

## INSTAGRAM IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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**Abstract.** *The purpose of the study is to explore the potential of integrating Instagram in university-level English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses, focusing on Business English for Advanced Students. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combines qualitative data from observing the completion of Instagram-based assignments and subsequent semi-structured group interviews with quantitative data from a five-point Likert scale questionnaire distributed to the students who participated in the study. The research sample consisted of twenty-six undergraduate students from the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia, who completed four Instagram-based tasks related to communication, international marketing, promoting Slovakia, and success, which were linked to topics covered in the course during the winter semester of the academic year 2020/2021. The findings show that Instagram can be used effectively in ESAP courses mainly due to its popularity, visual appeal of posts, and, most importantly, as a platform that serves as a powerful marketing tool. The results indicate that the implementation of Instagram activities was positively perceived by most students, with high levels of agreement regarding the relevance, engagement, and creativity of the tasks. The study highlights the potential benefits of using Instagram in ESAP, providing insights into effective language learning through authentic, business-related tasks. Ultimately, integrating Instagram into ESAP can enable students to develop the language skills and competencies needed in real business contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Content and Language Integrated Learning; English for Specific Academic Purposes; Instagram; language skills; marketing; social networking sites; tertiary education.*

### ІНСТАГРАМ У ВИКЛАДАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ДЛЯ СПЕЦІАЛЬНИХ АКАДЕМІЧНИХ ЦІЛЕЙ

*Мета дослідження – вивчити потенціал впровадження Instagram в університетський курс з англійської мови для спеціальних академічних цілей (ESAP), зосередившись на діловій англійській мові для студентів старших курсів. Змішаний підхід у цьому дослідженні поєднує якісні дані, зібрані під час спостереження за виконанням завдань в Instagram і подальших напівструктурованих групових інтерв'ю, з кількісними даними, отриманими через п'ятибальну анкету за шкалою Лайкєрта, яку розповсюдили серед студентів-учасників дослідження. Вибірка дослідження складалася з двадцяти шести студентів бакалаврату факультету*

*торгівлі Університету економіки в Братиславі. Протягом зимового семестру 2020/2021 навчального року вони виконали чотири завдання в Instagram, пов'язані з комунікацією, міжнародним маркетингом, промоцією Словаччини та успіхом, що відповідали темам курсу. Результати показують, що Instagram можна ефективно використовувати в курсах ESAP, головним чином завдяки його популярності, візуальній привабливості дописів і, що найважливіше, як платформу, яка слугує потужним маркетинговим інструментом. Результати вказують на те, що більшість студентів позитивно сприйняли виконання завдань в Instagram, з високим рівнем згоди щодо актуальності, залучення та креативності завдань. Дослідження підкреслює потенційні переваги використання Instagram в ESAP, надаючи уявлення про ефективне вивчення мови через автентичні, пов'язані з бізнесом завдання. Зрештою, інтеграція Instagram в ESAP може дозволити студентам розвивати мовні навички та компетенції, необхідні в реальних бізнес-контекстах.*

**Ключові слова:** *інтегроване навчання; англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням; Instagram; мовні навички; маркетинг; соціальні мережі; вища освіта.*

## **1. Introduction**

In today's globalized world, effective communication skills in English are increasingly important, particularly in the business world. As a result, English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) has become a key part of university curricula, with the aim of developing students' language skills relevant to their field of study. While traditional methods of teaching ESAP have been successful, there is growing interest in integrating social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, into language instruction.

Instagram's visual and interactive features make it a promising tool for language learning that can facilitate student engagement, collaboration, and creativity. Moreover, Instagram is not only a platform concentrated on connecting with people but also a place where business is done on a large scale with the possibility to reach a worldwide audience, which provides students of economics with an opportunity to learn about the functions of marketing in the digital era. Through integrating language and content, students can simultaneously develop their language proficiency and knowledge of industry-specific topics, which can better prepare them for real-world professional contexts. With the use of Instagram, students can produce and share content that reflects their understanding of both language and business concepts, ultimately enhancing their language skills and developing their problem-solving, creativity and communication abilities, all of which are highly valued in the business world. However, despite its benefits, its use in ESAP, particularly in university courses for students of economics, has not been extensively researched. Thus, one of the aims of this study is to point out how Instagram can be integrated into language instruction in tertiary education, based on research conducted in the past, and at the same time, to try to fill in the existing gaps in this field.

## **2. Literature review**

Social media have become the focus of different kinds of research, among those also linguistic and methodological analyses in a variety of educational contexts. White et al. (2011) examine the potential uses of social media in the classroom, emphasizing their

role in promoting student creativity, collaborative learning through the creation of learning communities, and the use of social media as an assessment tool. In the book by Joosten (2012), educators are provided with instructions on how to utilise social media in education in general, while Patrut and Patrut (2013) concentrate on the integration of e-learning platforms, interactive virtual channels, and social networking sites in specific university courses (marketing information systems and gender studies), as well as on building global communities of academics. Mallia (2014) offers insights into the potential benefits and challenges of integrating social networks into the classroom, highlighting both formal and informal uses of social interaction tools as learning tools. One of the topics addressed by Greenhow et al. (2016) is how social media can become a part of teacher education. The study by Ansari and Khan (2020) proves that using social media and mobile devices has a significant impact on students' collaborative behaviour, engagement, and, consequently, on their academic performance.

