

EFL Young Adult Learners' Attitudes towards Using Instagram to Improve Their Language Proficiency in Turkey

Salsabil El Kamili

MA Student: Y2112.021063

Istanbul Aydin University, Institute of Graduate Studies / English Language Teaching, Beşyol, Küçükçekmece / Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul Aydin University, Institute of Social Science, Beşyol, Küçükçekmece / Istanbul, Turkey

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8134721>

Published Date: 11-July-2023

Abstract: In today's digital era, Instagram has emerged as a vital platform that holds great significance among teenage students worldwide. Due to its widespread popularity, Instagram has become an effective tool that facilitates not only social engagement but also the development of language proficiency. This study investigated the attitudes of Turkish EFL young adult learners towards using the Instagram platform as a means to improve their language proficiency. This study also aimed to explore the role of Instagram in facilitating English language learning and comprehending the factors driving its adoption among Turkish EFL students. For this purpose, an online survey questionnaire was sent to twelve (N=12) Turkish students from different universities in Istanbul. The obtained findings indicated that the majority of the participants are in favor of using the Instagram platform to practice English. The corresponding results also showed that the participants perceived positive outcomes due to their engagement in English language practice on Instagram, including the acquisition of new vocabulary and the noticed enhancement of their English language proficiency. Additionally, they conveyed that consistent utilization of Instagram contributed to the development of their confidence in using the English language.

Keywords: EFL, Instagram, language learning, attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the emergence of social media has sparked a digital revolution, connecting people globally and providing unlimited sources of information. Social media platforms have gained widespread acceptance and usage among the present generation especially students whose ages range from 18 and 34. These tools have not only had an impact on a personal level but also in their educational habits. With the ability to download social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on portable devices as applications, students can use them anytime and anywhere as long as they are connected to the internet. Currently, Instagram is considered one of the world's top social media platforms with not less than 1.628 billion users. According to the latest data published in January 2023, the number of Instagram users in Turkey has been regularly increasing to around 52.36 million users. Thanks to the new features of Instagram, alongside the characteristics of Web 2.0 technologies, Instagram users are no more limited to only viewing published content, rather the platform offers them the ability to become producers and to create their own content. This has led Instagram to gain a great popularity among young adults who nowadays spend hours scrolling down on the application, reacting to other users' posts and creating their own reel videos, posts and Insta stories. Within this, Prensky (2006) claims that students of today are no longer "little versions" of their teachers, as they might have been in the past. He further explains that students, as digital

natives, will continue to change quickly and teachers can no longer teach using the same techniques and materials from the 20th century. To put differently, with this dominance of Instagram and other social media platforms, educators became eager to know more about those platforms and try to use them in their classrooms.

Given the high popularity of Instagram use, many studies have been conducted to explore how Instagram platform can be used for educational purposes, particularly in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. It has been shown that Instagram, as a teaching tool, can be used to develop students reading comprehension skills (Sudiran, 2022) and can also enhance students' writing abilities skills more effectively than traditional methods (Jawad, 2022). Studies also confirmed the positive influence of Instagram on vocabulary learning at advanced and proficiency levels (Habibah et al., 2021) as well as in making the educational process insightful and interesting (Mirković, 2022).

This study delved into the same above-mentioned issue within the context of Turkish English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. The purpose of this work was to reveal the attitudes of Turkish EFL young learners towards using the Instagram platform as a tool to improve their language proficiency. Social media platforms, including Instagram, have changed the culture of education and learning, and mobile apps are, nowadays, widely used for learning foreign languages (Pindeh, Suki, & Suki, 2016).

The general purpose of this work is to explore the beliefs of EFL young learners regarding using Instagram as a medium of enhancing their English proficiency level. More specifically, it aims to examine the impression of Turkish young learners towards using Instagram for English language skills practice and vocabulary acquisition. Another specific purpose of this research is to determine the frequency of Instagram usage among Turkish young learners and their awareness of its potential as a tool for exposure to authentic language. Therefore, the finding of this study will be of great importance to stakeholders in the field of English Language Teaching; the result of this study will help Turkish EFL teachers to understand how their students actually feel towards using Instagram to practice their language skills and learn new vocabulary items. Moreover, the study is of significance to enable Turkish EFL students to be more aware of the benefit of the Instagram platform in preparing them for real-life situations outside the classroom environment. In fact, research about the use of Instagram in language learning is still ongoing. However, in the literature, it is very rare to find studies that have been conducted to examine the attitudes of EFL learners, especially in a context like Turkey. Therefore, this research serves to bridge the gap in the literature.

