Instagram SNS platform is also widely used by other countries where it can connect people in one country to another country. Thus, it is beneficial for EFL students who learn and perform their target language competence through certain contexts, and they may communicate with the native speakers through particular content in the comment section. Participant 17 also justified that *"In my opinion, Instagram can provide a more modern and friendlier way to learn a language."* This statement showed that learning the target language through the Instagram SNS platform was more preferable since the content was uploaded in form of a short phrase with a picture and short duration video. EFL students might get benefits to learn and access it more easily through their smartphone devices. This argument is in line with Border et al. (2019), who indicated there has been a noticeable increase in students shifting to Instagram as their preferred social media platform for educational content. The main reason why many people move into Instagram SNS platforms is caused by the leading SNS platforms, Facebook and Twitter, have a gradual cultural shift in its content, which focuses more on family narratives, politics, social observations, and commentary. This cultural shifting has been identified to be one of the contributing factors of why people nowadays especially EFL students are moving to Instagram, where the posts are more in line with their lifestyle and behaviours.

Another result also showed that the majority of Indonesian EFL students had the experience in learning activity through the Instagram platform and therefore they claimed that it is appropriate for language learning activity and beneficial for their learning progress. A large number of educational accounts and educational feeds that were visible on the Instagram platform in which many EFL students followed the most active educational accounts to increase their target language competence also supported this result. This argument was also clarified by 37 participants' perceptions about following specific language educational content by stating that *"I think Instagram can be a good platform to learn a language particularly English, for example, many people watch or have seen Guruku Mr d's content"*. The account of 'Guruku Mr. D' on the Instagram SNS platform is an American speaker who creates video and learning content dedicated to English language learning for Indonesian EFL students. Therefore, it can be very beneficial for Indonesian EFL students to follow such account similar to 'Guruku Mr. D'. This statement was also supported by Border et al. (2019) who stated that the new trends arising in social media related to education might reflect the novelty of these platforms, with EFL students now reverting to what they truly find most useful material as their academic support. The whole findings and result in 'section A' clarified that the Instagram SNS platform was not only used for entertainment purposes but also provided various learning contents specifically for learning English. The contents are made by educational Instagram accounts from foreign countries, and they are connected on the same platform that is Instagram. This platform allows Indonesian EFL students to access all these language learning content by simply following that accounts and discovering similar content from another educational Instagram account. The previous statements also indicated that the Instagram platform was accessible to many language-learning contents and beneficial for EFL students learning process by simply accessing it through their computers or smartphones.

### Learning Contents or Resources Available on Instagram Platform

Based on the questionnaire result in section B, it was found that the majority of Indonesian EFL students answered 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' through whole items in this section. For further analysis, the participants' responses were depicted to table below:

**Table 2. SMAPSQ Result**

Number of item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	20.2%	67.9%	11%	0.9%
2	36.7%	58.7%	3.7%	0.9%
3	23.9%	67%	8.3%	0.9%
4	24.8%	64.2%	9.2%	1.8%
5	39.4%	55%	4.6%	0.9%
6	29.4%	61.5%	8.3%	0.9%
7	17.4%	50.5%	29.4%	2.8%

Based on this result, the majority of Indonesian EFL students agreed with item number 1 that the Instagram SNS platform was a suitable place for a language learning environment with a decisive result of students who answered 'Agree' (67.9%) and 'Strongly Agree' (20.2%) with this idea. This finding revealed that they have been frequently used the Instagram SNS platform for language learning purposes due to the problem of accessing conventional educational resources that can be afforded freely by this social media platform. Kind and Evans (2015) who discussed that the implication of social media platform that has ease accessibility and availability shared similar idea with this finding. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare EFL students to engage actively in social media learning, especially on the Instagram platform with appropriate learning strategies so they have good learning outcomes. Thus, there might be a possibility that learning a language from the Instagram platform can be considered effective and efficient with up-to-date information. Another result also showed that Indonesian EFL students were mostly agreed with item number 2 that learning a language through the Instagram platform enhanced their vocabulary mastery by stating 'Agree' (58.7%) and 'Strongly Agree' (36.7%). This finding concluded that they were not only learning vocabulary through educational content but also from entertainment or lifestyle content that exists on the Instagram platform. Even though such contents were not included as educational learning content, they might turn to be unconscious English exposure, in which Indonesian EFL students might acquire particular terms and words for their vocabulary mastery. Concerning this issue, participant 2 suggested, "*Learning through IG TV (Instagram TV) is an effective way to enrich vocabulary*". This statement raised another issue that Instagram TV (IG TV) as one of the most recent features on the Instagram platform might be beneficially used for sharing educational videos to establish EFL students learning process especially in enhancing their vocabulary. This argument might be valid since IG TV features have longer video submission than other features on Instagram. These features can also be used for streaming videos for about one hour. As mentioned by Joosten (2012), social media can support activities and allow students to take ownership of their learning, reflect on the knowledge they are acquiring, and interact with their peers. Thus, Instagram as one of the social media platforms might also enhanced EFL students' vocabulary for facing any kind of situations in the target language context.

