

INSTAGRAM FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: LEARNERS' VIEWS ON READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH CAPTIONS, THREADS, AND COMMENTS

Adelia Puspa^{1*}, Dwi Bayu Saputra², Tiara Azzahra Marpaung³, Anggun Citra Sari Dewi⁴

Universitas Bengkulu
adelia.puspa@unib.ac.id

*Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

Although interest in social media-mediated language learning is increasing, most research on Instagram has focused on productive skills, with limited attention to its potential for supporting reading comprehension, especially through platform-specific textual features. This study addresses this gap by critically examining the ways in which captions, comments, and threads mediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' reading comprehension and engagement in a multimodal digital environment. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 72 undergraduate students via pre- and post-intervention questionnaires and follow-up interviews following an eight-week Instagram-based extensive reading program. The results indicate a measurable increase in learners' engagement and perceived comprehension. A majority of participants reported higher engagement (58.4%) and enjoyment (62.5%), while 77.8% noted improvement in reading comprehension. Furthermore, 87.5% of students identified visual-textual integration as a key facilitator of meaning-making, and 70.8% highlighted the comment section as the most effective feature for interpretive support, emphasizing the importance of socially mediated interaction. Qualitative data further demonstrate that comprehension is constructed through the dynamic interplay of multimodal cues, contextual inference, and peer negotiation of meaning, although linguistic informality, such as slang, continues to present challenges. These findings challenge traditional text-centric models of reading by conceptualizing comprehension as a socially situated and multimodal process. The study advocates for a pedagogical shift that incorporates platform-specific affordances of social media into EFL reading instruction, thereby aligning formal educational practices with learners' digital literacy environments.

Keywords: Instagram, Learners' View, Reading Comprehension, Comments, Captions, Threads



INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and is a critical factor in academic achievement. Despite the increased availability of learning resources, many EFL students continue to experience difficulties in understanding English texts. This challenge is frequently attributed to low engagement and a perceived lack of relevance between academic content and students' everyday experiences (Grabe & Stoller, 2021). Furthermore, traditional text-based instructional methods often fail to meet the needs of contemporary digital learners, who are accustomed to interactive and multimedia content (Li, 2022).

Recent research indicates that social media can facilitate language learning by increasing students' exposure to the target language and offering opportunities for meaningful interaction (Duha et al, 2025). In line with this, Ernestivita et al (2024) stated that social media platforms offer interactive and engaging environments where learners can practice and develop language skills outside the traditional classroom setting. In addition, social media platforms now function as learning environments, particularly for technologically adept students (Nasution, 2023). For example, Instagram integrates visual and textual elements, and features such as captions, comments, and threads contribute to a more authentic, relevant, and interactive learning experience. (Aslan & Sirojtidinovna, 2025)

These features have the potential to enhance reading comprehension by providing additional contextual information (Sudiran et al., 2025). Captions, for example, present authentic and contextually relevant language, while accompanying images or videos support learners' understanding of meaning (Khusnia &

Taufiq, 2025). Mayer (2021) asserts that learning with both textual and visual inputs can improve comprehension, as the brain processes words and images simultaneously. Consequently, Instagram may serve as an effective tool for supporting reading comprehension.

Instagram's interactive features, such as comments and threads, facilitate user interaction, which is a critical component of language learning. According to social constructivist theory, individuals construct knowledge through dialogue and collaborative meaning-making. (Moser & Zimmermann, 2025) Empirical studies demonstrate that engaging in discussion, clarification, and idea sharing on social media platforms can enhance language comprehension (Sato & Ballinger, 2023). On Instagram, the comments section provides a space for detailed textual discussion, while threads enable extended and organized conversations.

Many studies have shown that Instagram aids students in improving their English skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary, along with their arguing and clarifying ability, especially in their task-related activity (Aloraini, 2018; Anggraeni, 2010; Handayani, 201; Rinda, Novawan, & Miqawati, 2018;). Most of them investigated the use of Instagram to improve students' writing skills. Students obtain advantages such as the comments given by their peers in their post, even the negative ones, have encouraged them to correct their spelling and grammar, enrich the vocabularies, to produce a better essay (Rinda et al., 2018; Shazali, Shamsudin, & Yunus, 2019).

