



From Scrolling to Reading: Students' Perceptions of Instagram as a Digital Platform for English Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

The growing use of social media in higher education has created new opportunities for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to access authentic, multimodal, and interest-based learning materials beyond the classroom. Instagram, as one of the most widely used social media platforms among students, offers various features such as captions, posts, stories, reels, comments, hashtags, and educational accounts that may support English learning, particularly reading comprehension. This study aimed to investigate students' perceptions of using Instagram as a supplementary digital platform for English reading comprehension. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, involving 15 students from the English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang. The data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 30 statements distributed via Google Forms. The data were analyzed descriptively by identifying response patterns, calculating percentages, and interpreting students' perceptions based on the research questions. The findings revealed that students generally perceived Instagram positively as a supportive medium for English reading activities. Students reported that Instagram helped them access varied English texts, understand short captions and posts, identify unfamiliar vocabulary and expressions, and summarize reading content more effectively. The visually supported and easily accessible nature of Instagram also increased students' motivation to engage with English materials. However, several obstacles were identified, including unstable internet connection, technical problems with mobile devices, and distraction from non-academic content. The study concludes that Instagram has pedagogical potential as a supplementary digital platform for English reading comprehension when it is used with clear learning objectives, appropriate content selection, and teacher guidance.

KEYWORDS

Instagram; students' perceptions; English reading comprehension; social media-based learning; EFL students

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has significantly transformed the ecology of English language learning by expanding the ways learners access, process, and interact with language input. In contemporary EFL contexts, students are no longer dependent solely on printed textbooks, teacher explanations, or classroom-based materials; they also engage with English through digital platforms, mobile

applications, online videos, captions, comments, and other forms of multimodal communication. This development is particularly relevant to reading comprehension because reading in digital environments requires students to interpret not only written language but also images, hyperlinks, hashtags, layout, and social interaction embedded in online texts. Reading

comprehension itself is a complex meaning-making process that involves decoding, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, inference, text structure awareness, and strategic engagement with written discourse (Bernhardt, 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Nation, 2013). Therefore, the use of digital and social media in English learning should be examined not merely as a technological trend but as a pedagogical response to students' changing literacy practices.

In English as a Foreign Language learning, exposure to meaningful input is essential because students need frequent opportunities to encounter vocabulary, sentence patterns, and discourse features in authentic contexts. However, many EFL students experience difficulties in maintaining reading motivation, understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, and connecting classroom texts with real-life communication. Social media may help address these challenges because it offers authentic, brief, visually supported, and interest-based texts that students can access repeatedly through their personal devices. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) argue that social media can connect formal and informal learning environments, while Greenhow and Lewin (2016) emphasize that digital platforms blur the boundaries between classroom learning and everyday literacy practices. From this perspective, social media can support English learning when it is integrated with clear instructional purposes rather than used only as entertainment.

Among social media platforms, Instagram has become one of the most popular applications among students because it combines visual, textual, and

interactive features. Instagram allows users to read captions, follow educational accounts, watch reels, respond to comments, save posts, use hashtags, and interact with global communities. These features create opportunities for incidental and intentional English learning. Al-Ali (2014) noted that Instagram could be used as a mobile language-learning tool because it encourages learners to connect images with linguistic expression. Similarly, Handayani (2016) explained that Instagram provides pedagogical opportunities for English teaching because learners can interact with authentic and meaningful content. In the context of EFL learning, Instagram may support reading comprehension by presenting short texts that are visually contextualized, personally relevant, and socially interactive.

Previous studies have shown that social media has potential benefits for second and foreign language learning. Reinhardt (2019), in a review of social media use in language education, found that social networking platforms can support language practice, learner identity, informal learning, and interaction when they are meaningfully connected to pedagogical activities. Manca and Ranieri (2016) also reported that social media offers educational opportunities in higher education, although its use may be affected by institutional, pedagogical, and technical challenges. In mobile-assisted language learning, Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg (2018) highlighted the importance of mobile technologies in supporting collaboration, communication, and learner autonomy. These findings indicate that platforms such as Instagram can enrich students' learning

experiences if teachers design activities that guide students to read, interpret, evaluate, and respond to digital texts critically.

The relationship between Instagram and English learning has also been investigated in Indonesian EFL contexts. Sesriyani and Sukmawati (2019) found that Instagram could be used as an English learning medium because students were already familiar with the platform and could access it easily through their gadgets. Liany et al. (2021) reported that university students perceived Instagram as useful for learning English because it provided learning resources and enhanced learning experiences. Suriaman et al. (2022) similarly found that students had positive perceptions of social media for English learning, particularly because it offered accessible learning resources and supported students' interest. More specifically, Sudiran (2022) showed that Indonesian students perceived Instagram positively as a medium for learning reading comprehension because they could use it to search for reading texts, vocabulary, and grammar-related content. These studies suggest that Instagram is not only a communication platform but also a potential digital literacy space for English learners.