The next result from items number three in section B inferred that Indonesian EFL students answered 'Agree' (67%) and 'Strongly Agree' (23.9%) when it came to relating engagement between Instagram platform as a place for practicing their authentic communication skill in certain context and content. It means that they had a contact with the native speaker through the comment section where they can perform and practice their target language competence. They also could reflect on how well their communication was by judging the native speakers' responses. Research conducted by Mossberger et al. (2012) mentioned that those who regularly accessed the internet, coupled with media and information literacy skills to "find, comprehend, evaluate and apply" the information had greater benefits. Therefore, it can be concluded that Instagram as a social media platform might bring benefits for EFL students in

practicing their real-life communication with native speakers they followed in the Instagram. Other results from item number 4, 5, and 6 also showed the majority of participants agreed that Instagram as social media platform can bring benefits in practicing writing skills (item number 4, 'Agree' 64.2%, 'Strongly Agree' 24.8%), reading skills (item number 5, 'Agree' 55%, 'Strongly Agree' 39.4%) and listening skills (item number 6, 'Agree' 29.4, 'Strongly Agree' 61.5%). These results were profoundly justified by participant 5 who stated, *"Yeah, firstly Instagram can be used for English learning media. This media can provide English learning practice through reading caption, writing a caption, learning English by pictures, animated short video. Well, all of the Basic Skills of English can be included, but only Reading n Writing practice can be very effective to be taught using Instagram while listening practice will be challenging to be applied. Yet, Instagram will not be a suitable medium for learning advance speaking since there is no feature of Instagram that can help users to talk. Meanwhile, to increase vocabulary and pronunciation practice, short-animated English learning video posted on Instagram can be an alternative way to enhance basic until guide speaking, with of course clear instructions and guide from the teacher"*. Thus, Instagram always keen to update its interface with supportive features in form of discovering specific contents with hashtags, allowing description on each picture (caption), and also providing varied entertainment and educational contents such as recent news, general facts, and even language learning contents.

It has also been observed in a recent study that students have unlimited access to social media, as the Instagram platform also promotes communication building and critical thinking through certain contents. According to two experimental studies by Soviyah & Etikaningsih (2018) and Listiani (2016), there was a significant difference in students' writing score, between those who were and were not taught using Instagram in the learning activity. Students who were asked to write a descriptive and recount text based on Instagram pictures gained more scores compared to those who were not, which may indicate that Instagram promoted a better understanding for students. Some studies also showed that Instagram aids students in improving their English skills notably on listening and reading skills along with their arguing and clarifying ability, especially in their task-related activity (Aloraini, 2018; Handayani, 2017; Khalitova & Gimaludinova, 2016; Mansor & Rahim, 2017; Vianty & Palmi, 2014). Therefore, the Instagram platform has been proven as effective media in enhancing writing skills, reading skills, and even listening skills for EFL students' learning process.

