

Instagram as an Education Platform for EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have gained an exceptional popularity especially in the last ten years and become an important part of human lives. Among the popular social media platforms, Instagram is used by millions of people every day especially by the young adults. Given this significance, social media platforms have been used for educational purposes, too. Thus, this study aimed at exploring university students' opinions about Instagram as an educational platform with respect to educational and language learning purposes and its effect on students' language learning process supplementary to formal classes. Using mixed methodology, 219 university students learning English were included in the survey, and 80 students took part in the experimental part of the study which was designed to explore the impact of Instagram on students' language learning process. Six students from the experimental group were also interviewed for their opinions about the Instagram use during the experimental part of the study. Carrying out quantitative and qualitative analyses, the findings show that Instagram is the most frequently used social media platform among the participants and they favor using it for educational and language learning purposes. Additionally, it was found that Instagram had a positive impact on students' language learning based on the achievement scores. Thus, it is concluded that Instagram can be used to enhance learning of English supplementary to formal teaching by exposing the students to language while they are using this platform as part of their every day practices.

Keywords: Instagram, language learning, student achievement, education, social media

INTRODUCTION

Due to increasing popularity and use of social media or social network sites as well as their mobile applications in education, educators tend to use them as a source for educational purposes, since such popular social media platforms as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, Flickr, and so on provide considerable potential for education (Aydin, 2012; Deaves, Trainor, & Grant, 2017; Faizi, Afia, & Chiheb, 2013; Hsieh, 2017; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Rosell-Aguilar, 2018; Taskiran, Bozkurt, & Aydin, 2016; Taskiran, Koral Gumusoglu & Aydin, 2018). According to a Pew Report (2018) published recently, a total of 4 billion people are active users of the internet, 53% of the total population of the world (7.593 billion), while 3.196 billion people are social media users (42% of the world population). Thus, given the huge number of active users of both the internet and social media platforms, the use of such social media platforms for educational purposes or as an educational environment allows the users to create, share and comment on a definite content (Manca & Ranieri, 2016) through a socially bounded system in which users of specific social network sites view the connections of others by creating their own profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

In fact, flourishing after the introduction and support of Web 2.0 technologies (Alsharidi, 2018; Chawinga, 2017a; Faizi et al., 2013; Kolokytha, Loutrouki, Valsamidis, & Florou, 2015; Krutka & Carpenter, 2016; Lim & Richardson, 2016; Manca & Ranieri, 2016), social media networks attracted the attentions of educators due to the popularity and use of these networks among young adults especially with the increase of internet connected smart phones (Aydin, 2012; Bal & Bicen, 2017). The awareness of educators towards exploiting the potentials of social network sites and their smart phone applications stems from the fact that a great majority of the educators are themselves active users of social media, for individual as well as professional purposes (Hsieh, 2017).

Given the high popularity of social media use, several studies have been carried out to demystify the use of social media platforms for educational purposes, in particular within the field of foreign language teaching and learning (Chawinga, 2017a, 2017b; Krutka & Carpenter, 2016; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; O'Keeffe, 2016; Tang & Hew, 2017). It has been shown that social media, despite having multifaceted functions not specifically designed for educational purposes, is utilized as a powerful tool (Alsharidi, 2018) to drive participation and communication in educational contexts (Chawinga, 2017b). Indeed, high visibility social media platforms enable both the teachers and the students to create and participate in online communities customized for sharing the specific content and promote learning. Additionally, one other reason why social media is utilized as an education tool is that students, as digital natives, demand innovative ways of learning outside of classical modes

of learning (Taskiran et al., 2018). Although literature is replete with studies regarding the use of such social media platforms as Facebook and Twitter for educational purposes (Alsharidi, 2018; Aydin, 2012; Benko, Guise, Earl, & Witny, 2016; Chawinga, 2017b; Deaves, Trainor, & Grant, 2017b; Kalelioglu, 2016; McArthur & Kristen, 2012; O’Keeffe, 2016; Rosell-Aguilar, 2018; Taskiran et al., 2018), Instagram has not been studied in detail in terms of its use for language learning purposes in higher education, despite being a popular social media platform among university students. This study therefore will try to unveil the opinions of university students’ opinions about Instagram as an educational platform and its effect on student achievement in language learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media platforms are regarded as powerful tools for teaching and learning practices through their nature of openness, interactivity and sociability (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Replacing the conventional teaching practices, these platforms have become virtual environments for educational purposes especially suitable to enable learners to create, share and receive user generated content by virtue of their interactive features (Vivakaran & Neelamalar, 2018). In fact, Facebook and Twitter are among the most intensively investigated social media platforms for their credibility in education and various aspects of social media were examined in this research, focusing on such platforms because of their widespread and ever increasing use across all age groups around the world, in particular among the younger generation. Additionally, these platforms were also incorporated into formal classrooms with the efforts of educators primarily aiming for student engagement (Abney, Cook, Fox, & Stevens, 2018).

In terms of language education, dependence on technological tools and their incorporation into classroom settings not just for student engagement but for interaction in and beyond the classroom (Lomicka & Lord, 2016) have paved the way for using social media to maximize the student exposure to the language in addition to providing authentic language learning, by means of socialization, contextualization and utilization (Wong, Chai & Poh Aw, 2017). In addition, having no time and space limit features (Ali, Yaacob, Al-Amin Bin Endut, & Langove, 2017; Bal & Bicen, 2017; Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016; Chawinga, 2017a), social media platforms provide authentic and learner generated language content enhancing student learning, confidence and motivation through collaboration (Badri, Nuaimi, Guang, & Rashedi, 2017; Derakhshan & Hasanabbasi, 2015; Lomicka & Lord, 2016). Thus, social media platforms create enjoyable and stress free learning spaces tackled by educators to turn students’ social media enthusiasm into a learning opportunity (McCarroll & Curran, 2013).

