



Socially Fluent: Harnessing Instagram to Enhance Language Skills

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse the positive outcomes of utilizing Instagram as an effective learning tool for the enhancement of linguistic skills. It explores the features, communicative aspects and the impact Instagram can have on language skills in general and communication and collaborative learning in particular. It delves deeper into the multitude of potential Instagram holds as a social media platform in fostering communication skills and collaborative learning. Qualitative methodology will be used to explore the different mechanics of Instagram to learn English as a second language and quantitative methodology will be applied to quantify undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English from Instagram. APA 7th edition will be used for citation. The paper will be structured into seven parts: introduction, literature review, significance of the study, discussion, data analysis, recommendations and future scope, and conclusion.

Keywords:

Socially fluent, Instagram, linguistic skills etc.

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INTRODUCTION

21st century is marked by globalization and rapid industrialization. This made efficient communication the need of the hour. Social media emerged in this context and took communication to new heights. It's the most efficient mode for instant connection and widespread sharing of data on an unprecedented scale. Its role in learning a language, especially a non-native language, is diverse, complex, and comprehensive. It provides a platform for real- time communication practice and collaborative learning. Instagram is a promising social media platform featuring audio- visual content that connects the world in seconds. It's a platform where people share their moments, philosophy and emotions in the form of images, text, and video. It promotes a more enjoyable, multifaceted, and comprehensive way of learning a language especially English. According to the Digital 2022 Global Overview Report, Instagram had more than 1 billion monthly active users worldwide. Its popularity and easy access facilitate users in almost all aspects of life, including learning a language. This research paper aims to provide an in-depth study of the position Instagram has acquired as a promising social media platform promoting language skills. Instagram can be used for language learning purposes in addition to formal teaching by exposing learners to listen, speak, read, and write while they are using this platform as part of their everyday practice. The purpose of the paper is to explore how Instagram features facilitate language skills. It will also focus on the various ways learners can access language -related content on Instagram. The researcher attempts to explore the scope of integrating social media into language instructions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gonulal (2019) in his paper "The use of Instagram as a mobile-assisted language learning" explored Instagram's potential for English language learning. The key finding



of that paper includes instagram's role in exposing learners to new vocabulary and better ways of communication. Karim (2022) in his paper "Social Media and learning of the English Language" highlights learners views towards the utilization of Instagram for the improvement of writing skills. Tambunan in his paper "student's perception of social networking sites for English language learning" highlights Instagram's effectiveness as a learning tool. Wahyudin (2019) in his paper "Undergraduate student's perception toward blended learning through Instagram in English for business class" explored the positive role Instagram can play in improving English in the business classes. Nushi & Dayani (2022) in their joint venture "Instagram Assisted Learning of Collocation and Colligations: the case of EFL learners," shed lights on how Instagram-assisted instruction can be used for collocation and colligations. Rosdiani's(2022) paper "Using Instagram captions to improve students vocabulary mastery" explored the enjoyable process Instagram captions can be used to improve vocabulary and advancement of a comprehensive writing style. Yeh & Mitric (2020) in their paper "Bridging activities: Social media for connecting language learners in-school and out of school literary practices," explored the effectiveness of Instagram in bridging the gap between in-school and out-of-school literary practices. Khalitova and Gimaletdinova (2016) in their paper "Mobile technologies in Teaching English as a foreign language in Higher Education: A case study of using mobile Application Instagram" investigate Instagram's effectiveness in improving the scenario of EFL teaching in higher education.



INSTAGRAM AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

The process of learning is not a matter of being but a matter of becoming. It has evolved over time. Gone are those days when students relied only on printed books to acquire knowledge, particularly language learning. The existence of social media, CD, multimedia, the internet etc. has made language learning much easier and a satisfying endeavour. The existence of printed books and online platforms can be used to teach students by using the flipped classroom learning model (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2021). Instagram is a social media app that is used for purposes like sharing moments and thoughts in the form of photos, videos, texts, captions, and DM (direct messages). One of the most important reasons behind Instagram's widespread recognition has always been its visual content. It not only entertains the viewers but also facilitates the language learning purpose. It facilitates language learning by providing a contextual understanding of the same. It makes the entire process a pleasurable undertaking. Every video, image shared in the platform not only exposes the language but also provides insight into the cultural context of the same. It facilitates learners by making them realize how language is deeply rooted in its cultural context. It helps the learners to understand that it is impossible to master a language without knowing its cultural context. Whenever a user posts photos, videos of any of their festivals and puts a caption describing the details, cultural significance of the event, it facilitates contextual language learning. Through this visual content, the learner not only learns the language but also gains insight into the cultural practices associated with it. Instagram is extremely invaluable for expanding our vocabulary stock. Images and videos help the learners to link a word with an object. Example- a post featuring a volcanic eruption with a caption in English describing specific terms related to it, colour, natural calamity, prevention measures expose learners to a whole new stock of vocabs. The use of



