

Learning English Through Instagram: The Social Media Experiences of Gen Z Students at Nurul Jadid University

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Generation Z students' experiences in learning English through Instagram. As digital natives, Gen Z learners are familiar with visual and interactive platforms, making Instagram a potentially engaging tool for language learning. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method, involving in-depth interviews with female participants aged 19–22 years. Data were collected through interviews and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis involving data reduction and categorization. The findings indicate that Instagram supports English learning across various dimensions, including vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, pronunciation, speaking fluency, and writing skills. Features such as reels, infographics, live sessions, and story quizzes were identified as the most impactful. Participants reported affective benefits such as increased motivation, confidence, and cultural awareness. However, they also encountered challenges, including distractions, low-quality content, and lack of structured guidance. To overcome these obstacles, students adopted strategies such as curating their feeds, saving educational content, setting language learning goals, and creating their own content. The discussion highlights how Instagram's features align with Gen Z's learning preferences and its potential to complement formal education. In conclusion, Instagram offers a relevant, engaging, and multimodal environment for English language development when used consciously and strategically. It is recommended that educators integrate social media into their teaching practices while promoting digital literacy and learner autonomy to maximize educational outcomes.

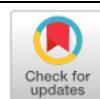
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the integration of digital technology into education has significantly transformed the way students learn and interact with content. Technological advancements have created new learning environments that transcend the traditional classroom, promoting flexibility, accessibility, and interactivity. The rise of smartphones, mobile apps, and social media has opened up a wide range of possibilities for language learning, especially among Generation Z, who are deeply engaged in digital culture. Instagram has emerged as a powerful tool, especially for the younger generation, including Gen Z. Generation Z is a sign for someone born between 1995 and 2012. The same opinion was expressed by (Barhate and Dirani 2022) who defined Generation Z as the generation born between 1995-2012. Likewise, other studies have expanded the upper limit to 2012, (Hong Shan, Cheah, and Leong 2023). As the first generation to grow up in a completely digital world, Gen Z is also unlike previous generations, Gen Z has been immersed in the world of smartphones, applications, and instant connectivity from a young age, which forms habits, and the way they obtain information that is centered on visuals and its dynamic features. Instagram has become more than just a social networking site, now a space for users to engage in various activities, including educational activities. For Gen Z students, Instagram offers a unique opportunity to learn English in an informal, engaging, and personal way.

Generation Z's experiences using Instagram to support English language skills reflect a shift in the way language learning occurs. The importance of this research lies in its potential to provide insight into the evolving educational landscape, where traditional methods are increasingly being replaced or even superseded by digital platforms. Understanding how Instagram, a platform primarily designed for social interaction, can be leveraged as an educational tool, is critical to developing more engaging and effective language learning strategies. This research is particularly relevant as educators and institutions seek innovative ways to connect with Gen Z students, whose learning needs and preferences differ from those of previous generations.

These statistics highlight the increasing reliance on digital platforms for language acquisition and suggest that students are more likely to engage with educational content when delivered through technology. Instagram, as a visual and interactive platform, has gained popularity among learners due to its ability to facilitate language learning in a more dynamic and engaging manner. (Wijipratiwi and Lolita 2023) found that Instagram significantly contributed to the development of language skills, including vocabulary mastery, grammar comprehension, pronunciation, and overall fluency. Platform features, such as stories, reels, and live sessions, provide students with the opportunity to practice and improve their speaking skills in a less formal and more fun context. This aligns with the preferences of Gen Z students who often seek interactive and visually engaging learning experiences.

As a popular social networking platform, Instagram is the most widely used social media platform among students, making it a prime candidate for this purpose education. (Agustin and Ayu 2021) explored the role of Instagram in language learning and found that 80% of students follow educational accounts related to English language learning, and 95% of these students acknowledged the platform's important role in improving their vocabulary and listening skills. These findings suggest that Instagram, which initially developed as a social media platform, has now become an effective learning tool since the arrival of Generation Z, especially in the context of English vocabulary learning.

These findings suggest that Instagram is not only popular among learners but also effective in supporting their language learning efforts. The platform's potential in developing students' vocabulary and language skills is further demonstrated by its widespread use in educational contexts. (Rizal and Farikhah Z 2021) concluded that Instagram is an effective tool for enhancing these skills, as it provides a rich multimodal learning environment that caters to multiple aspects of language acquisition. The combination of textual, visual, and auditory content makes it particularly well-suited for language learning, as the platform engages multiple senses and reinforces learning through repetition and practice.

This study aims to explore how Instagram can be leveraged to improve English language skills among Gen Z students. By examining specific features of Instagram that contribute to language learning, as well as students' perceptions and experiences, this study seeks to provide practical insights for educators and learners. The findings can inform the development of more effective educational strategies that leverage social media to create engaging and meaningful learning. As the educational landscape evolves, the role of platforms makes them a promising platform to create fun and effective learning experiences that meet the needs and learning styles of today's students, as well as helping students to better utilize social media as a tool to develop English language skills.