Among social media platforms, Facebook attracts the attention of most educators and researchers for its potential in education; thus, a considerable number of studies were carried out to investigate the use of Facebook as an educational platform in terms of language teaching and learning. Being the most popular social media platform ever (Smith & Anderson, 2018), Facebook is reported to have features contributing to communication skills with peers and school or faculty members, participation, collaboration, peer support, commitment in educational activities (Tiryakioglu & Erzurum, 2011). As an educational tool, it also enhances language teaching and learning and offers advantages not only for students but also for educators in that Facebook provides opportunities for engaging learners on tasks, for improving all four skills in English and increasing student motivation; however, it should be noted that educators need to have pre-planned objectives for Facebook to be utilized as an educational environment (Aydin, 2012; Lim & Richardson, 2016; Rios & Campos, 2015).

The Twitter social media platform is also utilized as an online space, and following Facebook, several studies were carried out to investigate the use of Twitter for educational purposes (Abney et al., 2018; Bista, 2015; Bozkurt & Aydin, 2016; Evans, 2014; Kalelioglu, 2016; Lomicka & Lord, 2016; O’Keeffe, 2016; Tang & Hew, 2017). Various aspects of Twitter from micro-teaching (Aitchanov et al., 2013), positive student attitudes and increase in student engagement, interpersonal relations and class participation in higher education (Bista, 2015; Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016; Evans, 2014), pre-service teacher education (Kalelioglu, 2016), professional development of practicing teachers (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018) to increasing learner autonomy in language learning (Solmaz, 2017) have all been investigated and found Twitter to be a valuable learning and teaching space. Additionally, regarding the language learning and teaching practices, it was shown that Twitter, with its microblogging feature, holds various uses at different language levels and settings with varying tasks in addition to offering interaction and communication with native users of the target language, as well as creating an awareness on noticing and exchange of the meaning (Hattem & Lomicka, 2016). Additionally, Twitter as an authentic and dynamic education platform particularly for L2 learning contributes to cultural and socio-pragmatic awareness of the learners, apart from improving their language skills while learning the language (Blattner & Dalola, 2018). Thus, Twitter accommodates a number of unique language learning opportunities for learners of language by offering interaction possibilities for practicing the language with native users.

Instagram, which first appeared in 2010, was launched as a photo sharing platform and over the time other new features such as video, texting, and story sharing have been added which contributed to its growth greatly (Ellison, 2017). In terms of language learning, Handayani (2016) argues that Instagram can be used as a source for applying a number of activities in language classrooms like digital storytelling, grammar activities through photos, role plays, reading, speaking activities through videos etc. Thus, Instagram addresses to four language skills to practice the language in and outside the classroom. Additionally, some studies were conducted on Instagram for developing writing skill (Soviyah & Etikaningsih, 2018). These studies show that Instagram was an effective tool in improving students' writing skill. Additionally, it was found that Instagram increases students' motivation to learn and their participation to classroom activities (Purnama, 2018). Among the studies conducted on Instagram regarding its use for language learning, Mansor and Rahim (2017) found that it is an effective platform in that it encourages students to interact with their peers in the group works related to videos they shot on the teacher led tasks.

Social media has been growing at unprecedented rates with an ever increasing number of users particularly among the young people (Mansor & Rahim, 2017; Sheldon, Rauschnabel, Antony, & Car, 2017; Smith & Anderson, 2018). Instagram, which is gaining more popularity across the world (Smith & Anderson, 2018), is a social media platform where its users can share self-generated content in the form of photos or videos (Abney et al., 2018), yet given the potential role of Instagram, considering the exploitation of Facebook and Twitter, in language learning and teaching setting (not limited to, though), it is surprising that little scientific attention has been given to Instagram except for quite a few studies (Handayani, 2016; Mansor & Rahim, 2017; Purnama, 2018; Soviyah & Etikaningsih, 2018). Aiming to fill this gap in literature, this study seeks to exploit university students' opinions regarding Instagram both as an educational and language learning platform and its effect on students' language learning by answering the following research questions:

- 1- What are students' opinions regarding Instagram use
 - a) for educational purposes?
 - b) for language learning purposes?
- 2- What is the impact of Instagram on students' language learning process in an EFL context?
- 3- What are students' opinions regarding their experiences of Instagram use for language learning purposes?

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted adopting mixed method approach. Initially, a survey study making use of quantitative approach was utilized and an experimental study with a pre-test and post-test design was followed by an interview with the students from the experimental group. Thus, this study makes use of a number of data collection tools; a scale in survey study to unveil students' opinions regarding Instagram use for educational and language learning purposes, student achievement scores in the experimental study and finally interview protocol to understand students' opinions regarding their experiences of Instagram following the experimental study.

Context and Participants

The first part of the study aimed at finding out the students' opinions about Instagram use for educational and language learning purposes. For this part of the study, the data were gathered from 219 students receiving intensive English education run by a language teaching program at a state university in Turkey. The intensive English education, a one-year-program, aims at equipping students with the necessary academic language skills to follow their departmental courses in English and an approximate of 800 students are enrolled in this program with an increasing number each year. Among the participants, students were enrolled into such various programs as the Department of English Language Teaching in Education Faculty and departments of Engineering, Food Engineering, Machinery, Computer Sciences, Management Engineering, Genetics and Bioengineering and Electrical and Electronical Engineering from Engineering Faculty.

For the second part of the study, the experimental part, a total of 80 students studying in the Department of English Language Teaching were randomly grouped as an experimental and a control group each of which consisted of 40 students. Following the experimental study, a total of six voluntary participants all of whom were females were interviewed as shown in Table 1 below. Thus, this study is limited to the participants and the experiment conducted in the provided data collection process.