The following research questions were pursued to guide this study:

1. How does interaction over Instagram help Turkish EFL learners to practice English?
2. To what extent is English practice via Instagram reflected in their learning process?
3. What are the reasons that drive the use of Instagram as an avenue for English practice amongst the learners?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media platforms have become deeply embedded in modern society, offering various features such as image sharing, video calls, instant messaging, and more (Manca, 2020). With its affordability, portability, and easy accessibility, social media has witnessed a significant increase in usage, particularly among teenagers. Research indicates that teens now spend an average of 8 hours and 39 minutes per day on screens, most of the time engaging with social media apps (Iwamoto & Chun, 2020). In other words, students of this generation devote an important amount of their energy, time, and attention in browsing social media apps, which as Poore (2015) claims, if used correctly, those apps can be excellent tools for enhancing their language learning experience. Furthermore, it is important to note that not all social media users are native speakers of English. However, as a lingua franca, English has emerged as the dominant language used on social media platforms for communication and content sharing. This widespread use of English on social media has created opportunities for language learners to engage with the language in authentic and meaningful ways (Eren, 2012; Hochman & Schwartz, 2012). When learning English as a foreign language, students need to be exposed to creative ways of presenting the language in order to effectively acquire the necessary skills to master it and achieve positive language learning outcomes (Guy, 2012; Yunus, Salehi, & Chenzi, 2012), both within and outside the classroom (Lan, Sung & Chang, 2009). Moreover, with social media platforms, students have more chance to exchange their opinions and thoughts freely and practice the language with native speakers (Wael, Asnur, & Ibrahim, 2018). Therefore, by actively participating in online discussions, reading English

content, and interacting with native speakers, language learners can immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment.

Social media offers a range of benefits to language learners; it provides learners with opportunities to express themselves, engage with diverse perspectives and cultures, access to real-world situations and authentic language use, instant feedback and communication, and more importantly, the ability to practice their skills and knowledge. In the literature, there are various studies that have investigated the influence of social media platforms on the language development of learners. Among these studies, a study by Al Arif (2019) investigated the use of social media in English language learning by students of the English Study Program at Jambi University. The findings revealed that, amongst social media platforms, students used Instagram and Facebook most frequently, though not always, for English learning purposes. However, the students exhibited positive attitudes toward using social media for English language learning, recognizing its importance in improving their language skills. The study also identified Instagram as the preferred social media platform for learning English among the university students of the English Study Program at Jambi University, primarily used for learning English at home. Moreover, Zainal and Zainal & Rahmati (2020) conducted a study which aimed to examine how social media impacts English language learning among undergraduate students in Assam, India. 274 undergraduate students from 22 different undergraduate colleges across Assam participated in this study. The results showed that social media played an important role in helping students learn new things and improve their English language skills. Students believed that through social media, they can learn interesting words, phrases, or even sentences and add them to their notebooks. The study also aimed to explore students' access to technology, their competence in using different social media platforms, and the factors influencing their social media usage. The results indicated that students had widespread access to smartphones and social media platforms highlighting their potential as effective tools for enhancing English language proficiency among college students. Another research done by Haque (2023) was aimed to explore the role of social media in language learning, specifically in improving writing skills and vocabulary acquisition among students. The findings from this research showcased a positive relationship between the use of social media platforms and language learning; students who actively engaged with social media platforms were more confident in their language abilities, communicated more often, and practiced languages more frequently. The finding also showcased that when using social media platforms, students have more chance to learn numerous new vocabulary words and how to effectively use them to communicate in diverse contexts. In addition, Malik and Ansur (2019) carried out a research which aimed to examine the impact of social media on the development of foreign language skills of students enrolled in foreign language study programs at universities in Indonesia. The study collected data from a sample of 52 students pursuing foreign language education across multiple universities and colleges in Indonesia. The findings revealed that students are on their phones scrolling on social media apps at all times in their activities throughout the day. As social media served as a valuable resource for vocabulary exploration, connecting with native speakers, and accessing foreign language songs and up-to-date news, students believed that social media can enhance their language learning abilities. Furthermore, a research study was conducted by Khan (2022) on the use of social media as a tool for language learning, particularly in the context of affordable alternatives to traditional language classrooms. The study aimed to explore the impact of social media on language learning in the Indian context, focusing on English language learners. A questionnaire was administered to 114 participants, mainly from India, with varying levels of English proficiency. The study found that social media provides learners with comprehensible input which improves their receptive and productive language skills. Students claimed that through social media, they acquire not only new vocabulary items, but also idioms, phrasal verbs, and slang and how to naturally use them in different contexts. Most importantly, social media enabled participants to practice their existing language knowledge with native speakers and exposed them to diverse accents and language usage.

