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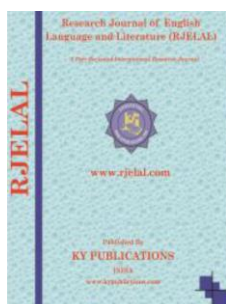
USING INSTAGRAM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was an attempt to explore the learners' viewpoints on Instagram application in learning English language. The participants of the study involved 27 undergraduate ESL learners, who were enrolled in an Academic Communication course at a private university in Malaysia. A focus group discussion was conducted to collect the learners' perspectives towards the use of Instagram in English language learning. The findings of the study revealed the learners enjoyed learning English via Instagram as it enabled them to enhance their English grammar as well as vocabularies. In addition, Instagram assisted them to develop their English language proficiency and communication skill through online meaningful interactions with their classmates. Finally, Instagram helped the learners to be more motivated to study English language. The implications of this study suggest practical and convenient ways of using Instagram to English language instructors and lecturers who are striving to improvise their language teaching pedagogy.

Keywords: Instagram application, language learning, social media, mobile learning, ESL learners, interaction, integration

Introduction

The development of technology nowadays has caused a rapid emergence of social media that connects people from all over the world. What started as a platform to interact with others and express oneself has now expanded into something bigger than what people may have expected. The pervasiveness of social media lead learners to utilise them as learning tools or platforms to improve their language skills. According to El-Hussein, Osman, and Cronje (2010), mobile learning happens in learning conditions and spaces that consider the mobility of technology, learners, and learning. The technology and devices for mobile learning are wireless and they are open for public use. This enables the learners to adapt this usage into their learning (Traxler, 2007). Mobile learning has also been

introduced as a new factor of learning process and learning method (Barhoumi & Rossi, 2013). It is evident for students to rely on mobile technologies such as smartphones and tablets in this modern era because they have become common to be applied in tertiary education. Jimoyiannis, Tsiotakis, Roussinos, and Siorrenta (2013) stated that besides the mainstream purpose of social networking through the applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, these applications are now also used for educational purposes.

Instagram is used as a platform for 21st century learners to enhance their productivity of learning. Instagram is a mobile application which is available via the play store or for iPhone users via apple store. It enables people to take instant snapshots of appealing images, current activities

which are going on live, upload pictures, text messaging, and even to post videos. Salomon (2013) stated that Instagram is a form of digital literacy which is used to aid in teaching process and enhance the quality of learning. Dewi, & Salam (2018) mentioned that students gain learning through Instagram and they can expand their learning time with various learning activities since learning in the classroom has limited timing which is not essential of productive learning. Instagram also enables learners to connect themselves in a meaningful way towards urban, diverse, and further goals in their future studying, teaching, and learning skills.

Solomon, (2013) added that there would be some people who speak English as their second language tend to have some grammatical errors when commenting, posting a caption or a status and that is when learners' inferiority in writing will emerge. Kurdi (2017.) suggested that a teacher should encourage the students that if writing habit is essential thus the grammatical competence. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010) "writing is the result of complex processes of planning, drafting, reviewing, and revising. It requires the brain to process many exposures or inputs and organize them into a well-structured written text". Thus, when learners are about to post a caption, or comment they require grammatical thinking even though it involves writing a short sentence.

Although Instagram has constrained functions, it tends to be valuable in language classrooms. Instagram offers a plenty of contextualized visual information that can provide help in English language classrooms. These guides are particularly valuable since they offer visual components that can be considered useful for visual learners. Additionally, utilizing Instagram in classrooms can help to create a socially associated network of learners. Associating on Instagram is essentially done through the like and remark capacities, which are not underestimated by Instagram clients. According to Vie (2008) another imperative basis for effectively using Instagram as a language learning tool is that Instagram is a usually utilized online networking outlet that youth students prefer to use. McBride (2009) believes that youthful students' commonality with Instagram can

be viewed as preference because it can reduce conceivable pressure caused by incorporating new devices into learning exercises.

Literature Review

Social media have now become applicable platforms for any learners from any field to perform mobile learning. Thus, many studies have been carried out on the impact of using social media such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and etcetera on language learning. There are many positive views from researches regarding the process of learning language via social media. EFL students were able to develop skills both in content and language knowledge through the use of Facebook (Shih, 2011; Eren, 2012). Besides, by using social media as learning tools, the students can not only connect and build a strong relationship with one another but also, with their teachers (Aydin, 2014). According to Idris & Ghani (2012) Facebook as one of the social media contributed in the construction of knowledge. In addition, Facebook has been able to promote incidental learning of language skills (Akhiar, Mydin, & Adi Kasuma, 2017; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010), and many opportunities were afforded by Facebook for language teachers (Mahadi & Ubaidullah, 2010).

On the other hand, there are also negative aspects of social media in language learning. Firstly, teachers will have extra tasks to monitor the suitability of language and content to ensure that the students do not come across any sensitive or controversial issues (Shih, 2011). In addition, social media are used for the purpose of sending and receiving information in an instant. Because of this, not much attention is paid when it comes to ensuring the proper use of English grammar structures. Therefore, the possibility of issues for students such as learning inaccurate language productions in online environment may arise (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010). Furthermore, other issues such as hacking and leaking of private information may also arise (Gettman & Cortijo, 2015; Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011). Therefore, teachers need to evaluate and take precaution before implementing social media into language learning classroom. Teachers also need to

contextualise their usage to match the students' needs and learning abilities, as well as the set curriculums.