hashtags also facilitates the expansion of vocabulary. Instagrams users in general and influencers in particular often create hashtags around specific vocabulary content. These hashtags enable the learners to explore the vocabs associated with the content. Example- #food lover may direct to all the posts featuring food related terms and expressions. Many users use bilingual or multilingual expressions to express their posts. This also helps the learners to come across many new words in their specific contexts. Example- an Englishman sharing a post with captions both in English and Hindi. Instagram also provides features like polls and quizzes which facilitate our language learning journey. It engages the learners in a playful manner and expose them to new vocabs and communication manner. Example- a quiz in which users guess the meaning of words related to a particular topic. The world is a rich tapestry of diversity where everyone is having a story to share. When one shares his\her story, he\she will discover thousand more striking a chord with him. Instagram provides the platform for everyone to share their own narratives in their own beautiful ways. This feature also possesses something to offer to the language learners. It facilitates the learners by exposing them to new words within the context of a story. It's an enjoyable way of expanding our vocabs as the learner needs not to rely on memorization. When one learns a word in the context of a story, it will become intact in their mind and they don't forget it easily. It is a matter of contextualize understanding. These narratives not only expose the learners to new vocabs but also allow the learners to acquaint themselves with standard sentence structure. It enables the learners to express themselves in a way that is universally acknowledged. Instagram provides the Opportunity for learners to engage in word challenges and games. These challenges prompt the users to create specific content around specific themes, enhancing vocabulary. Example: A challenge post encouraging users to share post using a specific set of vocabulary. Instagram not only facilitates the expansion of vocabulary but also bridges the gap of pronunciation



between native and non- native speakers. When a non-native speaker listens to a native speaker, he grasps the nuances of standard pronunciation. The integration of AI has taken Instagram to new heights. It floods the Instagram feed with content based on the user's interest. A person using Instagram only to improve their language skills will get content only related to language skills. It wipes out all the distractions a typical social media platform possesses. Instagram is highly effective in improving our writing skills. Writing captions that can aptly describe an image or video in an engaging way can improve the creativity and structure of writing skills. Mini vlogs are one of the most trending features of Instagram. It allows the user to express a photo, collage of photos, or video in the most succinct manner. It promotes a concise and clear way of writing. Collaborations on comments, captions, and community projects can foster a collaborative learning environment. Following varied accounts of diverse fields can also expose learners to different writing styles. It facilitates in the collocation of words by giving exposure to trending phrases and commonly used word combinations. Popular language influencers and communities on Instagram flood their posts with natural and authentic collocations which helps learners to adopt the same. Numerous individuals are actively engaged in enhancing English language standards on Instagram. Some of the most prominent accounts are Bbclearningenglish, Cambridgeenglish, English vocabulary, English without Tears, Idiom Land, Pronunciation with Emma, To Fluency, Englishism, Learningenglishwithoxford, etc. Each of these account holders is working in their own way, but their goal is same: to foster language skills in an enjoyable way.



MERITS AND DEMERITS OF INSTAGRAM AS A LEARNING TOOL

Easy access	Existence of diverse content may lead to distraction
Facilitates an informal and flexible environment of learning	Too much informality may not line up with formal language.
Provides a source of motivation to readers	Absence of in depth knowledge in many cases
The audio-visual content makes it more engaging	Lack of privacy
Facilitates authentic use of language	

The Second part of the paper follows a descriptive survey method where a questionnaire is administered to collect responses from students with regards to their utilization of Instagram in learning English as a second language. A simple random technique is used to collect data from a population of 80 undergraduate students from Hojai district of Assam.

The first part of the questionnaire sought to inquire whether students use Instagram to learn any skill and, among them, what percentage of students use it to learn exclusively English. The response shows that 48 students out of 80 uses Instagram to acquire a skill, and among them, 12 students use it exclusively to learn English.

Figure 1:

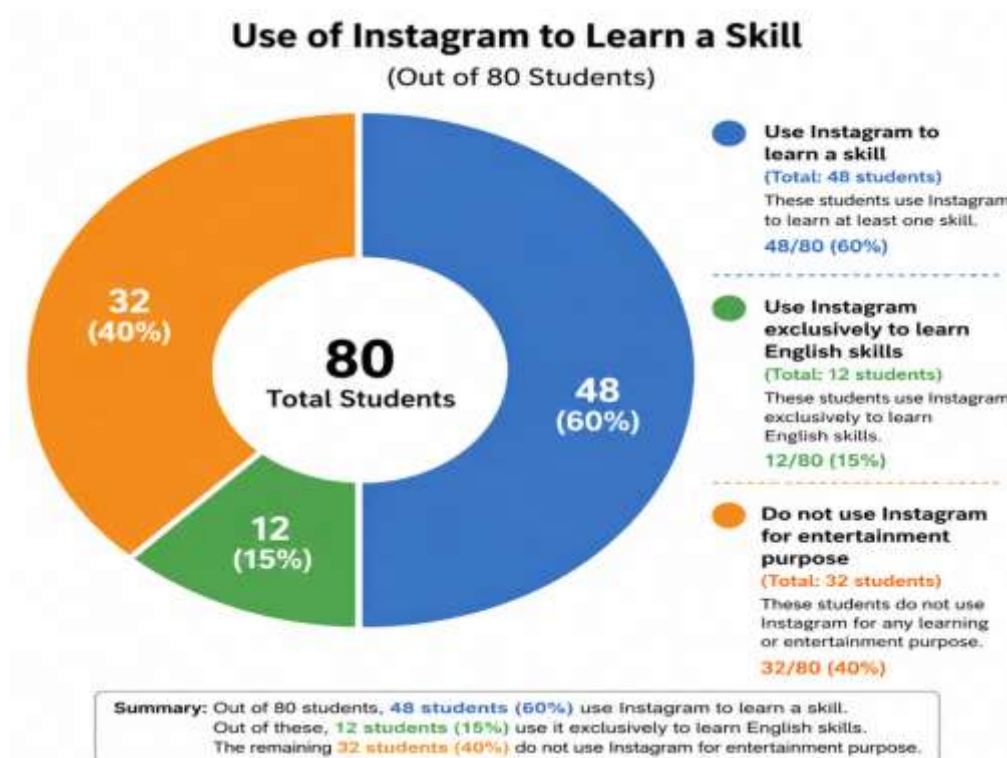


Figure 1 shows that most of the students do not use Instagram primarily to acquire a skill and use it mostly for entertainment purposes. However, it is interesting to note that almost 72 out of 80 students believed that Instagram as a social media platform is highly beneficial to acquire English proficiency. This finding shows that although students do not primarily use Instagram to learn English, after using it for a considerable amount of time, they indirectly and unknowingly learn English through exposure to new vocabulary, storytelling features, vlogging, captions, and direct messages (DMs).

The next part of the questionnaire sought to identify the perceived benefits and challenges of using Instagram as a language learning tool. Here, the researcher used a 5-point Likert scale to measure students' responses.

5= Strongly Agree (SA)

4= Agree (A)



3= Neutral (N)

2= Disagree (D)

1= Strongly Disagree (SD)

Table1: Students' Perception of benefits of Instagram as a language learning tool (n=80)

Sl. No.	Benefit Particular	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
1	Short reel-sized content easily fits into my daily schedule	63	8	NA	1	8	4.46
2	Audio-Visual facilities help me in memory retention of new vocabs	70	8	2	NA	NA	4.85
3	Exposure to native accents and colloquial expressions makes learning application-oriented	71	9	NA	NA	Na	4.89
4	Learning from Instagram feels less anxious and boosts motivation	80	NA	NA	NA	NA	5.00

Table2: Students' Perception of Challenges of Instagram as a language learning tool
(n=80)

Sl. No.	Challenge particular	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
1	Entertainment content, DM's, live video notifications interrupt study focus	72	8	NA	NA	NA	4.90



2	More emphasis on listening, reading, and writing and less exposure to writing skills	63	12	5	NA	NA	4.73
3	Algorithm disrupts systematic, gradual progress and also recommends irrelevant content in between	74	6	NA	NA	NA	4.93

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study lies in its investigation of the utilization of social media for the improvement of language skills. It promotes the idea that language learning is an evolving process. The study explores the scope of integration of digital technology, particularly social media, into language practices. The study would update language educators about the promising outcomes and challenges of leveraging social media as an additional source of language learning. The study also has something to offer to the field of research on the integration of social media into language practices. The paper explores the various ways social media contributes to improve communication skills.

CONCLUSION

The study delves into the relationship between Instagram and language skills. It explores the multiple ways Instagram facilitates linguistic proficiency. Modern problems require modern solutions. The study proves the fact by establishing the idea that language learning is an ever-evolving process and only a multifaceted and dynamic teaching strategy can address the issue. In this digital age, printed books are not enough to foster language skills. The integration of social media or perhaps Instagram can make the entire process of language learning a pleasurable undertaking. Instagram facilitates language skills by providing a contextual understanding of words and



expanding vocabulary stock. Some features even help learners to express their stories in a universally acknowledged way. In a broader way, Instagram as a social media platform aids in effective communication. For future recommendations, one can do interesting research on comparative studies across different regions, cultures, and linguistic communities to investigate the diverse impact of Instagram on their language skills.

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