Reinhardt (2019) provides a thorough overview of studies dealing with blogs, wikis, and social networks in language education, where he points out the role of social media in autonomous learning. (Chan et al. (2011) outline the theoretical and pedagogical implications of their use in foreign language teaching and learning. The authors draw attention to developing oral proficiency using YouTube videos and demonstrate how social networking sites can enhance students' motivation and learners' autonomy. Lamy and Zourou (2013) emphasise that the success of using social networking sites in language education depends on the student's environment, activities, and learning priorities: The findings of the research into using social networking sites show that these support expanding students' vocabulary (Motlagh et al., 2020; Mykytiuk et al., 2022; Gómez et al., 2023), enhancing their communication skills (Chan et al., 2011; Mykytiuk et al., 2022; Yamshynska et al., 2022), and help remove intercultural barriers (Lisnychenko et al., 2022).

It is natural that most attention has been paid to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace and to some specific educational social networking sites such as Edmodo, Ning, Elgg, as these sites have a longer history or more variable functions than those of Instagram, or, as in the second group, they are specifically aimed at learners on different levels of education. However, Instagram has gradually become of interest to teachers and researchers, which was confirmed by the analysis of 46 studies by Manca (2020).

One group of studies dealing with Instagram specifically, concentrates on students' attitudes towards it as an educational and language learning platform. Erarslan (2019) used combined research methods to find out students' opinions about Instagram for educational and language learning purposes and investigated also whether Instagram influenced students' language learning. According to the author, the results of the study prove "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" and that "in terms of language learning purposes, Instagram was found to be an effective tool" (Erarslan, 2019, p. 66). This finding was also confirmed in research by Sari and Yahudin (2019) in a Business English course.

Al-Ali carried out her research into utilizing Instagram and other platforms (Keynote and BlackBoard Learn) in a bridge-intensive English program in three learning activities

concerning holidays, whose goal was to improve students' grammar structures, speaking, writing, and vocabulary skills. Based on the outcomes, the author believes that Instagram "helped create a more personalized learning experience for students, ... it allowed for creating a sense of community, ... and it encouraged them to produce creative content rather than doing the bare minimum to complete an activity" (Al-Ali, 2014, pp. 12-13).

A study by Rahmah (2018) showed that sharing visual materials, such as photographs and videos, on Instagram can make students more confident to speak in a foreign language stemming from positive comments made on Instagram by their friends, followers, and colleagues.

Similar results were produced by Pujiati et al. (2019) in an experiment conducted in a junior high school, whose aim was "to improve students' motivation in learning English and also to increase their grammatical competence and skills especially, vocabulary and writing" (Pujiati et al, 2019, p. 653). Compared to other studies, this experiment was founded on students' reactions to teachers' questions in the form of polls published on Instagram and not on students' own posts of photographs and videos. Despite this difference, the authors state that "[b]ased on the result of the study, it is precise that Instagram has essential roles in assisting students to improve their motivation in learning English and eventually increase their English competence and skills" (Pujiati et al. 2019, p. 654).

Gonulal (2019) came to analogous conclusions using Instagram as a mobile-assisted language learning tool (MALL). From the results, he determined that Instagram is an effective way to learn vocabulary and communication skills. Depending on particular Instagram features implemented in foreign language classroom tasks, this social networking site has been found to contribute to the enhancement of learners' reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills (e.g. Mansor & Rahim, 2017; Maslova et al., 2019; Wulandari, 2019; Prasetyawati, & Ardi, 2020; Sitorus & Azir, 2021).

Other studies were conducted in groups of university students. Mansor and Rahim (2017) based their experiment on the group work of 20 students of the Business Communication Course at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. The students, divided into groups, posted videos on four different topics on Instagram and the groups were encouraged to interact with each other via the commenting function of the platform, which was later followed by an online interview with the course instructors. The authors of the study claim that based on their findings, using Instagram not only boosted students' confidence to communicate in English and helped them develop their language skills (namely reading and writing), but it also contributed to developing the collaborative environment by creating learning communities.

Leier (2018) explored this topic in a group of university students attending an intermediate German course that they took by distance. The theoretical framework of Leier's study drew on multiliteracies as described by Pegrum et al. (2011, 2022):

- digital literacy – the ability to interpret and share information on digital platforms,
- search literacy – the ability to use search engines effectively
- multimodal literacy – the ability to interpret and communicate through multimedia,
- filtering literacy – the ability to reduce the excess of information
- critical literacy – the ability to apply critical thinking to digital technologies,

- network literacy – the skill of using networks to connect with others, share information, collaborate, and build reputation,
- tagging literacy – the ability to use tags as metadata to search, make searchable, and organise online content,
- remixing literacy – the ability to change existing digital content to create new meanings.