The last result in the last item of section B, item number 7, had some contradictions even though the majority of Indonesian EFL students agreed that the Instagram platform was a suitable language-learning platform for all age ('Agree' 50.5%, 'Strongly Agree' 17.4%, and 'Disagree' 29.4%). The reason of this contradiction is that the content on Instagram might not be possibly accepted for all ages. Participant 14 also stated, *"Instagram is not for all age, for example, kindergarten students better using YouTube kids because it's more attractive"*. It was certainly true that many adult content exist and there are no parental control features when children or young learners access them on Instagram. Participant 19 also mentioned, *"I don't think Instagram is suitable for all age. It happens people 40+ tend to have an "old" mindset about how to learn something"*. Even for the adult users, Instagram is used to share pictures and maintain relationship with relatives and friends. Therefore, Instagram might not possibly suitable for all ages. On the other hand, several participants also gave some justifications related to this issue. Participant 33 clarified, *"To learn from Instagram, I think that it depends on the user's way of thinking and age because people's way of thinking is different based on their ages and it will affect how you learn something"*. It means that the learning process for different ages of EFL students on social media might depend on their critical thinking and self-awareness against educational advancement. Participant 17 justified, *"Instagram can be used as an innovative way to learn a language. However, the learners must be able to filter which context is suitable for learning"*. This statement means that EFL students of all ages who learned the language from the Instagram platform must carefully select what kind of content and materials they wanted to learn. Participant 32 also clarified, *"I often read and looking for information or news items in the world. Sometimes medical knowledge and cooking programs are something I watch on Instagram. So much of the learning of English and other foreign languages can be done on the Instagram account"*. It means, regarding of EFL students age, they still can acquire many educational contents from

Instagram such as English materials that are beneficial for their learning process.

In short, the findings and statements from participants implied that the Instagram SNS platform helped them to access educational content by simply following educational accounts and discovering other educational content. Their justifications also indicated that the Instagram platform containing various language learning contents either educational or entertainment contents in form of English materials is beneficial for their learning. It can also be accessed through their own devices or gadgets.

However, this research also has some limitations to be considered by the future researcher. First, this research was focused on how much potential the Instagram social media platform can offer language-learning material for EFL students by using the questionnaire. It means the results of this research can be tested by using other research instruments. Experimental research and classroom action research may be needed to investigate more on how the data work in real-life teaching and learning practices. Although previous research has shown that learning through social media, especially the Instagram platform, brought benefits in the learning process, yet, there are limited numbers of research focusing on how Instagram can be implemented for EFL students learning purpose. Therefore, future researchers must find out how the Instagram platform can be integrated into formal or informal learning for EFL students.

Another limitation of this study is related to the Instagram platform, such as the lack of quality control and lack of specific content and skills. There should be modifications on its terms and conditions, and regulatory procedures that will make it more suitable for EFL language learning context. The examples of the verification of quality accounts that provide educational content can be achieved by having teachers and instructors' peer-reviewing relevant accounts and approving its content. In the current age of rapidly advancing technology, the future role of Instagram in the technological sphere need to be discovered. The last, this descriptive survey study was conducted on a regional scale and non-national research scale. Thus, possible future research on a larger scale should be included in the whole national country as well as different countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, students' perceptions of Instagram as an SNS platform used as a language-learning environment were considered appropriate. The reflection from the majority of participants of this study towards Instagram learning itself was positive since they often used the Instagram platform which beneficial for them. The findings of this study also have implications for EFL students' academic performance and their learning progress. This study contributes to the literature, teachers, and instructors by presenting an insight on how to evoke EFL students' interest and motivation to learn the target language in the classroom. These findings supported the previous study by Mansor & Rahim (2017). They mentioned that many young EFL generations are more familiar to Instagram and teacher should be aware of this fact by integrating it into classroom activities so they have a chance to exchange opinions, communicate in the comment section on a photo or videos, and engage in online discussion. As a result, the learning environment will be more fun, interesting, and they may enhance their learning autonomy. From the finding, we may conclude that the Instagram SNS platform is certainly appropriate and suitable to be used for language learning purposes. However, there are some concerns about Instagram features mostly for the entertainment purposes and content branding in which it is not a suitable for learning activity. The most concerning issue that comes from EFL students' attitude itself is whether they have motivation in learning target language or have self-awareness in managing learning and leisure activity through the Instagram platform. Therefore, it is recommended for future researchers to find out how teachers or instructors create proper guidelines in conducting learning activities through the Instagram SNS platform.

The limitations above can be highlighted for the future researchers who will discover that area. Finally, the increasing tendency from EFL students in using social media for various purposes, such as to communicate with their peers and a global community, and share their ideas and opinions has increased to remove the barriers of the traditional classrooms with the utilization of these technologies for learning and teaching activities. Thus, it is possible to claim that social media platform, Instagram, enables

students to create a cooperative and collaborative atmosphere, also to support the formal classroom setting and materials.

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