Table 1. Participants of the study

Study	Frequency	Percent
<i>Survey</i>	219 (n)	
Gender		
Female	105	48
Male	114	52
Age		
17	6	2.3
18	83	37.4
19	85	38
20	31	14
21	10	4.6
22-25	2	1
25 and over	2	1
Language Level		
A1-A2	105	48
B1	38	17.4
B2	50	22.8
C1	22	10
Department		
English Language Teaching	88	40
Computer Engineering	35	16
Genetic Engineering	21	9.5
Food Engineering	20	9.1
Machinery Engineering	22	10
Electric-Electronic Engineering	12	5.4
Administrative Engineering	21	9.5
<i>Experimental Study</i>	80	
<i>Experimental Group</i>	40	
Gender		
Female	17	42.5
Male	23	57.5
<i>Control Group</i>	40	
Gender		
Female	13	32.5
Male	27	67.5
Interview	6	

Data Collection Tools and Process

The survey part of the study was completed by gathering the data regarding the students' opinions about Instagram use for educational and language learning purposes. To this end, an Instagram Use Survey adapted from The Social Networking Use Survey (Lim & Richardson, 2016) and Twitter Use for Language Learning Questionnaire (Alsharidi, 2018) was used. During the adaptation process, items in the Social Networking Use Survey (Lim & Richardson, 2016) and Twitter Use for Language Learning Questionnaire (Alsharidi, 2018) were transformed into Instagram use items. The Instagram Use Survey had two major sections as demographic information (Items 1-13) and survey part (a total of 28 items) having three dimensions to explore students' perceptions and use of Instagram as "Intensity of Using Instagram" (Items 14-17), perceptions regarding "Using Instagram for educational purposes" (Items 18-27), "Using Instagram for language learning purposes" (Items 29-42) –item 28 was left blank for reliability test. Structured from general Instagram use to English learning perceptions of the students, the survey items adapted were sent to experts in the fields of educational sciences and English language teaching and following the feedback and comments on items, the necessary corrections were made for the accuracy, clarity as well as the organization of the subscales to ensure content and face validity. Further, the adapted survey form with 5 Likert-scale items was piloted and the constructed-ready-to-use form was applied by collecting data from the students.

To answer the second research question, an experimental study was carried out to investigate the likely effects of Instagram use on the students' language learning process. To this end, randomly selected B2 level Turkish EFL students learning English were grouped for experimental part of the study and equal groups of forty students were assigned as the experimental and the control group in a random way. Creating an Instagram account as "LearnEnglishAlku" (Alku as the abbreviation of the university), the students in the experimental group were invited to join the Instagram account specified. For a period of ten weeks, the experimental group students were systematically exposed to Instagram posts structured around the content and syllabus of the course book they followed in their formal classes and asked to participate in the assignments posted or comment on the posts while the control group continued their formal language instructions. The use of Instagram for the experimental study was designed as supplementary to formal classes. Following a meticulous preparation period, the Instagram posts targeting four language skills and language areas together with pronunciation activities were created and shared. At the same time, a number of well-known official language learning accounts (e.g. BBC English) were followed and the posts shared by such accounts were re-shared. Extra-curricular skill and grammar based posts together with vocabulary items were shared which required the students to comment on the content or participate in the discussions.