The author used a questionnaire to find out how students behave on Instagram generally, how they perceive learning with Instagram as part of their assignment, and finally, their approach to their Instagram account design. Thus, this study comprised both passive and active use of Instagram in the educational setting. It follows from the results that “[t]he students perceived the Instagram assignment to be beneficial for their cultural learning of German, but less so for their overall German language acquisition except for spoken German” (Leier, 2018, p. 87). Regarding developing multiliteracies, more specifically digital literacies, “(t)he outcome was a more reflective use of internet resources, leading to transformed practices” (Leier, 2018, p. 87).

The function of Instagram as a marketing tool was highlighted in the article by Mustain et al. (2019). Business Administration students were assigned a task to examine corporate marketing strategies on Instagram and produce their own brief videos on the same platform. Subsequently, interviews and a questionnaire were conducted to identify students’ perceptions of using Instagram in a language classroom. The outcomes of the study confirmed the previously mentioned results, namely that students feel more motivated and more engaged in activities that include Instagram as a learning tool. Moreover, the study revealed “that Instagram can promote meaningful interaction as well as learner autonomy which are essential for their life outside the classroom” (Mustain et al., 2018, p. 100).

Communication in the field of marketing was also the primary focus of the investigation pursued by Maslova et al. (2019), who explored the integration of Instagram into teaching English for specific purposes to students of economics. In this specific case, Instagram-written blogs dealing with e-marketing were posted by groups of students during one semester, while the second experiment lasted three semesters, during which students were given different tasks based on the level of their language skills to publish video blogs on Instagram. Analyses of written blogs and video blogs led to the conclusion that “Instagram has proved to be a highly motivational tool that allows stimulating and nurturing students’ interest for continuous learning” and “[t]he fresh format and uniqueness of this approach allow for the deployment of creativity and self-expression” (Maslova et al., 2019, p. 8703), and at the same time, students were able to develop their writing and speaking skills in English.

The outcomes of the studies proved the undisputable benefits of utilising Instagram on different levels of education, which can be summarised as follows. Instagram is an effective tool for learning and teaching as it facilitates:

- higher motivation to learn a foreign language,
- interaction among students and between students and a teacher,
- a sharing and collaborative environment among students,
- a more personalised learning experience,
- greater students’ autonomy,

- stimulation of creativity and self-expression,
- increase in students' confidence in foreign language communication,
- developing competence and language skills in a foreign language.

Besides the studies analysing students' attitudes towards Instagram and the ways to utilize this application in the education process, there is a gap in the literature that was addressed by Carpenter et al. (2020), who studied how educators use Instagram in their professional lives, because "educators' online activities remain an understudied field, and the particular case of Instagram remains unexplored in published research" (Carpenter et al., 2020, p. 4). Their investigation into this topic was based on 841 responses, mostly by elementary and high-school teachers, to a survey distributed on various social networking sites. According to the results, "[e]ducators employed Instagram to acquire and share knowledge, as well as to exchange emotional support and develop community" (Carpenter et al., 2020, p. 9). One of the findings that might be surprising is the fact that teachers tend to mix professional and personal content on Instagram.

Previous research has predominantly focused on the overall use of social networking sites, with Instagram also being investigated in English language teaching across diverse educational contexts. However, a limited body of work exists concerning the specific use of Instagram in academic settings, particularly for language learning with a focus on Business English. Given Instagram's status as a vital marketing tool, it offers a compelling opportunity for content and language-integrated learning (CLIL).

The presented research **aims** to address this knowledge gap by examining the practical application and outcomes of integrating Instagram into university-level courses in English for economics. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to explore Instagram's potential in supporting ESAP teaching and learning, with a focus on English for economics students. To achieve this, the article introduces a case study of Instagram's implementation in a university setting, along with a questionnaire reflecting students' perceptions of Instagram-based activities in the ESAP course.

Based on the aim, we asked the following research questions:

- 1) can Instagram-based activities be effectively integrated into university-level ESAP courses for students of economics?;
- 2) what are the students' perceptions regarding the implementation of Instagram as a supportive tool in the ESAP course?

### **3. Methods**

#### *Research Design*

The methodology employed in this study comprises a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from observation of assignment completion and semi-structured group interviews following every Instagram-based task with quantitative data from a five-point Likert scale questionnaire focused on students' perceptions of these activities. This methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences of using Instagram as a language learning tool at the tertiary level.

#### *Participants*

The group assigned Instagram-based tasks consisted of 26 undergraduate students in the first year of their bachelor's study programs at the Faculty of Commerce, University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia. These students were enrolled in the course *Business*

*English for Advanced Students*, which corresponds to the C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2020). All students participated voluntarily, and their anonymity on Instagram was ensured through the utilization of a shared Instagram account. The research was conducted during the winter semester of the academic year 2020/2021, spanning from September 2020 to December 2020.