Despite these benefits, the use of Instagram in English learning also presents challenges. Students may experience unstable internet access, limited mobile-phone storage, small screen size, distraction from entertainment content, and lack of critical digital literacy. These challenges are important because the pedagogical value of Instagram depends on how students use it and how teachers guide

its use. Social media can support learning when students are directed to follow relevant educational accounts, read appropriate texts, identify vocabulary, summarize information, and reflect on meaning. However, without pedagogical guidance, Instagram may become a source of distraction rather than a learning resource. This concern is consistent with Manca and Ranieri's (2016) argument that social media in education contains both opportunities and obstacles. Therefore, students' perceptions need to be investigated because perception influences acceptance, motivation, engagement, and willingness to use technology for learning.

Students' perceptions are central in evaluating the use of Instagram as a learning medium because learners are the direct users of the platform. Perception refers to the way individuals interpret, evaluate, and give meaning to their experiences. In educational technology, students' perceptions can reveal whether a digital platform is considered useful, accessible, engaging, and relevant to their learning needs. Positive perceptions may encourage students to use Instagram for reading English texts more frequently, while negative perceptions may indicate barriers that teachers need to address. In EFL reading, students' perceptions are particularly important because reading engagement is influenced not only by text difficulty but also by motivation, interest, accessibility, and the perceived relevance of materials.

Although several studies have discussed Instagram for English learning, further investigation is needed in local higher-education contexts, particularly among English Education

students in Enrekang. Students in this context are prospective English teachers who need to develop not only their own English proficiency but also their awareness of digital learning tools that may later be used in teaching practice. Investigating their perceptions can provide insight into how Instagram supports reading comprehension, what features are considered helpful, and what obstacles limit its use. This study therefore focuses on students' perceptions of using Instagram in learning English, especially in relation to reading comprehension.

Based on the background above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of using Instagram to support English reading comprehension?
2. What benefits do students perceive from using Instagram in English reading activities?
3. What obstacles do students encounter when using Instagram for English learning?

This study contributes to the discussion of social media-based English learning by providing empirical evidence from Indonesian EFL students' perspectives. The findings are expected to help lecturers, teachers, and students understand how Instagram can be used as a supplementary medium for reading comprehension. In addition, the study may inform the design of digital reading activities that are more contextual, engaging, and compatible with students' everyday technology practices.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to investigate

students' perceptions of using Instagram in English learning, particularly in supporting reading comprehension. This design was considered appropriate because the study focused on describing, interpreting, and understanding students' experiences, responses, and perceived challenges rather than measuring the effect of a treatment through experimental procedures. Therefore, this study did not use an experimental group, a control group, pre-test, or post-test. Instead, it emphasized students' subjective perceptions of Instagram as a supplementary digital learning medium.

A descriptive qualitative approach allows researchers to present participants' views in a systematic and contextual manner. In this study, the approach was used to explore how students perceived Instagram features such as captions, comments, stories, reels, hashtags, and educational posts in relation to English reading activities. The design also enabled the researcher to identify the perceived benefits and obstacles experienced by students when using Instagram to support their reading comprehension.

Participants

The participants of this study were 15 students from the English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang. The participants were selected because they had experience using Instagram and were familiar with English learning activities at the university level. Their familiarity with Instagram was important because the study aimed to obtain relevant responses from students who had directly used the platform in their daily digital practices.

The participants represented

English as a Foreign Language learners who regularly encountered English content through social media. As prospective English teachers, their perceptions were considered meaningful because they were not only users of Instagram but also learners who could critically reflect on the usefulness of digital platforms for language learning.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of 30 statements. The questionnaire was designed to collect data about students' perceptions of using Instagram in learning English, especially in relation to reading comprehension. The questionnaire items covered several aspects, including students' interest in using Instagram, ease of access, usefulness of Instagram content, vocabulary learning, comprehension of English captions and short texts, motivation to read English materials, ability to identify difficult expressions, ability to summarize reading content, and obstacles encountered during Instagram-based learning.

The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms to make it easier for participants to complete the instrument using their mobile phones or other digital devices. The use of Google Forms was also relevant to the nature of the study because the research itself examined students' experiences with digital learning media.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher prepared the questionnaire based on the research objectives and the focus of the study. The questionnaire was arranged to obtain students'

responses regarding the use of Instagram as a learning medium for English reading comprehension. Second, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants through Google Forms. Third, the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire honestly based on their actual experiences of using Instagram in English learning activities.