However, social media has also some disadvantages in language learning. Amin, Rafiq, and Mehmood (2020) undertook a study which examined the impact of social media on English language learning in Northern Iraq. The study included 10 selected participants, consisting of secondary school learners, language educators, and teachers from different educational institutions. The findings revealed that social media does not only have advantages, but also disadvantages when used for language learning. Regardless of up-to-date information that social media offers, along with authentic language input, and the ability to communicate with native speakers, it can also expose language learners to ungrammatical content, give inappropriate interactions, and can also lead to students' distractions. Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of guiding learners to choose reliable sources and managing their time effectively.

3. METHODOLOGY

To collect data on the students' attitudes, a quantitative research method was used for this study. Quantitative research collects data in a way that allows it to be quantified and analyzed statistically to either support or contradict "alternate knowledge claims" (Creswell, 2003, as cited in Williams, 2007, p. 66). It relies on collecting and analyzing numerical data in order to either explain, forecast, describe, or manipulate the variables of interest (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). In terms of the study's population, there are thousands of EFL young Adult Learners in Turkey. Therefore, due to the large size of the target population, the selection of participants was based on convenient sampling which is considered as a non-probability sampling method where individuals are selected based on their availability (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). The sampling included EFL students from three different university preparatory schools in Istanbul who were reached out through their teachers. To ensure a diverse range of thoughts and beliefs, participants were contacted from various departments and faculties. The selection of instruments was carried out based on the research design and the nature of data needed for this study. To accomplish the study's objectives, a questionnaire survey was used, as it is flexible in terms of what can be investigated, it makes it possible to collect data from large number of individuals and generalize the findings to large populations (Mertler, 2018). The questionnaire used for this study is a modified version of a survey questionnaire initially developed by Alsharidi (2018). The questionnaire consisted of three main parts. Part one was intended to collect data on the participants' background information which was relevant to the study's purpose, such as their age, how often they use the Instagram app, and what language they use to interact with one another. The main part, however, focused on asking the learners about their attitudes towards different aspects of using Instagram application for language learning purposes. The participants were asked to rate their opinions on a 5-point Likert scale, with '1' indicating 'Strongly Disagree' and '5' representing 'Strongly Agree'. Additionally, the survey included open-ended free response questions in order to gain in-depth insights from the participants. The data obtained from the online survey questionnaire was analyzed through using the SPSS software program. The SPSS (version 21. 0) along with MS Excel Program provided great statistical analysis in the form of percentages (%) and frequencies (f).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study provide valuable insights into the attitudes of Turkish EFL young adult learners regarding the use of Instagram for language learning. The research findings have been reported based on an analysis of questionnaire responses from 12 Turkish EFL learners (n=12). The following tables and figures provide a detailed percentage distribution of responses for each item in the questionnaire.