### *Instruments and Procedures*

The research comprised four distinct phases:

- 1) pre-activity: this phase involved administering a questionnaire that aimed to gather insights into the general use of social networking sites;
- 2) main activity: Instagram was integrated into the learning process through the implementation of four guided tasks; subsequently, both teachers and students' colleagues provided feedback on the completed tasks;
- 3) post-activity: following the completion of the tasks, an assessment of the posts was conducted, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with the participating students;
- 4) data collection and analysis: a Likert-scale questionnaire was distributed among the students who had taken part in the Instagram-based activities, and the data from this questionnaire were then collected and subjected to analysis.

This study encountered three key considerations during the implementation of Instagram-based tasks in ESAP courses for economics students. Firstly, a significant digital divide can be observed between the “digital native” students and “digital immigrant” teachers (Prensky, 2001). Overcoming this disparity required thorough preparation and facilitated closer cooperation between students and the instructor, fostering a collaborative atmosphere. Secondly, the group consisted of first-year students who were unfamiliar with each other, and the course commenced amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, relying primarily on online platforms like MS Teams for communication. This limited personal interaction may have increased the potential for student weariness, confusion, and frustration. Lastly, addressing students' privacy concerns was crucial. Although prior research suggested privacy was not a significant issue for students (Leier, 2018), we opted to create a separate Instagram account solely dedicated to the course tasks. This approach positively influenced creativity and collaboration during the account setup, promoting a more comfortable learning environment.

A collaborative process led to the selection of the account name *businessstudentsof*, which was initially public and later switched to private at the end of the course. Utilizing this common account, accessible to all students and the author, was preferred over following individual accounts to avoid intermingling personal and course-related content, which would have differed in scope. This approach ensured that students felt encouraged to share their “professional” posts without hesitation.

Following the initial stage, students were given four tasks to complete throughout the entire semester. These tasks were designed to align with the course's content based on the textbook *Market Leader Upper-Intermediate – Business English Coursebook* (Cotton et al., 2013). Specifically, the tasks covered topics dealing with communication, international marketing, doing business internationally, and success. The tasks were deliberately arranged in a sequence, progressing from passive to active use of the medium. While the

primary focus of the assignments was on improving English writing skills, it should be noted that speaking skills had the potential to be incorporated in Instagram videos.

**Task One – Communication.** This task aimed to evaluate the application of Instagram as a communication tool by businesses in promoting their products and services. Students were required to conduct research on Instagram posts of a business of their choice and present their findings concisely in a 100-word text, employing domain-specific vocabulary and collocations pertinent to communication. Preparatory seminars were held to provide students with the necessary understanding of communication issues to enable them to carry out their research effectively.

Participants were granted the autonomy to analyse any business they desired on Instagram, be it of international or Slovak origin. Following task completion, students submitted their summaries to the teacher for assessment and feedback. The provided feedback was intended to improve the students' work, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and offer suggestions for enhancement.

**Task Two – International marketing.** The second task assigned to the students revolved around promotional activities on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, with a focus on international marketing. The primary objective was to create and publish an advertisement of an existing or imaginary product or service on Instagram within a stipulated two-week timeframe. To facilitate the task, a case study from the textbook (Cotton et al., 2013, p. 20-21) was presented as a source of inspiration.

**Task Three – Doing Business Internationally.** The objective of the third task was to promote a region in Slovakia or the country as a whole. Students, including those studying Business in Tourism and Services, were instructed to capture a photograph representing their town, region, or country, accompanied by a comment promoting the chosen location.

**Task Four – Success.** The aim of the final, fourth task was to express students' individual feelings of success after they had passed the examination at the end of the winter semester 2020/2021. This task not only aligned with the final unit of the course but also aimed to encourage a more playful expression of students' sentiments, fostering a positive attitude towards completing the tasks and the entire Business English course.

The semi-structured group interviews conducted after each task served as a vital component of this study, aiming to elicit valuable insights into students' perceptions and evaluations of the assigned tasks. The interviews provided a platform for students to express their thoughts on the task's interest level, relevance, and overall engagement. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences, identifying any challenges encountered throughout the process. The findings from the interviews were later considered when analysing data obtained from a follow-up questionnaire.