Before filling out the questionnaire, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study. They were also informed that their responses would be used only for academic purposes. This step was important to ensure that the participants understood the research context and provided responses that reflected their real perceptions.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively. The researcher first collected and reviewed all responses from Google Forms. The responses were then classified based on the main themes of the study, namely students' perceptions of Instagram, perceived benefits for reading comprehension, and obstacles in using Instagram for English learning.

After the responses were classified, the researcher calculated the percentage of students' answers for each questionnaire item. The percentage results were used to identify the dominant tendency of students' perceptions. The data were then interpreted qualitatively by explaining what the response patterns indicated about students' experiences in using Instagram.

The analysis focused on identifying whether students perceived Instagram as useful, interesting, accessible, and

supportive for English reading comprehension. In addition, the analysis also examined the obstacles reported by students, such as poor internet connection, technical problems with mobile devices, and possible distraction from non-learning content. The interpretation of the data was connected to the research questions so that the findings could provide a clear explanation of students' perceptions of Instagram-assisted English learning.

RESULT

This study investigated students' perceptions of using Instagram in English learning, particularly in supporting reading comprehension. The data were obtained from a questionnaire consisting of 30 statements distributed to 15 students of the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang. The findings are presented based on three main aspects: students' general perceptions of Instagram, the perceived benefits of Instagram for reading comprehension, and the obstacles encountered by students when using Instagram for English learning.

Students' General Perceptions of Instagram in English Learning

The findings indicate that students generally showed positive perceptions of using Instagram as a supplementary medium for English learning. Most students agreed that Instagram was familiar, accessible, and interesting to use. This positive response may be related to the fact that Instagram is already part of students' daily digital practices. Students did not need to learn a completely new platform because they were already accustomed to using Instagram for communication, entertainment, information seeking, and

social interaction.

The students perceived Instagram as more attractive than conventional learning media because it presents English content in a multimodal form. English texts on Instagram are commonly accompanied by images, videos, captions, reels, hashtags, and comments. This combination helped students engage with English texts more naturally. Instead of reading long and formal texts only, students could access short English captions, motivational quotes, educational posts, vocabulary explanations, and reading materials from various accounts. Therefore, Instagram was considered useful not only as a social networking platform but also as an informal space for English exposure.

The highest response tendency showed that 47% of students agreed that Instagram helped them during reading-based English learning activities, while only 7% disagreed. This result suggests that Instagram was perceived as a supportive medium for reading activities. The students' responses also indicate that Instagram encouraged them to read English texts more actively because the materials were short, visually supported, and easy to access through mobile phones.

Perceived Benefits of Instagram for Reading Comprehension

The results show that Instagram provided several perceived benefits for students' reading comprehension. First, Instagram helped students access various English reading materials. Through captions, posts, stories, reels, and educational accounts, students could encounter different forms of English texts. These texts were generally short and contextual, making them easier to read and understand. Students reported that this type of content helped them become more interested in reading

English.

Second, Instagram supported vocabulary learning. When students read English captions or posts, they often found unfamiliar words or expressions. These words encouraged them to guess meanings from context, check dictionaries, or relate the words to the accompanying images. This process supported incidental vocabulary learning because students encountered new words in authentic and meaningful contexts. As a result, Instagram did not only function as a platform for reading but also as a source of vocabulary development.

Third, Instagram helped students understand the meaning of short texts. The visual elements in Instagram posts provided contextual clues that supported comprehension. Images, videos, and layouts helped students predict the topic and interpret the meaning of captions. This multimodal support was particularly helpful for EFL students because they often experience difficulty understanding English texts when vocabulary and background knowledge are limited.

Fourth, students perceived Instagram as helpful for summarizing reading content. After reading captions or educational posts, students could identify the main idea, understand key information, and restate the content in their own words. This indicates that Instagram-based reading activities can support basic reading comprehension skills, including identifying main ideas, understanding details, recognizing difficult vocabulary, and summarizing information.

Fifth, Instagram increased students' motivation to read English texts. Students were more willing to read English when the content was interesting, visually appealing, and related to their personal interests. The availability of various topics on

Instagram allowed students to select content that matched their preferences, such as education, lifestyle, motivation, entertainment, language learning, and daily communication. This flexibility made reading activities feel less monotonous and more connected to students' everyday lives.