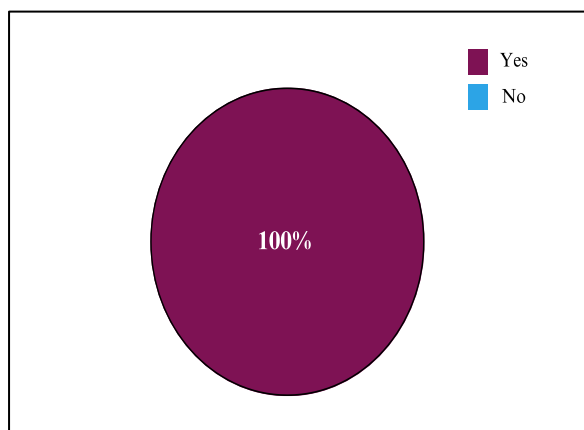


Fig 1. Instagram users

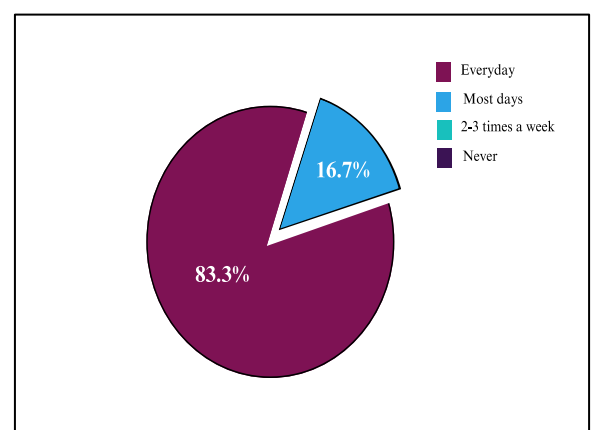


Fig 2. Frequency of Instagram Usage

Figure 1 indicates that 100% of the participants use Instagram. In terms of frequency, 16% reported using Instagram most days, while the majority (83%) reported using it every day, which emphasize the popularity and frequent engagement of the youth with Instagram.