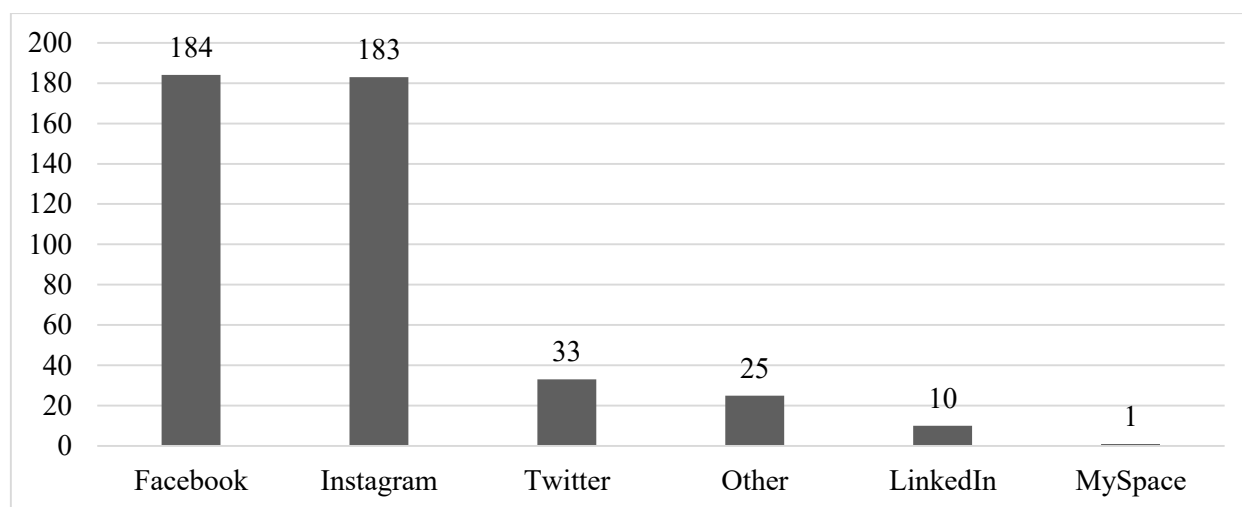
The final phase of the study entailed administering a comprehensive five-point Likert scale questionnaire, consisting of nine questions scored on a scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Each item was assigned numerical values as follows: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. The tenth question ranked the four assignments from best (1) to worst (4). The primary objective of the questionnaire was to identify and measure students' perceptions of the Instagram-based activities integrated into the language learning process. This quantitative approach provided valuable data that complemented the qualitative insights obtained from observations during the course and the semi-structured group interviews, allowing for a holistic understanding of the students' experiences and opinions regarding the teaching methods employed.



#### 4. Results

##### *Results of the initial questionnaire concerning social networking sites*

Instagram was selected for the study due to its easy accessibility via mobile phones and popularity among students at the University of Economics in Bratislava, which was determined based on a survey filled out at the beginning of the winter semester of the academic year 2020/2021. Among our university students, Instagram was used by 183 out of 191 respondents, coming second only to Facebook, which had 184 users (see Figure 1). The findings demonstrate the equal popularity of these two social networking sites. At the same time, more than half the participants (54%) answered that they would welcome social networking sites becoming part of their English language course if it was a controlled activity (cf. Pavlíková, 2021).



**Figure 1.** Students' profiles on social networking sites, n = 191.

##### *Results of integrating Instagram in the ESAP course*

**Task One** sought to cultivate students' understanding of how businesses employ Instagram as a communicative tool, while also improving their language skills in the context of communication-related vocabulary and expressions. Analysis of the students' texts revealed that they recognised the effectiveness of Instagram as a marketing tool for companies to engage with their target audience. However, when examining the summaries, it became apparent that some students used informal language rather than the expected formal language. This observation could be attributed to their limited experience of academic writing, which includes writing summaries, abstracts, and other forms of academic text. In addition, the informal nature of communication prevalent in social networks may have influenced the students' writing style. As a result, the incorporation of more colloquial language in their texts could be explained by their familiarity with the informal communication patterns prevalent in the digital realm. The feedback process administered by the teacher played a crucial role in guiding the students towards more refined and effective communication practices.

**Task Two.** Despite some initial delays in submissions, a total of 16 commercials were eventually successfully posted. These included 11 static advertisements featuring at least one photograph and 5 videos. Some posts displayed a remarkably high standard in their visual presentation, reaching an almost professional level. The task was designed to be completed individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Interestingly, some students chose to

work together in pairs or groups of three almost instantly despite not having met personally before due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The successful completion of this task highlights the students' creativity and skills in utilizing Instagram as a powerful tool for international marketing promotion. Their ability to collaborate and generate compelling advertisements underscores the value of the platform in fostering innovative approaches to advertising strategies.

**Task Three.** A total of 19 submissions were received in response to the third assignment. However, one notable observation emerged during the evaluation process. While students demonstrated active participation in completing the task, it was discovered that a significant proportion of the images used in the submissions, and occasionally the accompanying comments, were downloaded directly from the internet and used without proper attribution to the original author(s). As a consequence, the account was switched from public to private. The presence of downloaded material may affect the extent to which students' work reflects their individual effort, which is a critical aspect in the assessment of their language learning.

**Task Four.** The timing of assigning this task at the end of the semester, moreover, after passing the test, was unfortunate because no further posts regarding the topic of success were produced. We presume that this was caused by two factors: students being too occupied with taking examinations in other subjects, and what seems even more probable – students lacking motivation to complete any tasks once they had finished the course and received a final grade for it.