Although numerous studies have examined Instagram's role in language learning, most have focused on general use or on productive skills such as writing and speaking. Limited research has investigated



the impact of Instagram's textual features, including captions, comments, and threads, on reading comprehension. Furthermore, most existing studies employ quantitative measures, with limited exploration of learners' perceptions and experiences of using Instagram for educational purposes. (Sudiran et al., 2025)

These gaps indicate a need for further research, specifically into how Instagram's features may be used to enhance reading comprehension among EFL learners. This essay aims to investigate students' perceptions of Instagram's textual and interactive features in the context of academic reading, with a focus on how these functionalities influence comprehension and engagement. By clarifying these perceptions, the study seeks to inform optimal integration of Instagram into language learning environments and contribute to pedagogical strategies that bridge the gap between digital media and effective reading instruction.

METHOD

In this research, a sequential mixed-method research design was used, utilizing a quantitative approach first and then followed by a qualitative approach to achieve a complete understanding of learners' perceptions and reading strategies when engaging with English texts on Instagram. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), this method is suitable for obtaining both measurable trends and in-depth insights, thereby enabling a holistic interpretation of educational phenomena.

The participants were 72 undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program at one of the public universities in Bengkulu. The students from two Extensive Reading classes were invited to participate in the

survey phase, and 8 students were selected for follow-up interviews. Convenience sampling was applied, a method commonly employed in educational research when participants are selected based on accessibility and willingness (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Participation was voluntary, and all responses were collected anonymously to guarantee compliance with ethical scientific procedures.

The data collection utilized two primary instruments, which were an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items designed to measure students' perceptions, engagement, and reading strategies when interacting with Instagram features such as captions, threads, and comments. It was adapted and contextually modified from existing instruments in prior studies (Dewi et al., 2022; Zalani & Yousofi, 2024) to ensure relevance to Instagram-based reading activities. Several items were reworded and expanded to capture learners' interactions with captions, threads, and comment sections. The questionnaire was administered in two stages: an initial survey and a post-intervention survey following a period of Instagram-based reading activities.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the second instrument to explore participants' experiences in greater depth. This interview format allows flexibility while maintaining focus on key research questions, making it appropriate for examining perceptions and strategies (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews lasted approximately 15–20 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face or via video calls in small groups. Prior consent was obtained from all participants.



The research procedure started with the administration of the initial survey to collect baseline data. The participants subsequently engaged in extensive reading activities on Instagram over several weeks, reading English content such as captions, comments, and threads in a natural and informal setting. This approach is consistent with the principles of extensive reading, which emphasize exposure to relevant and enjoyable texts to enhance reading competence (Day & Bamford, 2002). Following the intervention, participants completed the post-survey, and

selected individuals participated in interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 72 third-semester students from the English Education Study Program who were enrolled in the Extensive Reading course completed the survey on their reading habits and experiences, particularly on Instagram. The survey consisted of two parts: an initial survey and a post-intervention survey. The results of the initial survey are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Results of the Initial Survey

Characteristics/ Statements	n	%
Gender		
Female	56	77.8
Male	16	22.2
<i>1. How long have you been learning English?</i>		
Less than 1 year	7	9.7
1-2 years	29	40.3
2-5 years	12	16.7
More than 5 years	24	33.3
<i>2. How often do you use Instagram?</i>		
Several times a day	19	26.4
Daily	43	59.7
Occasionally (a few times a week)	5	6.9
Rarely (once a week or less)	5	6.9
Never	0	0
<i>3. What do you usually use Instagram for? (students may choose more than 1)</i>		
Entertainment (videos/memes)	61	84.7
News and current events	44	61.1
Educational content	41	56.9
Connecting with friends	49	68.1
Shopping or following brands	5	6.9
<i>4. How often do you read in English outside the classroom?</i>		
Very often	12	16.7
Often	31	43.1
Occasionally	20	27.8
Rarely	9	12.5
Never	0	0
<i>5. I find reading in English to be...</i>		
Very easy	3	4.2



Easy	21	29.2
Neutral	41	56.9
Difficult	7	9.7
Very difficult	0	0
<i>6. I feel motivated to read in English.</i>		
Strongly agree	25	34.7
Agree	38	52.8
Neutral	7	9.7
Disagree	1	1.4
Strongly disagree	1	1.4

The sample consisted predominantly of female participants (77.8%), which may have influenced the findings, as previous research indicates higher female engagement in literacy and digital activities. A significant portion of participants indicated having either 1–2 years or more than five years of experience learning English, which may provide them with a sufficient foundation for understanding content.