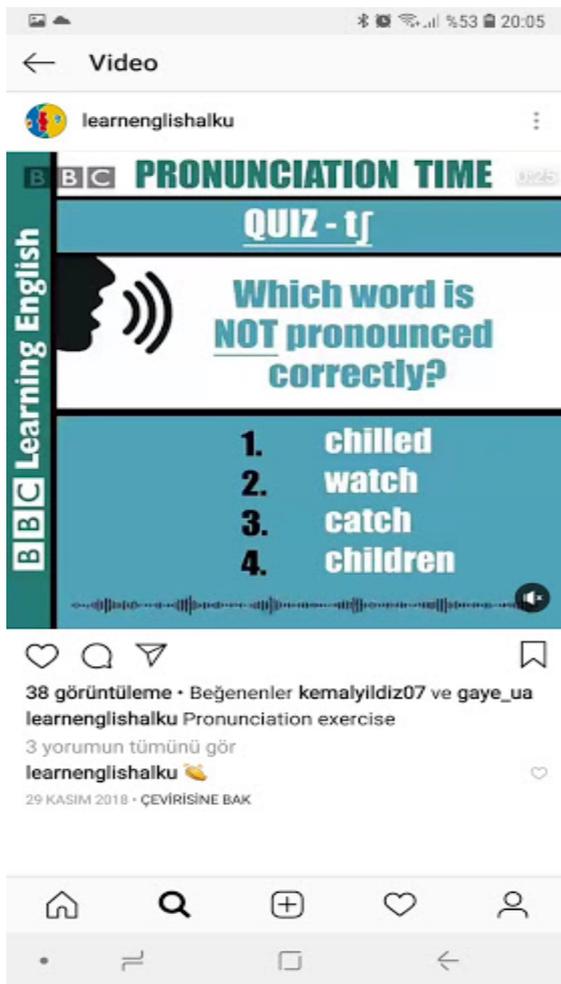


Figure 1

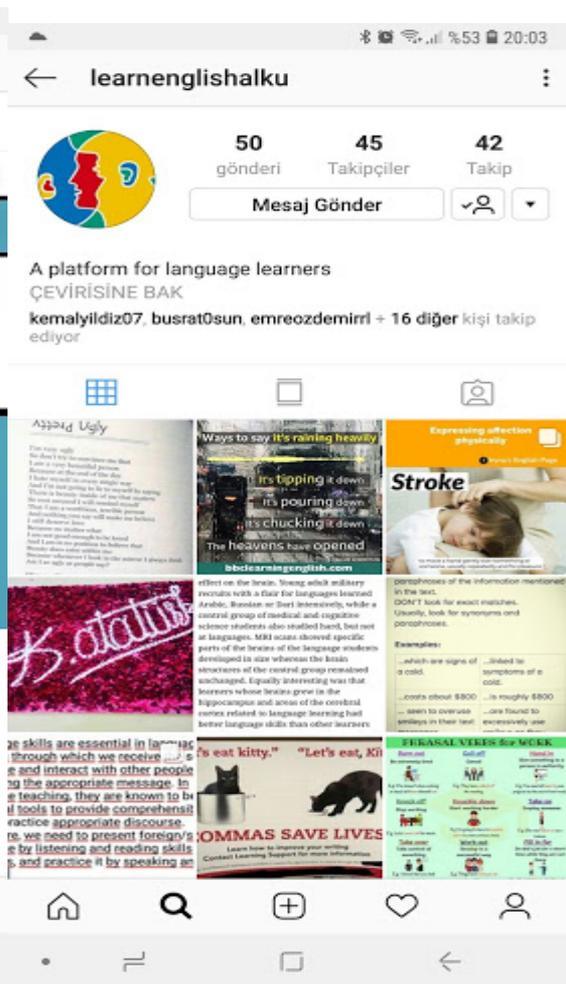


Figure 2

During the experimental study, the posts and Instagram stories were designed based on four skills and language areas in line with the course book. For listening purposes, the short videos and pronunciation exercises were posted regularly with questions in the comments part. Additionally, to improve students' speaking skill in addition to developing their listening skill the posts required them to conduct the certain tasks (such as the ones to complete a job interview with two peers) through videos. Also, they needed to shoot videos on certain tasks taken from their course books in the form of role-plays with their peers or they needed to upload videos using the hashtag specified previously. For reading skill, academic reading texts were posted and under each text, the students were asked to find out the topic, main idea, paragraph title or apply reading sub-skills such as skimming, scanning paraphrasing, deducing the meaning from the context or defining the key words in the texts where they needed to write their answers and comment on their peers' responses.

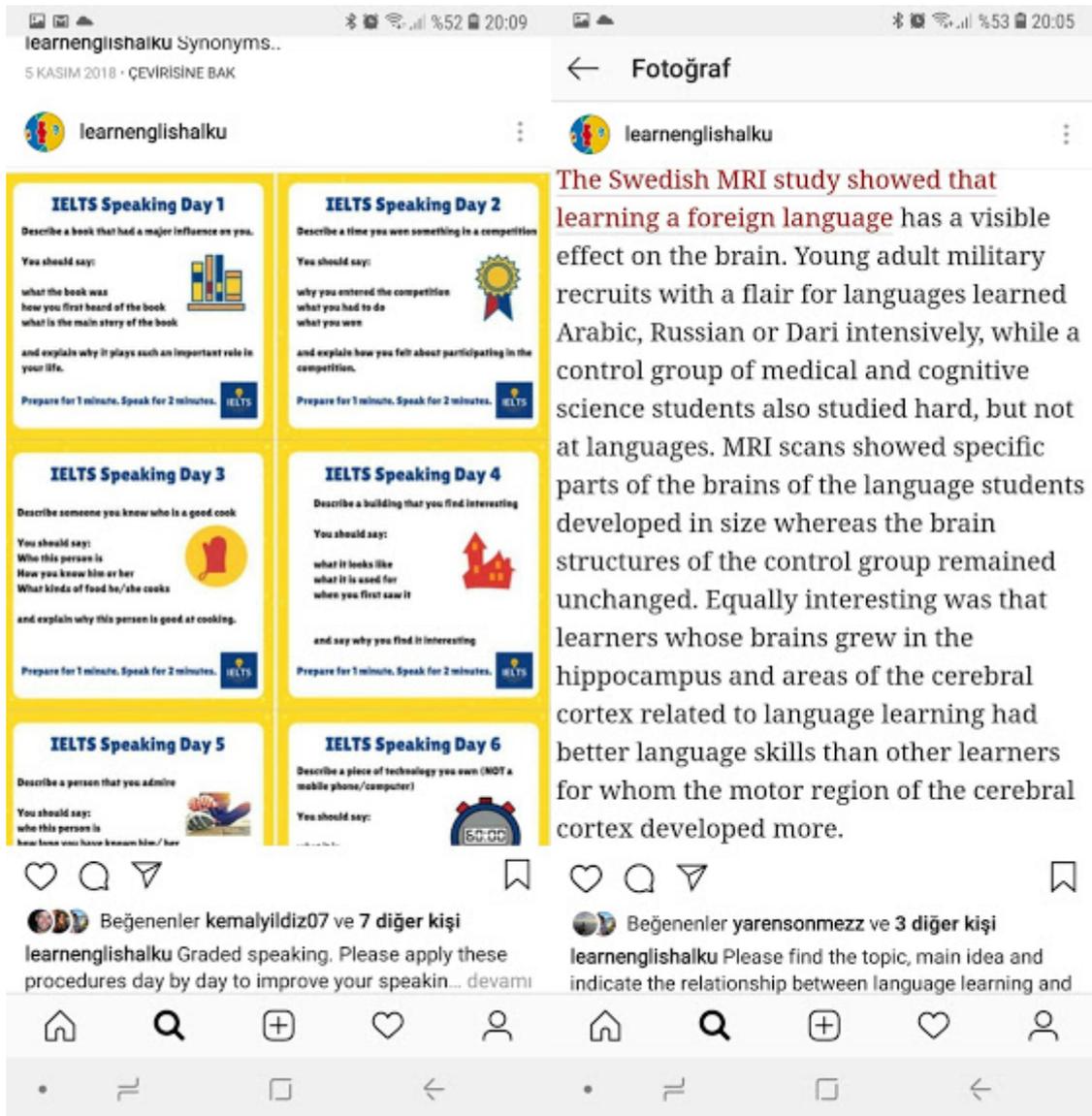


Figure 3

Figure 4

In the pre and post-tests, both the experimental and the control group students were administered achievement tests for comparison and the effectiveness of Instagram on students' language learning was then tested statistically. The achievement tests were taken from the assessment book provided by the publisher given only to classroom teachers. Thus, the students had no chance to reach these tests previously.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the two studies were analyzed in both quantitative and qualitative manner. In the quantitative analysis of the data collected using the scale, an initial reliability measurement was made and the scale was found to be reliable for the further analysis. In the analyses, the data in scale form where the participants responded the blank question (Item 28) were not utilized. Following the reliability check, mean scores and percentages were utilized in addition to t-test computation for dependent and independent variables. In the analysis, the missing parts were removed.

Table 2. Reliability Measurement of Survey Tool

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.89	28

In the analysis of the survey items, responses given were evaluated using participation levels based on the percentages and participation levels for the statements were found as Strongly Agree 3.21 – 4.00, Agree 2.41 – 3.20, Neutral 1.61 – 2.40, Disagree 0.81 – 1.60, Strongly Disagree 0 – 0.80.

Data gathered through the interviews with the students about the use of Instagram for educational purposes in language learning were initially transcribed and analysed using content analysis. The data were analysed by two co-raters and the most recurring categories and themes were identified. To ensure an agreement between the raters, Cohen’s κ was utilized and the agreement between the raters’ analysis was found as $\kappa = 0.76, p < .005$.