Excluding the first task – the summary, a total of 38 Instagram posts were published (two of which were posted by the teacher as a form of motivation for the students), resulting in the account *businessstudentsof* gaining 15 followers, predominantly consisting of fellow students. Interestingly, the “like” function was sparingly used, and comments were even rarer, possibly due to the students' tendency to communicate with each other in Slovak rather than English.

Throughout the course, the students' motivation to complete the assigned tasks showed a decreasing trend, especially towards the end of the semester. Nevertheless, the integration of Instagram positively stimulated their creativity, particularly in the production of commercials and advertisements. Overall, the use of Instagram facilitated a hands-on approach, allowing students to apply their knowledge in practice, rather than just acquiring a theoretical understanding of the subject. These findings were confirmed by the interviews and also by the final questionnaire.

#### *Results of the final questionnaire*

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was distributed using Google Forms among all 26 students who participated in the activities throughout the semester. Twenty respondents (n=20) provided anonymous answers to the questionnaire.

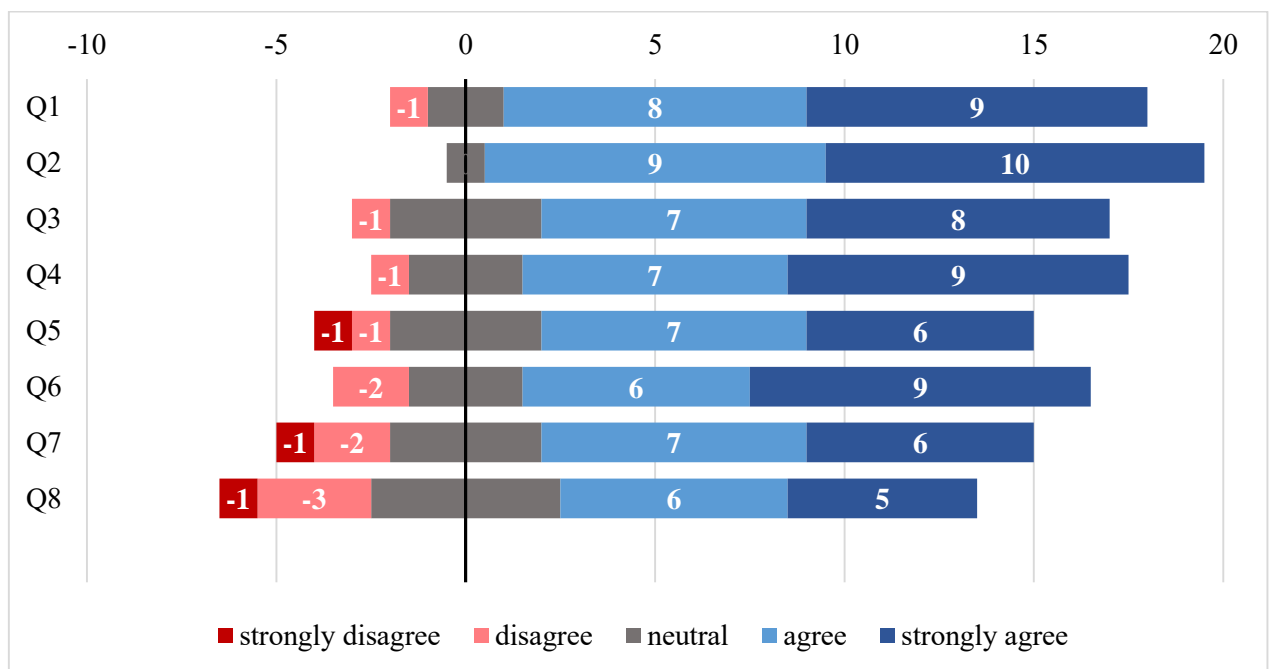
The overall results indicate that the Instagram activities were positively received by the students. The majority of 20 respondents reported that they found the activities engaging, relevant to the course content, and creative and would recommend that they be incorporated in future Business English courses at the University of Economics in Bratislava (Table 1, Table 2, Figure 2).

**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of students' perceptions of the Instagram-based activities Q1-Q8, n=20  
 (SD – strongly disagree, D = disagree, N – neither agree nor disagree, A – agree, SA – strongly agree)

	SD (%)	D (%)	SD+D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	SA+A (%)
<b>Q1</b>	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	8 (40%)	9 (45%)	17 (85%)
<b>Q2</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	9 (45%)	10 (50%)	19 (95%)
<b>Q3</b>	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	7 (35%)	8 (40%)	15 (75%)
<b>Q4</b>	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	7 (35%)	9 (45%)	16 (80%)
<b>Q5</b>	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	4 (20%)	7 (35%)	6 (30%)	13 (65%)
<b>Q6</b>	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	6 (30%)	9 (45%)	15 (75%)
<b>Q7</b>	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	4 (20%)	7 (35%)	6 (30%)	13 (65%)
<b>Q8</b>	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	4 (20%)	5 (25%)	6 (30%)	5 (25%)	11 (55%)