METHOD

Respondents

Participants in this study were Gen Z students at Nurul Jadid University who actively use Instagram, aged 19-22. This location was chosen to examine students' experiences with Instagram as a learning tool. The researchers chose this location because the environment is

conducive to learning English, and the majority of students were enthusiastic, making interviews easier. In this study, participants were targeted at five female respondents to obtain diverse data. Women were chosen because women tend to be more active in using social media, especially Instagram, and are more open in expressing their experiences. Similar to studies that use purposive sampling, they often have small sample sizes, such as 5 female respondents, especially in qualitative research where depth of insight is prioritized over breadth (Campbell et al., 2020).

Instrumens

Research instrument is a tool for measuring, observing, or documenting the data (Creswell 2008). Instrument which was used in this research is the researcher herself. According to (Buku Metode Penelitian Sugiyono 2012:223), In qualitative research, which became the key of instrumentis the researcher themselves. Research instrument is essential thing that should be considered in carrying out a research. The use of instrument in a research will determine the quality the data research. It means the researcher as the planner, the data collector, analysis, and the reporter of the research result. In addition, in this study the researcher also used a supporting instrument, namely WhatsApp. WhatsApp is used for interviews and documentation. Through text messages, footnotes, video galleries, and sharing images or documents, which allows synchronous and asynchronous communication (Kaufmann and Peil 2020).

Prosedures

This section presents, the data collection techniques employed in this study and the individual instruments used to gather the data. In qualitative research, data collection approach includes in-depth interview, document analysis, observation, and audiovisual materials analysis (Creswell 2012). Data of this research came from interviews and documentation, which was gathered through several techniques of data collection.

Data analysis

This section presents the data analysis procedures performed on the collected data to answer the research questions. Analysis techniques data is done by processing the results of interview transcripts and document reviews. Data are analyzed based on the thematic analysis model. There are two types of this model, namely; data reduction and data grouping from the interactive cycle process. This method prioritizes a structured approach in data interpretation, which ensures and emphasizes that nuanced insights can be captured effectively and explores the complexity of student experiences. As stated by Apriliyanti et al. Explained that thematic analysis is carried out by reducing data and grouping information to identify important concepts that emerge from the data that has been collected(Apriliyanti, Hanurawan, and Sobri 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study identified several key insights related to Gen Z students' experiences of learning English through Instagram:

Improved Language Skills

Students reported that Instagram use supported the development of various aspects of English language skills, including vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, pronunciation, speaking fluency, and writing skills.

The Most Impactful Instagram Features

Features such as reels, infographics, live sessions, and story quizzes were identified as the most effective content in helping English learning. Visual content and this interactive is considered easier to understand and more engaging for Gen Z.

Affective Benefits

Students felt increased motivation, self-confidence, and cultural awareness as affective benefits of learning, through Instagram. They became more proficient in speaking and writing in English due to frequent exposure to authentic content and interactive.

Challenges Faced



Some of the challenges faced include distractions from non-educational content, quality content that is not always good, and the lack of a clear learning structure. Students' Perception on the List of Speech Tasty, Application in Teaching Pronunciation Skalla causes the learning process to sometimes be unfocused and undirected.

Student Adaptation Strategy

To overcome these challenges, students develop strategies such as curating the accounts they follow, saving educational content, setting language learning targets, and producing their own content as practice.

Discussion

The results of the study show that Instagram is very suitable for the learning characteristics of Gen Z who like visual, interactive and fast information. This platform offers a multimodal learning environment, so it can meet the needs of diverse and dynamic learning. Instagram does not replace the role of formal education, but can be an effective complement. Features such as live and stories allow students to practice speaking and listening in real-time, while captions and infographics help enrich vocabulary and grammar contextually. Exposure to authentic and interactive content on Instagram increases students' intrinsic motivation to learn English. In addition, students become more independent in managing the learning process, for example by choosing materials that suit their needs and interests. Distractions and varying content quality are major challenges. Therefore, it is important for students to have good digital literacy, so that they can sort educational content and avoid irrelevant content. Developing independent learning strategies, such as making study schedules and producing their own content, has been shown to help increase the effectiveness of learning. These findings recommend that educators begin to integrate social media, especially Instagram, into English learning practices. Teachers can design reel- or caption-based assignments to increase student engagement and encourage students to actively produce content as part of language practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that Instagram is a relevant and effective tool for supporting English language learning among Generation Z students. The findings show that Instagram enhances various aspects of English skills, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking fluency, and writing. Features such as reels, infographics, story quizzes, and live sessions were identified as the most impactful in creating engaging and interactive learning experiences. Moreover, students experienced affective benefits such as increased motivation, confidence, and cultural awareness through exposure to authentic content. Despite facing challenges such as distractions, content quality issues, and lack of structure, students adapted by curating educational content, setting learning goals, and producing their own materials. Overall, Instagram complements formal learning by providing a multimodal, student-centered environment that aligns with Gen Z's learning preferences. It is recommended that educators integrate Instagram consciously into teaching practices while fostering digital literacy and independent learning strategies to maximize its educational potential.

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