For the experimental study, the students’ both pre and post-test results gathered by the achievement tests were also analyzed quantitatively, using SPSS 24.

FINDINGS

Findings for the Research Question 1

Aiming to reveal the students’ opinions about Instagram for educational and language learning purposes, the scale used for data gathering had two parts: a demographic part which included items containing the participants’ personal information as well as social media use routines, and a survey part with statements to gather data related to their opinions about the “Intensity of Using Instagram”, “Using Instagram for educational purposes” and “Using Instagram for language learning purposes”; thus, the findings were presented in line with these aspects.

Table 3. Participants’ Responses to Demographic Part of the Survey

Categories		Frequency	%
Having internet connected personal computer/mobile phone	Yes	217	99
	No	2	1
Having social media account(s)	Yes	202	92
	No	17	8
Time spent on internet	1-2 hours	38	17.4
	3-5 hours	110	50.2
	6-7 hours	28	12.8
	7+ hours	26	11.9
	Less than an hour	15	7.7
Using social media for educational purposes	Yes	168	76.7
	No	51	21

The demographic part of the survey was aimed at finding out whether the participants’ owned a personal computer or a mobile phone with which they can access the internet and social media accounts, as well as the amount of time spent online and whether they used social media platforms for educational purposes. To begin with, almost all the participants (99%) reported that they had internet connected personal computers or mobile phones, and 92 % of them had social media accounts. Half of the participants spent 3-5 hours, and 11.9% spent more than seven hours on the net every day. Only 7.7 % of the participants spent less than one hour on internet. The findings also show that a majority of them (76.7%) used their social media accounts for educational purposes. Apart from these, they were also asked which social media platforms they used (choosing more than one option was possible in the survey form).

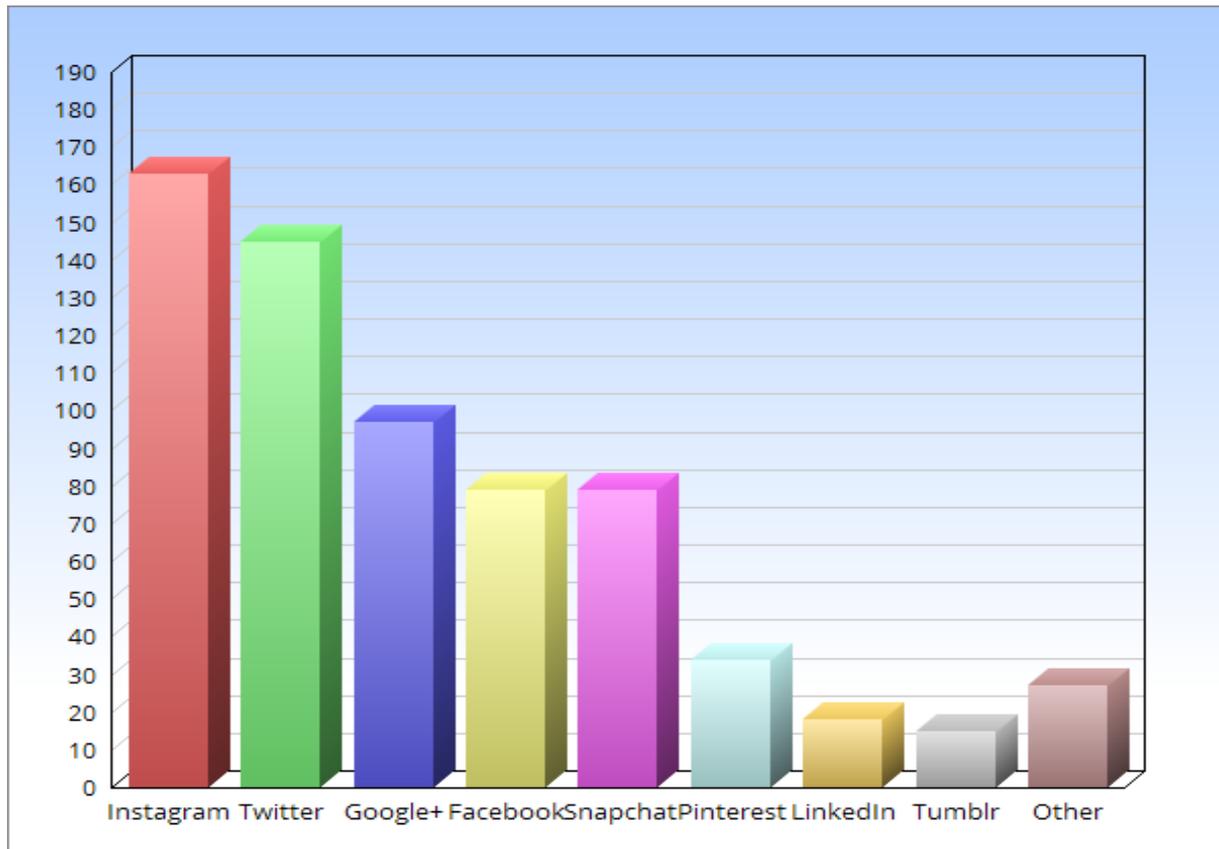


Figure 5. Social media platforms used by the participants

The most popular social media platform among the participants of this study was Instagram followed by Twitter and another popular platform, Google+, was ranked third. A great majority of the participants (n=163) had an Instagram account and this was a significant finding of the study. Despite the popularity of Facebook, the gathered data showed that participants used it less than the other platforms and it is worth noticing that Snapchat was equal to Facebook in terms of use among by them. Other platforms such as Pinterest, LinkedIn and Tumblr were among the least frequently used social media platforms.

The participants' opinions regarding Instagram for educational and language learning purposes were scrutinized under three main categories seeking to find out their intensity of Instagram use, use of Instagram for educational purposes and use of Instagram for learning English.