**Table 2.** Statistical analysis of students' perceptions of the Instagram-based activities Q1-Q8, n=20

	Mode	Media n	Mean	St Dev
<b>Q1</b>	5	4	4.25	0.85
<b>Q2</b>	5	4.5	4.45	0.60
<b>Q3</b>	5	4	4.10	0.91
<b>Q4</b>	5	4	4.20	0.89
<b>Q5</b>	4	4	3.75	1.16
<b>Q6</b>	5	4	4.10	1.02
<b>Q7</b>	4	4	3.75	1.16
<b>Q8</b>	4	4	3.55	1.19



**Figure 2.** Students' perceptions of the Instagram-based activities Q1-Q8, n=20

The highest level of agreement was achieved with the statement that the Instagram activities were relevant to the topics covered in the course (Q2), as 95% of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards this statement. This was followed by the results of the statement indicating that the Instagram activities were engaging (Q1), with 85% of respondents providing positive feedback, and that they offered students a way to express their creativity (Q4), also at 85%. The results concerning team collaboration (Q3) and the recommendation of Instagram-based activities for future ESAP courses (Q6) were similar, both reaching 75% agreement.

Responses indicating agreement or strong agreement also prevailed for the statements that the Instagram activities promoted students' motivation (Q5) and improved their understanding of Business English-specific vocabulary and concepts (Q7), both of which received 65% agreement. The lowest positive score, though still over half, was for the last statement (Q8), with 55% of respondents agreeing that the activities had contributed to improving their communication skills in business English.

The responses to the statement about students' improvement in specific language skills (Q9): reading (R), listening (L), writing (W), and speaking (S) comprehension (Table 3, Figure 3) showed more variable results.

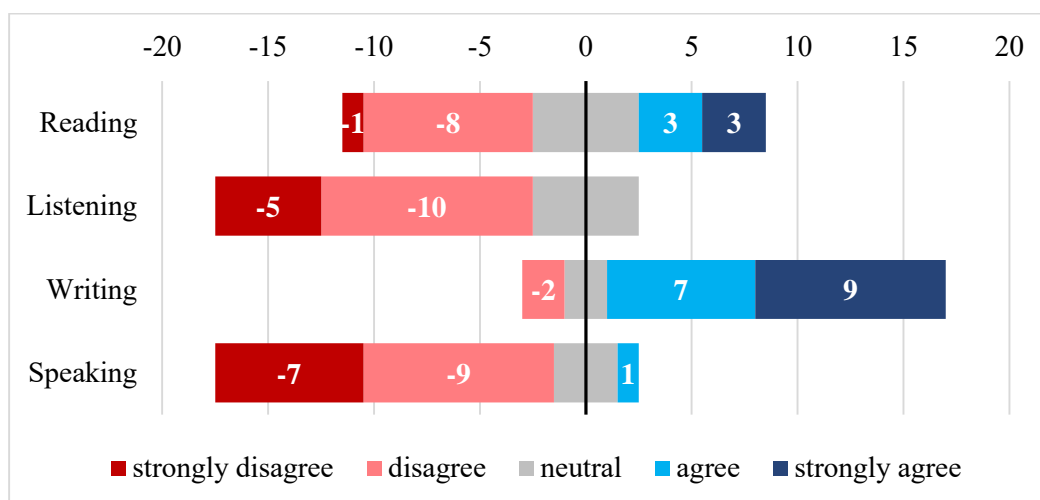
80% of the respondents perceived Instagram activities as generally beneficial for enhancing writing skills, while 30% acknowledged their usefulness for improving reading skills. Conversely, participants expressed disagreement regarding the effectiveness of the tasks in improving speaking and listening skills, 80% and 75%, respectively. This finding could be explained by the nature of the tasks and Instagram's inherent text-centric (and visual) characteristics, which may have limited its potential to support the development of oral communication skills.

**Table 3.** Frequency distribution of students' perceptions how the Instagram activities helped them improve their language skills (Q9), n=20  
(SD – strongly disagree, D = disagree, N – neither agree nor disagree, A – agree, SA – strongly agree)

Q9	SD (%)	D (%)	SD+D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	SA+A (%)
R	1 (5%)	8 (40%)	9 (45%)	5 (25%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	6 (30%)
L	5 (25%)	10 (50%)	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
W	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	7 (35%)	9 (45%)	16 (80%)
S	7 (35%)	9 (45%)	16 (80%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)

**Table 4.** Statistical analysis of students' perceptions how the Instagram activities helped them improve their language skills (Q9), n=20

Q9	Mode	Median	Mean	St Dev
R	2	3	2.95	1.19
L	2	2	2.00	0.73
W	5	4	4.15	0.99
S	2	2	1.90	0.85



**Figure 3.** Students' perceptions how the Instagram activities helped them improve their language skills (Q9), n=20

The responses to the final question (Q10) revealed that the tasks associated with promotion and advertising (tasks 2 and 3) received the highest positive ratings. This can be attributed to the fact that these tasks offered students the opportunity to engage in authentic activities, that simulated professional scenarios that they are likely to encounter in their future careers. This was closely followed by the summary writing task (task 1). However, the task designed to celebrate success (task 4) received the lowest score, which is not surprising as no students completed it.