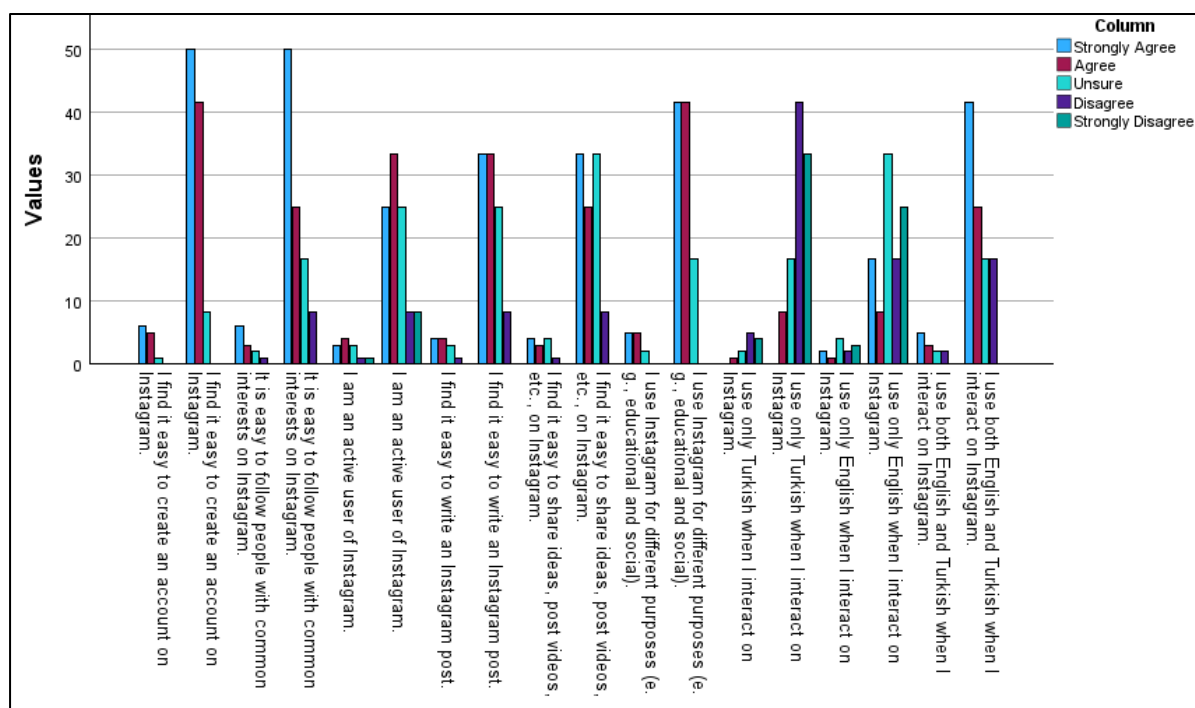


Fig 3. Attitudes and practices of participants regarding Instagram usage and language interaction.

The findings from the Likert scale analysis (see Figure 3) revealed that a majority of the participants found it easy to create an account on Instagram (91.7% agreed). They also expressed ease in following people with common interests (75.0% agreed). Many participants reported being active users of Instagram (58.3% agreed), finding it easy to write posts (66.7% agreed), and sharing ideas and videos (66.7% agreed). Instagram was utilized for various purposes, including education and social activities (83.3% agreed). Regarding language use, participants showed a tendency to use both English and Turkish when interacting on Instagram (66.7% agreed), while a significant majority (75.0%) disagreed with using only Turkish.

The reported data in Table.1 reveal important insights into the attitudes and perceptions of Turkish EFL young adult learners regarding the use of Instagram for English language practice. Participants generally expressed positive views about practicing English on Instagram, with a majority (61.7% agreed) agreeing that they feel good when doing so. The results also highlight the benefits of global communication, as 83.3% of participants agreed that they like Instagram because it allows them to communicate in English with people from different parts of the world. Moreover, participants emphasized the importance of meaningful interaction on Instagram, with 66.7% feeling that it is a natural place for English practice. The positive environment on Instagram was further highlighted, with 75.0% agreeing that it is an encouraging platform where mistakes are not judged. Participants acknowledged the language learning outcomes, with 66.7% indicating that they learn new vocabulary through English interactions on Instagram, and 66.7% believing that their English has improved since they started engaging with others on the platform. In addition, 58.3% agreed that continuous practice on Instagram strengthens their confidence in using the English language.

Table 1. Attitudes Towards English language practice on Instagram.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel good when I practice English on Instagram.	25.0%	41.7%	16.7%	8.3%	8.3%
I like Instagram because I can communicate in English with different people from all over the world.	50.0%	33.3%	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%

I communicate in English with people whose first language is anything but Turkish.	25.0%	16.7%	41.7%	0.0%	16.7%
I feel no pressure when I make mistakes on Instagram.	33.3%	8.3%	41.7%	8.3%	8.3%
I feel that Instagram is a natural place to practice English because there is meaningful interaction amongst people.	41.7%	25.0%	25.0%	8.3%	0.0%
I feel that Instagram is an encouraging place to practice English because no one judges my mistakes.	33.3%	41.7%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I learn new vocabulary when I interact in English with other people.	33.3%	33.3%	8.3%	8.3%	16.7%
I believe my English has improved since I started interacting with people on Instagram.	25.0%	41.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%
It is easy for me to ask if I need help on my English when I use Instagram.	25.0%	33.3%	25.0%	0.0%	16.7%
Continuous practice of English on Instagram strengthens my confidence in using the language.	50.0%	25.0%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%

Regarding the open-ended questions in the final section of the questionnaire, participants had free space to express their interest in practicing English on Instagram and shed light on their personal experiences and perceptions. One participant highlighted the appeal of Instagram's global reach, stating, "Because it provides an easy way to communicate with people from all around the world." Another participant expressed appreciation for the simplicity and affordability of Instagram, saying, "I like how simple and affordable it is." Participants believed that using Instagram for English practice helps them learn new vocabulary and offers a different learning space outside the classroom. One participant explained, "It helps because it gives you a different area to use what you learn other than your classroom." While some participants found practicing English on Instagram easy due to its interactive nature, others acknowledged challenges, such as understanding fast-paced native speakers. To illustrate, one participant claimed, "Sometimes it's hard because native speakers can speak fast." Participants actively sought clarification when encountering unclear ideas and generally viewed Instagram as a platform that fosters free language practice and meaningful connections. As one participant stated, "Yes it does because you can talk with anyone from anywhere at any time you want."