Table 4. Findings related to Use of Instagram as an Educational Tool

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Score	219	1.00	5.00	3.07	.66
Intensity of Instagram Use	219	1.00	5.00	2.78	1.15
Educational Purpose	219	1.00	5.00	2.99	.74
English Learning Purpose	219	1.00	5.00	3.45	.79

The participants' responses in the survey yielded that they had positive opinions, with a mean score of 3.07, regarding the use of Instagram as a learning tool in general. In order to have in-depth understanding of their opinions, the students' responses to the scale were evaluated in detail focusing on the most salient items representing each sub-scale.

Table 5. Intensity of Instagram Use

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Instagram is part of my everyday activities	219	3.56	1.37
I feel out of touch if I do not log into Instagram for a while	219	2.36	1.33
I see myself as a part of Instagram community	219	2.61	1.36
I would be sorry if my Instagram account were shut down	219	2.59	1.53

Regarding the intensity of Instagram use, findings show that the students strongly agreed Instagram being a part of their everyday activities. They also agreed that they considered themselves as a member of the Instagram community and that they would feel sorry if their Instagram accounts were shut down. On the other hand, they partly agreed that they felt out of touch when they did not log into Instagram for a period of time. Thus, it seems clear that the participants intensely use Instagram in their daily routine, and they regard themselves as part of the Instagram community leading them to feel sorry and out of touch when they do not log into their accounts.

a) Students' opinions regarding Instagram use for educational purposes

As for the second sub-scale of the survey, the students held the opinion that Instagram could be used for various purposes as an educational environment and the mean score for this aspect was found to be 2.99 indicating the positive perceptions of the participants for this sub-scale.

Table 6. Using Instagram for educational purposes

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Using Instagram for educational purposes would be convenient	219	3.15	1.30
Instagram could be used to support face to face learning	219	2.88	1.31
Using Instagram for class could promote motivation for learning	219	2.79	1.35
Using Instagram for class could make me feel more connected to my learning community	219	2.81	1.36
Instagram could be used effectively to share class materials	219	3.41	1.25
Using Instagram as an educational platform could promote better rapport with peers	219	2.91	1.30
Instagram could be an effective way to collaborate with peers	219	3.36	1.22
Instagram could be an effective way to communicate with peers	219	3.57	1.21
I feel that my privacy would be invaded against my class mates if Instagram is used for class	219	2.54	1.24
I don't care one way or the other about Instagram's being used for educational purposes	219	2.47	1.41

Beginning with the highest score items, Instagram was regarded as a useful educational tool to communicate (M=3.57), to collaborate (M=3.36) and to increase rapport with peers (M=2.91), in addition to its effectiveness in sharing the class materials (M=3.41). In fact, these findings indicate that students had the opinion that Instagram could be an auxiliary learning tool in aiding face to face learning by creating a positive learning community. As another notable finding, the participants were of the opinion that it could be a motivating learning tool when utilized effectively for class (M=2.79).

b) Students' opinions regarding Instagram use for language learning purposes

As the final sub-scale of the survey, the highest mean score was about the aspect of Instagram for learning and practising English (M=3.45) indicating the students in the study agreed and favoured this use of Instagram.

Table 7. Instagram for a language learning purposes

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I learn new vocabulary when I interact in English with other people.	219	3.89	1.19
I see that my English has improved since I started interacting with people on Instagram	219	3.44	1.21
I believe using Instagram helps me learn new English language structures.	219	3.31	1.27
I prefer Instagram because I can communicate with different people from all over the world	219	3.59	1.32
I am exposed to real language when I interact in English on Instagram.	219	3.39	1.26
I feel no pressure when I make mistakes on Instagram.	219	3.52	1.32
I feel that Instagram is a natural place in which to practise English because there is meaningful interaction amongst people	219	3.27	1.23
I feel discouraged thinking my peers see my mistakes in English on Instagram for educational purposes	219	2.31	1.28

I feel that Instagram is an encouraging place to practise English because no one judges my mistakes.	219	3.24	1.20
I follow people with whom I can interact on Instagram to practice English.	219	3.43	1.46
Using Instagram offers new ways for me to practise English.	219	3.53	1.17
I feel good when I practise English on Instagram.	219	3.96	1.11
I am more internationally connected when I interact in English on Instagram.	219	3.76	1.19
I am more comfortable communicating in English on Instagram.	219	3.62	1.17

When the items in this sub-scale of the survey are closely examined, they reveal that Instagram made students feel good when they practiced English on this platform (M=3.96) and they could learn new vocabulary items upon interacting on Instagram (M=3.89). Also, Instagram enabled the students to become internationally connected (M= 3.76), and students felt more comfortable communicating in English on Instagram (M=3.62). Obviously, one of the reasons why Instagram was a preferred social media platform was because students could communicate with people across the globe (M=3.59), which meant that they were offered new ways to practice the language (M=3.58), and they felt no pressure for their language related mistakes when communicating with other people (M=3.52). Additionally, the students reported that they felt their English improved on Instagram (M=3.44) and they followed the people with whom they could interact on Instagram (M=3.43) since they also reported that they were exposed to authentic language (M=3.39) in which a meaningful interaction among people was created (M=3.27). Finally, findings show that Instagram was considered as an encouraging place for students to practice English (M= 3.24) helping them also to acquire new structures (M=3.31).

Findings for Research Question 2

In order to investigate whether Instagram influenced students’ language learning, an experimental study was conducted for a period of ten weeks, and both the experimental and the control groups were administered an achievement test, taken from the assessment book of the main course book, in the pre and the post test. For the analysis of the data gathered through the achievement tests in the pre and the post test, a Shapiro-Wilk’s test (p>.05) and a visual histogram inspection as well as Normal Q-Q Plot tests were carried out to check the distribution of normality; these tests showed that the achievement scores were normally distributed (p= .288).

To check the effect of Instagram on students’ learning English, mean values for pre and post test scores were compared for each group and independent samples *t*-tests were performed for both the pre-test and the post-tests.

Table 8. Pre-test results for Control and Experimental Groups

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Pre-test	Control Group	40	57.70	9.47	1.49	1.76	78	.08
	Experimental Group	40	61.60	10.26	1.62			

Findings indicate that the control and the experimental groups had similar achievement scores prior to taking experiment. In the pre-test, the mean value for the control group was 57.7 (SD= 1.49) while it was 61.6 for the experimental group (SD=1.62). The independent samples *t*-test analysis shows that the control and the experimental groups did not differ significantly in terms of their level of English based on their achievement scores; *t*(78)=1.76, p=.08.