The results of a study by Musa, Lie, and Azman (2012) showed that many Malaysian students feel less confident while using social media. This is because they are concerned with their lack of skills in English language especially in grammar rules and structures. Chokwe (2015) stated that most students receive feedback from their peers while interacting with them on social media via posting pictures with captions. If a friend were to detect a grammar mistake, they would reach out to them (Akhiar, Mydin, & Adi Kasuma, 2017). In fact, social media enhance students' interests to participate and interact with their peers. They are effective tools for them to discuss their task-related activities in order to improve their learning.

Mansor and Rahim (2017) mentioned that social networking pages encourage a sense of community and fostering a greater grasp of the concept discussed in class. It can be said that majority of the students perceived Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as potential tools that can help in education field. "Social media is also a platform for learners to express their thoughts more clearly while improving their English language at the same time (Plumb, 2013)". The freedom to express their thoughts instead of saying it face to face in classrooms also helps boost their motivation as some may not have the confidence to talk in front of people. Khalitova and Gimaletdinova (2016) stated that Instagram can be used as an online instructive tool to help and upgrade learning EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Finally, Purwandari (2017) carried out a study on using Instagram to improve pupils' writing through photographs and the results of his study demonstrated that the application of photographs in Instagram improved pupils' writing skills in writing descriptive texts.

Method

The main aim of this study was to explore the learners' perspectives on Instagram application in learning English language. This study involved 27 undergraduate ESL learners, who were enrolled in an Academic Communication course at a private

university in Malaysia. All learners were already familiar with SNSs specifically Instagram as they had their personal Instagram accounts for personal purposes. For the purpose of this study, each learner was asked to set up a new Instagram account in order to communicate with each other based on different topics given by the lecturer for them to discuss during the whole semester (3 months). It is worth noting that the lecturer played the role as an observer and a facilitator. The data gathered via focus group discussion from all students in order to find out their perceptions towards using Instagram for learning English language. The learners were given the chance to discuss all the topics via their Instagram beside their class in order to experience learning through Instagram before participating in focus group discussion. The data were recorded using digital voice recorder and transcribed accordingly. Finally, the researchers coded the key quotes and sorted them into themes in order to analyse them via thematic analysis.

Findings and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, this study explored the learners' perspectives on Instagram application in learning English language. According to the learners' responses from the focus group discussions, Instagram helped them to improve their English language proficiency as well as their communication with their classmates. They also stated that online discussions helped them learn from each other. In terms of grammar rules, Instagram helped them to think twice before they post any comments in order to come up with correct sentences. One of the learners stated:

"basically, Instagram can improve my English because, it stimulates creativity for everyone who uses Instagram because whenever we want to post captions we have to think critically and make sure grammatically our sentences are correct. we actually can test our English skills specially grammar and try to improve them which is a good point." (*learner 4*)

Most of the learners pointed out that Instagram made them more motivated to learn English vocabularies and grammar rules. For instance, one learner mentioned:

"Instagram motivates me for better learning in English in terms of certain words or new vocabularies that I am not sure about. I would actually take those words and will Google them or even find them in the dictionary to understand their meaning to learn new English words." (*learner 12*)

Two learners added:

"I can say that Instagram motivates me for learning a better English as when I read the comments in English, I will be curious to learn more and more. This motivation helps me to improve my English learning. In fact, it is very fun to learn English via Instagram" (*learner 21*)

"Based on my experience of learning English through Instagram during this semester, I can say that Instagram is very good for learning English where we can improve our vocabulary and grammar mistakes. So, it helps me to correct my mistakes that I had made before and I learn a lot of things through Instagram in terms of English skills." (*learner 25*)

According to a study conducted by Akhiar, Mydin, & Adi Kasuma, (2017). "Instagram improves students' language proficiency (75 percent) and enhances their communication with teachers and friends (70 percent). The findings of their study are in line with the findings of this study as most of the learners believed that Instagram helped them to improve their English language proficiency as well as their communication with their classmates.

Rensburg and Thanh (2017) also believed that the application of Instagram is anticipated to increase students' language learning outcomes from their active involvement and constructive attitudes to supplementary learning activities. Furthermore, they stated that active engagement in SNSs generates a better English conversation atmosphere for the learners. In addition, a study by Al-Ali (2014)

revealed similar results that using Instagram helped redefine the language classroom as it allowed students to generate ideas for their English writing activities with contextually relevant content and offered them a learning experience that they enjoyed.

This study explored the learners' perspectives towards the use of Instagram in English language learning. The results of the study showed that the learners enjoyed learning English via Instagram and they found learning fun and enjoyable. According to the learners' feedback, Instagram helped them to enhance their English grammar as well as vocabularies. They were able to correct their mistakes in terms of grammar and choice of words, based on their classmates' supports. The learners also mentioned that Instagram assisted them to develop their language proficiency and communication skill.

Conclusion

it can be concluded that the learners had positive perceptions towards the integration of Instagram with the task-based language activities in Academic Communication course. In fact, Instagram as a learning platform provided the learners with the opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions which improved their English language communication, language proficiency, grammar rules, and vocabularies. Instagram played a significant role in terms of learners' motivation as it made them be eager to learn English language via interactions with their classmates. Therefore, it is highly recommended for teachers and lecturers to make the learning process more enjoyable and effective via using Instagram in order to enhance the students' English language learning.

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