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the first research question addressed in this study examines the role of Instagram interaction in facilitating English language practice for Turkish EFL learners. The results indicated that participants generally expressed positive views about practicing English on Instagram, as the majority of participants agreed that they feel good when practicing English on Instagram. Moreover, the majority of participants showed that they like Instagram because it allows them to communicate in English with people from different parts of the world. The findings of this study are in line with several studies, including the one conducted by Alzamil (2020) which revealed that participants exhibited views that were relatively favorable toward the use of Instagram as a tool for language learning.

Pertaining to the second research question (to what extent is English practice via Instagram reflected in their learning process), the findings reveal that participants perceive positive outcomes from their English practice on Instagram. They reported learning new vocabulary and believing that their English has improved since they started engaging with others on the platform. The responses provided by the participants can be corroborated with Mirković's (2022) results, and which aimed to explore the effectiveness of Instagram on learning English vocabulary. The data analysis of Mirković's study indicated that Instagram is a very useful tool for improving English vocabulary at "C" levels. Participants of the current

study also expressed that continuous practice on Instagram strengthens their confidence in using the English language. Here we can bring Rahmah' (2018) findings which also emphasized that by sharing photographs on Instagram students can become more confident to speak in a foreign language.

Finally, addressing the third research question which is related to exploring the reasons that drive the use of Instagram as an avenue for English practice amongst the learners, participants revealed their motivations for using Instagram for English practice. Their responses pointed out various reasons, such as the simplicity and affordability of the platform, and the opportunity to learn new vocabulary and practice English outside the classroom. This finding is consistent with that of Atila and Irnanda (2021) on the use of Instagram to support English vocabulary learning. According to the respondents of Atila and Irnanda (2021), the primary motivating factor for university students for writing Instagram captions in English is to practice their vocabulary. Furthermore, participants of the current work recognized Instagram as a space that fosters free language practice and meaningful connections, allowing them to communicate with people from all around the world. This view is parallel to that reported by Gonulal (2019), emphasizing that Instagram offers benefits not limited to vocabulary enhancement, but also extends to the development of social competence.

In short, the findings support the notion that interaction on Instagram helps Turkish EFL learners practice English by providing opportunities for meaningful communication, contributing to their learning process, and improving their English proficiency. The reasons driving the use of Instagram as an avenue for English practice among learners include its global reach, simplicity, affordability, and the opportunity for vocabulary acquisition and practical application of language skills. These findings highlight the potential of Instagram as a valuable tool for English language learning and can provide insights for educators and learners seeking effective language practice platforms.

5. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted in order to investigate the attitudes of Turkish adult learners who study English as a foreign language regarding the use of Instagram for English language practice. The above findings indicate that the participants generally expressed positive views about practicing English on Instagram, highlighting the reasons that direct them to use the platform, which include the opportunity to communicate with people from different parts of the world, the simplicity and affordability of Instagram, and the chance to learn new vocabulary and interact in a fun and interesting way.

Students appreciate the freedom and non-judgmental nature of Instagram, where they can freely practice English without feeling pressured to be flawless. They also emphasized the benefits of global connectivity, with Instagram allowing them to connect with people from all over the world, enhancing their language skills and broadening their cultural understanding.

However, while there was overall enthusiasm for practicing English on Instagram, some students acknowledged potential challenges. These challenges include the need for clarification when encountering unclear ideas or unfamiliar vocabulary, and the presence of distractions on the platform which may impact language learning.