Following the Instagram intervention, the students were administered the same achievement exam both in the control and the experimental groups. The test the effect of the Instagram use as a language learning environment, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted for the post-test.

Table 9. Post-test results for Control and Experimental Groups

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Post-test	Control Group	40	62.45	8.85	1.39	-8.07	78	.000
	Experimental Group	40	78.30	8.70	1.37			

The findings based on the *t*-test analysis of the post-test show that there was a statistically meaningful difference between those who were exposed to language related content through Instagram, and those who were not (*t*=-8.07; p=.000). The mean scores showed a considerable increase on the part of experimental group (M=78.3) while the control group had lower mean scores in the post-test (M=62.45).

In order to have a detailed analysis for the effect of Instagram use for language learning purposes as an educational environment, paired-samples *t*-test was performed to investigate the correlations and the averages of the two tests for experimental group.

Table 10. Paired Samples *t*-test results

			<i>r</i>	<i>Sig</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Experimental Group	Pair1	Pretest - PostTest	-.026	.873	16.70	13.63	2.15	-7.74	39	.000

The paired-samples *t*-test results show that there was a negative correlation for the experimental group ($r=-.026$) indicating that the Instagram intervention contributed significantly to students language learning based on the achievement tests as seen in the post test. Although the findings show that both groups had an increased post test results, the effect of Instagram on experimental group is evident as Table 10 shows.

Thus, the experimental findings of the Study 2 suggest that the students’ progress in language learning can be supported through Instagram and it has a statistically significant impact as an educational tool for language learning purposes.

Findings for Research Question 3

The findings from qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews with the voluntary participants from the experimental group following the Instagram intervention were presented based on the recurring themes.

Table 11. Recurring Themes of the Student Interviews

Themes	Participants
Exposure to Language	S5, S1
Enjoyment & Motivation	S2, S1, S4
Decreasing Social Media Barriers	S3, S2
Contribution to Developing Language Skills and Areas	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6
Eliminating the classroom barriers	S1, S4
Miscellaneous	S2, S6

One of the major findings of the interviews with the participant students is that Instagram use was an integral part of their daily lives and its use for language learning purposes increased their exposure to language out of the formal classes. For this theme, for example, one of the students (S5) stated that “...out of the school, I spend most of my time on Instagram following the posts of my friends; since we started using our Instagram account for our class, I have started checking the posts for our lessons and spend time on checking my friends’ replies to posts”. Similarly, S1 also said that “I always check my mobile for Instagram or other social media accounts in the bus, at café or at dormitory. That is my habit anyway; but now I also check or come across the posts from the Instagram and I learn a lot because I see these posts almost every day.”

Regarding the theme of “enjoyment”, the participants stated that they had fun checking the posts and get motivated doing the tasks especially when they were required to shoot videos to tag their answers. Within this theme, the other dimension the students indicated was about the nature of the content. Focusing on these aspects, S2 explained that “When I need to answer a question on the post in speaking, I really spend time and take videos over and over and finally choose the best captured one. I love these activities and I feel motivated.” Likewise, S1 stated “I enjoy reading the posts after classes, because I work on these posts and remember the content better.” One of the students (S4) said that “I think, when the content of the posts is interesting, it is more motivating for me and I enjoy reading such posts more.”

One of the striking findings of the interviews is that the students reported that using Instagram for language learning purposes prevented them from spending time for free and made them focused on their courses through exposure. They claimed that the habit of checking the updates or following the posts of their friends was the main factor preventing them from sparing time for studying. However, the use of Instagram with linguistic content for language learning purposes kept them on track in terms of language learning. Regarding this, S3 stated:

“I always spend time switching between my social media accounts, so I have difficulty in sparing time for studying. Now I spend my time on Instagram to overcome this difficulty; I can revise what I learned at school”. Adding to this, another student (S2) claimed that “While studying, I use my mobile to check my Instagram and get distracted. But now, I continue learning my subjects from Instagram.”

In relation to the effectiveness of Instagram on developing students’ language skills and areas, almost all the participants (S1, S3, S4, S5, S6) expressed that the short videos and pronunciation exercises improved their listening skills in addition to developing their speaking. Also, they reported to have developed their reading especially finding out the topic and key words. To clarify, S6 explained that *“In Instagram, I especially benefitted from the vocabulary posts like idioms and phrasal verbs. Also, synonym words posted for the following courses made the courses understandable for reading texts.”* Similarly, two of the students (S2 and S4) reported that they improved their speaking skills due to the video shooting as the post requirements by saying *“in class, I sometimes do not want to involve in speaking tasks, but it is quite enjoyable to post short videos for speaking and I posted several videos which I believe to have contributed my speaking.”* Also, S5 stated *“Pronunciation related posts and exercises were particularly useful for me, so I purposefully worked on them.”*

In terms of eliminating the classroom barriers, the findings showed that one of the effects of Instagram as an educational platform for language learning purposes was about removing the inhibition factors in students’ participation in formal classroom settings. In relation to this, S6 explained that *“Normally, I feel shy in participating in the classroom activities or hesitate speaking for fear of making mistakes; however, in participating in Instagram posts while commenting, writing answers to questions or sending speaking videos I do not feel any pressure on me.”* Likewise two other students (S1 and S4) stated they felt free for making mistakes while using Instagram for learning English by saying *“Unlike school lessons, it is more motivating for me to check our class posts and participate in the tasks because I do not feel inhibited”* (S1).