Obstacles in Using Instagram for English Learning

Although the students generally perceived Instagram positively, they also encountered several obstacles. The first obstacle was poor internet connection. Since Instagram requires stable internet access to load images, videos, reels, comments, and stories, unstable connectivity could reduce students' learning experience. This problem was particularly relevant in areas where internet access was not evenly distributed.

The second obstacle was technical problems with mobile devices. Some students experienced difficulties when their mobile-phone screens were damaged, their devices had limited storage, or the application did not run smoothly. These technical limitations affected their ability to read Instagram content comfortably. Since reading through Instagram depends on mobile-device performance, students with limited digital facilities may not experience the same learning benefits as those with better devices.

The third obstacle was distraction. Instagram contains both educational and non-educational content. Students may initially intend to read English learning materials but then become distracted by entertainment posts, advertisements, personal feeds, or unrelated videos. This indicates that Instagram should not be used without pedagogical guidance. Students need clear learning goals so that their use of Instagram remains focused on English learning rather than

passive scrolling.

Overall, the results show that Instagram has potential as a supplementary medium for English reading comprehension. However, its effectiveness depends on how students use the platform, what type of content they access, and how teachers guide the learning process.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that Instagram can be perceived positively by EFL students as a medium for English learning, particularly reading comprehension. The students' positive perception is consistent with previous research showing that Instagram provides meaningful opportunities for language exposure, engagement, and informal learning. Instagram is not merely a social media platform for entertainment; it can also function as a mobile-assisted language learning tool when its features are used for educational purposes.

The first important finding is that students perceived Instagram as accessible and familiar. This supports the idea that social media can connect formal and informal learning environments. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) argue that social media can support personal learning environments because students can access learning resources beyond classroom boundaries. Similarly, Greenhow and Lewin (2016) explain that social media blurs the boundaries between formal and informal learning, allowing students to learn through everyday digital practices. In the present study, students' familiarity with Instagram made it easier for them to engage with English learning content without feeling that they were using a completely new learning tool.

The finding is also in line with Nasution's systematic literature review, which reported that Instagram plays a

significant role in English language learning because it offers visual and interactive features that enhance students' learning experiences. This supports the present study, where students responded positively to Instagram because English texts were presented through captions, images, stories, reels, and comments. These features made English reading more contextual, attractive, and accessible.

The second finding concerns Instagram's contribution to reading comprehension. Students perceived that Instagram helped them read English texts, identify difficult vocabulary, understand short passages, and summarize content. This finding is supported by Sudiran's study, which found that Indonesian students had positive perceptions of Instagram as a learning medium for reading comprehension because they could use it to search for reading texts, vocabulary, and grammar-related content. In both studies, Instagram was perceived as useful because it provided authentic and varied English input that students could access independently.

The present findings are also consistent with recent research on Instagram-based reading instruction. Sudiran, Taufiq, and Adi investigated Instagram as a medium to improve EFL students' reading skills and reported that Instagram-based reading materials were implemented through authentic posts in classroom practice. Although the present study did not measure effectiveness through pre-test and post-test, the students' perceptions suggest that Instagram has pedagogical potential to support reading comprehension when used as a supplementary learning tool. In other words, this study strengthens previous findings from a perception-based perspective.

The role of Instagram in vocabulary learning is another important point.

Students reported that they could identify unfamiliar vocabulary or expressions from Instagram captions and posts. This finding is theoretically relevant because vocabulary knowledge is one of the key components of reading comprehension. Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge strongly influences learners' ability to understand texts. In Instagram-based reading, vocabulary is often presented in meaningful contexts, supported by images and short explanations. This condition may help students infer meaning more easily and retain new vocabulary through repeated exposure.

The multimodal nature of Instagram also helps explain why students perceived it positively. Instagram combines written language, images, videos, symbols, layout, and interaction. From a multimodal literacy perspective, meaning is constructed not only through written text but also through visual and semiotic resources. Kress (2010) argues that multimodal communication involves various modes that work together to construct meaning. In this study, images and visual contexts helped students understand English captions and short texts. This suggests that Instagram may reduce the difficulty of reading English texts because visual support provides contextual clues.

Furthermore, students' motivation to read English content through Instagram is consistent with previous studies on social media and language learning. A review of social media in EFL teaching found that platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube can enhance language skills by providing authentic communication, collaborative learning, motivation, and engagement. This finding is reflected in the present study because students considered Instagram interesting and motivating. They were more willing to read English texts when the materials

were brief, visually attractive, and related to their interests.