REFERENCES

- [1] Al Arif, T. Z. Z. (2019). The use of social media for English language learning: An exploratory study of EFL university students. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language Literature and Teaching*, 3(2), 224-233. <https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v3i2.1921>
- [2] Alsharidi, N. K. M. (2018). The use of Twitter amongst female Saudi EFL learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 7(4), 199-205 <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.7n.4p.198>
- [3] Amin, B. O., Rafiq, R., & Mehmood, N. (2020). The impact of social media in English language learning. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(10). DOI: 10.31838/jcr.07.10.507
- [4] Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., & Razavieh, A. (2010). *Introduction to research in education* (8 Edition). Cengage Learning.
- [5] Eren, Ö. (2012). Students' attitudes towards using social networking in foreign language classes: A Facebook example. *Public Relations Journal*, 4(3), 288-294.
- [6] Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E. and Airasian, P. (2009) *Educational Research Competencies for Analysis and Applications*. Pearson, Columbus.

- [7] Guy, R. (2012). The use of social media for academic practice: A review of literature. *Kentucky Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice*, 1(2), 7.
- [8] Habibah, A., Asmawati, N., Fitriningsih, F., & Nurdin, N. (2021). The effect of Instagram in learning English vocabulary. *Datokarama English Education Journal*, 2(1), 22-34.
- [9] Haque, M. Z. (2023). The use of social media platforms in language learning: A critical study. *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science*, 17(1), 20-28. <https://doi.org/10.56557/JOGRESS/2023/v17i18109>
- [10] Hochman, N., & Schwartz, R. (2012). Visualizing Instagram: Tracing cultural visual rhythms. *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 6(4), 6-9. <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v6i4.14361> . ,
- [11] Iwamoto, D., & Chun, H. (2020). The emotional impact of social media in higher education. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 9(2), 239-247. doi:10.5430/ijhe.v9n2p239.
- [12] Jawad, A. K. (2022). Utilizing Instagram for enhancing students' writing capacity: Case study of Iraqi EFL students. *Nasaq Journal*, 35(1), 679-675.
- [13] Khan, S. (2022). Using social media for autonomous language learning in the Indian context: What the students say. *Language in India*, 22(3), 49-62. Retrieved from <http://www.languageinindia.com/> /
- [14] Lan, Y. J., Sung, Y. T., & Chang, K. E. (2009). A mobile-device-supported peer-assisted learning system for collaborative early EFL reading. *Language Learning & Technology*, 11(3), 130-151.
- [15] Malik, A. R., & Asnur, M. N. A. (2019). Using social media as a learning media of foreign language students in higher education. *BAHTERA: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 18(2), 3126-3135. DOI: 10.21009/BAHTERA.182.06.
- [16] Manca, S. (2020). Snapping, pinning, liking or texting: Investigating social media in higher education beyond Facebook. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 44, 100707. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2019.100707>.
- [17] Mertler, C. A. (2018). *Introduction to educational research*. Arizona State University, USA.
- [18] Mirković, D. (2022). The impact of Instagram in the process of improving English vocabulary at "C" levels. *SCIENCE International Journal*, 1(1), 9-15. doi: 10.35120/sciencej0101.
- [19] Pindeh, N., Sukia, N. M., & Sukib, N. M. (2016). User acceptance on mobile apps as an effective medium to learn Kadazandusun language. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 37, 372-378. doi:10.1016/j.proeco.2016.12.080.
- [20] Poore, M. (2015). *Using social media in the classroom: A best practice guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- [21] Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.
- [22] Sudiran, S. (2022). Indonesian students' perception and their interpretation on Instagram as media for learning reading comprehension. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, 11(12), 43-49.
- [23] Wael, A., Asnur, M. N. A., & Ibrahim, I. (2018). Exploring students' learning strategies in speaking performance. *International Journal of Language Education*, 2(1), 65. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v2i1.5238>.
- [24] Williams, C. (2007). Research methods. *Journal of Business & Economic Research*. 5(3), 65-72.
- [25] Yunus, M. M., Salehi, H., & Chenzi, C. (2012). Integrating social networking tools into ESL writing classroom: Strengths and weaknesses. *English Language Teaching*, 5(8), 42.
- [26] Zainal, Z., & Rahmati, N. H. (2020). Social media and its influence on vocabulary and language learning: A case study. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 7(11), 99-110. DOI: 10.46827/ejes.v7i11.3259 ,