Additional findings of the study were related to the high level of preparedness to learn and the retention of the linguistic knowledge thanks to exposure. The participants stated that the posts shared following the formal classes increased their level of retention. In relation to this aspect, S2 said that *“...because I have difficulty in studying regularly, but the posts shared which included the course content enable me to remember them better.”* One of the participants (S6) explained that the posts shared prior to courses increased her readiness level by saying *“sometimes, the Instagram posts included the content of the following courses of the next days, so I understood my lessons better because I was already familiar with them and I was ready for the lessons.”*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Together with the high popularity of social media platforms and their use in educational contexts for delivering and sharing information, a great body of research has focused on their effectiveness as educational platforms (Álvarez Valencia, 2016; Aydin, 2012; Derakhshan & Hasanabbasi, 2015; Jovanovic, Chiong, & Weise, 2012; Kalelioglu, 2016; Lomicka & Lord, 2016; McCarroll & Curran, 2013; Rios & Campos, 2015). On the other hand, as one of the most commonly used social media platforms, Instagram has gained more popularity especially in recent years although there are quite scant studies investigating its efficacy as an educational platform for language learning purposes (Mansor & Rahim, 2017); thus, the discussion of the findings of this study was based on the findings of other social media platforms. Aiming to fulfill the gap in the literature and to explore the effects of Instagram use for language learning purposes, this study found that social media is part of students’ everyday life, which several other studies also supported (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016; Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Lim & Richardson, 2016; McCarroll & Curran, 2013; Nicolai et al., 2017; Solmaz, 2017). Thus, it is evident that social media platforms have become an integral part of students’ everyday practices as also found within this study. From this perspective, it is argued that the intensive use of social media as part of students’ everyday lives (which in fact began with the introduction of Web 2.0 technology) could effectively be utilized for educational purposes particularly in higher education contexts (Hemmi, Bayne & Land, 2009).

The young generation’s increasing tendency to use social media for various purposes, to communicate with their peers and others as part of a global community, to share their ideas and opinions, has increased pressure on educational institutions to use such social media platforms to connect with these students and to eradicate the barriers of the traditional classrooms for these students, with the utilization of these technologies for learning and teaching activities (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016).

As it was also revealed in this study, the students themselves believe that social media platforms, Instagram in this particular context, can be used for specifically for educational purposes, as also explained by Wong et al.(2017). They state that social media platforms especially those with student-generated content or the social

media enhanced learning environment and the learning community, serve a base for autonomous and social learning in the daily lives of the learners. This study has also revealed that students specifically focus on the peer-related concerns (cooperation, collaboration, sharing of the knowledge, and being in rapport with each other) for the use of Instagram for educational purposes. In spite of not being conducted specifically for Instagram, this finding is also found in other studies related to Twitter (Krutka & Carpenter, 2016; Taskiran et al., 2016, 2018), Facebook (Aydin, 2012; Lomicka & Lord, 2016; Rios & Campos, 2015) and social networking sites in general (Alabdulkareem, 2015; Badri et al., 2017).

Thus, it is possible to claim that social media platforms and Instagram in particular for the purpose of this study, enable students to create a cooperative, collaborative and sharing atmosphere, supporting the formal classroom setting in addition to sharing class materials. One of the significant additional findings of our study which was also found in a number of other studies conducted for Twitter and Facebook is that the participants agreed Instagram could be used to support face-to-face learning. Chawinga(2017), for example, found that Twitter use played a supplementary role to formal classes while increasing the students' interaction time out of classroom. Similarly, Lim and Richardson (2016) recommended in their studies based on the findings that social media networks could be beneficially used to enhance face-to-face learning. Regarding this, some other authors also emphasize the supplementary use of social media platforms to support traditional classroom learning (see Abney et al., 2018; Aydin, 2012; Lomicka & Lord, 2016; Taskiran et al., 2018). It was also found in this current study that students regarded Instagram as a motivating tool fostering learning. As O'Keeffe(2016) states in her study that modern networking technologies enable the social media communities to share knowledge and create learning environments with students who are motivated to involve in learning activities in online spaces (p.4).

In terms of language learning purposes, Instagram was found to be an effective tool. Supporting this, Bista (2015) reports that the use of Twitter for educational purposes contributed to language learning by enhancing the social presence of the students. As Faizi et al.(2013) recommend the use of Facebook for language learning purposes in the forms of distant education, blended or face-to-face learning. Regarding this, Brick(2012) conducted a study to investigate the potential of social networking sites, in particular Busuu, for language learning in higher education context and concluded that these networking sites give chance to learners improve their communicative skills through practice opportunities. Similarly, Wong et al. (2017) also claim that social media platforms are appropriate to develop the learners' communicative skills in L2; however, they emphasize the significance of balancing the activities in the form of formal and informal, individual and social, meaning and form and input vs output instruction.

In the survey, it was found that being an authentic platform to practice the language or to interact with people, the learners did not feel stressed about making mistakes on Instagram in terms of showing up in discussions or contributing to comments. Specifically, Chawinga (2017) also found that the use of Twitter increased to response rates of the students with an encouraging effect on them unlike the total silence which was occasionally observable on the part of the shy students hesitating to participate in class activities. Thus, Chawinga (2017) stated that social media enabled the students to express themselves without inhibition. This finding was also consistent with the findings of Faizi et al.(2013) who, similarly, asserted that social media are beneficial for intimidated students to share their opinions and thoughts.

Because of the quite limited number of studies conducted on Instagram, the efficacy of this social media platform was previously unknown for educational purposes, in particular for language learning. Thus, to unveil the potential of Instagram for these purposes, the experimental part conducted for this study also showed that the students performed better in the post-test following the Instagram intervention supplementary to face-to face, traditional classroom. Though the findings of this study were compared with the findings of other social media related studies, a study conducted for Instagram for language learning purposes similarly supports the findings of this study. Mansor and Rahim (2017) highlighted in their studies that Instagram provided educational opportunities to students for language learning purposes since the students felt relaxed and spontaneous and they also stated that through Instagram tasks, learners were able improve their communicative skills as well as writing and reading skills. As both the survey and the experimental findings as well as interview findings of this current study show, it is evident that Instagram could be utilized to support students' language learning as it provides opportunities for them to practice the language with their peers and people around the world, by exposing them to language content out of the classroom in addition to improving their language skills as well as language areas.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations in terms of the context and the participants. Initially, this study is limited to the EFL learners; thus, how Instagram use may affect the ESL learners may need a new study. Also, this study

is limited to the data collected from the participants of the study. Finally, the study also has limitations in terms of the content and skills shared with the participants during the experimental part.

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