The findings also support research by Sesriyani and Sukmawati (2019), who found that Instagram could be used as an English learning medium because students were familiar with the platform and could access it easily through their gadgets. Likewise, Liany et al. (2021) reported that students perceived Instagram as useful in English learning because it provided learning resources and supported students' learning experiences. The present study confirms these findings in the context of English Education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang. Students perceived Instagram as useful because it gave them opportunities to read English texts outside the classroom.

However, the findings also show that Instagram use is not free from limitations. Students reported unstable internet connection and technical problems with mobile devices. These findings are consistent with Manca and Ranieri's (2016) argument that social media in higher education has both opportunities and obstacles. While social media offers flexibility and engagement, its use may be constrained by access, infrastructure, digital competence, and pedagogical management. In the context of this study, poor internet connectivity became a practical barrier that limited students' access to Instagram-based reading materials.

Another important challenge is distraction. Instagram contains a wide range of content, including entertainment, advertisements, personal updates, and non-academic posts. Without clear learning objectives, students may shift from reading English content to passive scrolling. This finding supports the view that social media-based learning requires pedagogical guidance. Reinhardt (2019) explains that social media can support second and

foreign language learning when it is meaningfully connected to learning objectives, interaction, and learner reflection. Therefore, teachers should not simply ask students to use Instagram but should design structured reading activities, such as selecting appropriate accounts, reading captions critically, identifying vocabulary, summarizing content, and discussing meaning.

The findings also relate to mobile-assisted language learning. Instagram is accessed mainly through mobile phones, which allows students to learn anytime and anywhere. Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg (2018) highlight that mobile collaborative language learning can support interaction, learner autonomy, and communication. In this study, Instagram enabled students to access English texts outside the classroom and engage with content based on their interests. However, mobile learning also depends on device quality and internet access. Therefore, Instagram-based learning should consider students' digital conditions.

Recent studies also provide empirical support for Instagram-based reading activities. A study on Instagram-based reading strategies reported that incorporating Instagram into educational practice could improve students' reading comprehension and support digital learning. Another recent article on Instagram and reading comprehension found that captions, comments, and threads could mediate EFL learners' reading comprehension and engagement in multimodal digital environments. These findings strengthen the argument that Instagram has potential not only as a social media platform but also as a reading-oriented learning environment.

Nevertheless, the present study should be interpreted within its scope. The study focused on students' perceptions and involved 15

participants. Therefore, the findings do not claim that Instagram directly improves reading comprehension statistically. Instead, the study provides descriptive evidence that students perceived Instagram as useful, accessible, interesting, and supportive for reading activities. Future studies may use larger samples, interviews, classroom observation, or experimental designs to examine the impact of Instagram-based reading activities more comprehensively.

Overall, the discussion indicates that Instagram can support English reading comprehension in three main ways. First, it provides authentic and varied English input through captions, posts, comments, and educational accounts. Second, it supports vocabulary learning and text comprehension through multimodal features. Third, it increases students' motivation because learning materials are accessible, visually attractive, and connected to students' daily digital practices. However, Instagram should be integrated carefully to minimize distraction, overcome access problems, and ensure that its use remains academically meaningful.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' perceptions of using Instagram in English learning, particularly in supporting reading comprehension. The findings show that students generally had positive perceptions of Instagram as a supplementary digital learning medium. They perceived Instagram as accessible, interesting, and useful because it provided varied English content through captions, posts, stories, reels, comments, and educational accounts.

Instagram was found to support students' reading comprehension in several ways. It helped students access authentic English texts, identify

unfamiliar vocabulary and expressions, understand short contextualized texts, and summarize reading content. The multimodal features of Instagram, especially the combination of images and written captions, provided contextual support that made English texts easier and more interesting to read. In addition, Instagram increased students' motivation to engage with English content because the platform was already familiar and connected to their daily digital habits.

However, the study also found several obstacles in using Instagram for English learning. The main challenges were unstable internet connection, technical problems with mobile devices, and distraction from non-academic content. These obstacles indicate that Instagram should not be used as an independent learning tool without guidance. Teachers and lecturers need to design structured learning activities so that students use Instagram purposefully for reading comprehension rather than merely for entertainment.

In conclusion, Instagram has pedagogical potential as a supportive medium for English reading comprehension in EFL contexts. Its effectiveness depends on appropriate instructional design, students' digital literacy, access to stable internet, and the selection of relevant English learning content. Therefore, Instagram may be integrated into English learning as a supplementary platform that connects students' everyday digital practices with meaningful reading activities. Future researchers are encouraged to involve larger participants, use interviews or classroom observations, and examine the effectiveness of Instagram-based reading activities through mixed-method or experimental designs.

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