## 5. Discussion

The results of the study suggest that the integration of Instagram into the ESAP course for business students was effective and had several positive outcomes. First, using Instagram as a language learning tool increased students' motivation to learn a foreign language. The visual and interactive features of Instagram engaged the students and encouraged them to actively participate in the learning process. In addition, the collaborative nature of the platform facilitated interaction between students and created a cooperative environment. These findings are consistent with those of other authors, who have explored the use of SNS in general (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Saienko et al., 2020; Pavlíková, 2021) and Instagram in particular in teaching English as a foreign language in different educational contexts (Al-Ali, 2014; Erarslan, 2019; Maslova et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the integration of Instagram provided students with a more personalised learning experience and allowed them to express their creativity. Due to the nature of the platform, students were able to develop their language skills while learning about business-related topics. However, the effectiveness of Instagram in improving specific language skills varied. Analysis of students' responses showed that the platform was generally helpful in developing writing skills, which is in agreement with the findings of Mansor and Rahim (2017) as well as a later study by Manullang and Katemba (2023).

Students responded most positively to the tasks related to promotion and advertising. This can be ascribed to the fact that these situations resembled real-life professional situations. The use of Instagram in these tasks allowed students not only to develop their language skills but also to explore marketing concepts in the digital age.

The present case study highlights that integrating Instagram-based activities requires teachers to consider several issues beyond the content and objectives of the assignments. These include ensuring the safety of both students and teachers online, emphasising the differences between formal academic language and the informal language of social media to students before assigning internet-based tasks, addressing plagiarism, which can be misconstrued by students when using internet sources, assigning tasks at an appropriate time, and, finally, finding methods to maintain student engagement throughout the course.

## 6. Limitations

Three fundamental limitations of the study were identified. The study was limited by a small sample size and included only Slovak students from one faculty at the University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia. Another limitation of the study relates to the COVID-19 pandemic situation during the 2020/2021 academic year when all lectures and seminars were conducted online. The absence of direct, face-to-face interactions may have influenced the behaviour of both students and lecturers and thus affected the results of the study. Finally, the limitation that has affected the findings of the research is the fact that only three Instagram-based tasks (out of four) were completed by participants.

## 7. Conclusions

Social networks have become integral to our daily lives and have naturally become a part of teaching and learning processes. At all levels of education, students use various electronic tools, including applications, programs, and websites, not only for informal communication but also in formal education settings. Therefore, language teachers should embrace the opportunity and sometimes challenge, of using all available methods and tools, including electronic ones, to make language instruction as effective as possible.

The research findings presented in this study demonstrate that Instagram-based activities can be effectively integrated into university-level ESAP courses, promoting both language learning and CLIL outcomes. Most students perceived the practical implementation of Instagram as a supportive tool in the Business English Course for Advanced Students positively, which resulted in increased motivation and creativity.

Future research could investigate various features of Instagram, including IGTV or Reels, to identify a more suitable environment for developing oral communication skills. In addition to examining how students perceive social media or mobile application activities, it is important to objectively assess students' language skills development. Furthermore, exploring the impact of social media on students' formal writing skills could provide valuable insights into how online communication affects language usage in academic and professional settings. Research could also concentrate on creating effective training programmes for language instructors to integrate social media platforms into their teaching methods, as suggested by Carpenter et al. (2020).

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire – students' perceptions of Instagram-based activities integrated in the *Business English for Advanced Students Course*

To what extent do you agree with the following statements on the scale of *strongly disagree (1) – disagree (2) – neither agree nor disagree (3) – agree (4) – strongly agree (5)*?

- Q1 The Instagram activities in this course were engaging.
- Q2 The Instagram activities were relevant to the topics covered in this course.
- Q3 The Instagram activities were helpful for developing your team collaboration skills.
- Q4 The Instagram activities provided me with the opportunity to express my creativity.
- Q5 The Instagram activities made me feel more motivated in my learning.
- Q6 I would recommend using Instagram in future Business English courses.
- Q7 The Instagram activities helped me understand Business English vocabulary and concepts better.
- Q8 The Instagram activities helped me improve my communication skills.
- Q9 The Instagram activities helped me improve my:
- a) reading skills
  - b) listening skills
  - c) writing skills
  - d) speaking skills
- Q10 How would you evaluate the four tasks you were assigned with 1 being the best and 4 being the worst?
- a) the summary of a company's activities on Instagram
  - b) advertising a product or service of your choice
  - c) promoting Slovakia
  - d) celebrating success