Platforms like Instagram can offer authentic opportunities for informal English practice, especially when students engage with them consistently and with a focus on learning. Although the platform was primarily used for entertainment (84.7%), a substantial proportion of students also engaged with educational content (56.9%), highlighting its dual function as both a social and learning platform (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

Furthermore, students reported consistent reading habits, with most reading English texts frequently outside the classroom. This pattern aligns with the principles of extensive reading, which emphasize that regular exposure to meaningful texts enhances comprehension (Day & Bamford, 2002). Regarding difficulty, most students perceived English reading as manageable, indicating an appropriate level of challenge for engaging with authentic materials.

After the initial survey, students participated in an eight-week Instagram-based extensive reading activity that included captions, comments, and threads. A post-intervention survey was then administered to assess changes in students' perceptions and experiences. The results of the post-intervention survey can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. The Results of the Post-Intervention Survey

Statements	n	%
Section 1: Engagement and Perception		
<i>1. I enjoyed using Instagram for English reading tasks.</i>		
Strongly agree	10	13.9
Agree	35	48.6
Neutral	26	36.1
Disagree	1	1.4
Strongly disagree	0	0
<i>2. I was more engaged with reading tasks on Instagram compared to traditional texts.</i>		
Strongly agree	11	15.3



Agree	31	43.1
Neutral	27	37.5
Disagree	3	4.2
Strongly disagree	0	0
3. I found the visual elements (images/videos) in Instagram helpful in understanding the text (the post).		
Strongly agree	30	41.7
Agree	33	45.8
Neutral	8	11.1
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	1	1.4
4. The Instagram reading tasks improved my reading comprehension in general.		
Strongly agree	8	11.1
Agree	48	66.7
Neutral	16	22.2
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0
5. I would prefer to continue using Instagram for English learning (reading).		
Strongly agree	9	12.5
Agree	32	44.4
Neutral	28	38.9
Disagree	3	4.2
Strongly disagree	0	0
Section 2: Content Preferences		
6. Which Instagram content format helped you the most with understanding English?		
Captions under photos	10	13.9
Stories	5	6.9
Threads	3	4.2
Comments	51	70.8
Reels	3	4.2
7. Which vocabulary learning method did you find most useful?		
Contextual guessing from captions	30	41.7
Direct explanations in comments	21	29.2
External links or posts with definitions	10	13.9
Hashtag-based discovery	3	4.2
Long explanation via threads	8	11.1

Table 2 indicates that students responded positively to Instagram-based reading activities. The majority reported enjoyment (62.5%) and greater engagement compared to traditional texts (58.4%). Furthermore, 87.5% agreed that visual elements enhanced comprehension, and 77.8% perceived an improvement in their reading skills. The comment section was identified

as the most helpful feature (70.8%), while contextual guessing was the most frequently employed vocabulary strategy.

Qualitative data confirmed these findings. Participants described Instagram reading as flexible and engaging, often part of daily routines. One participant said, “I usually read English posts on Instagram without realizing it, like when I scroll



before sleeping,” suggesting reading happens incidentally within habitual digital practices. This supports recent views on informal digital learning, which see language acquisition as embedded in everyday activities rather than structured tasks (Li, 2022).

Participants emphasized the importance of multimodal and contextual cues in supporting comprehension. One participant said, *“The pictures really help me understand what the caption means, even if I don’t know some words,”* while another said, *“I try to guess the meaning from the context first before checking anything.”* These responses show the importance of multimodal processing and contextual inference, central to meaning-making in digital reading environments (Zhang & Pérez-Paredes, 2021).

The comment section was a significant resource for comprehension. One participant said, *“Sometimes the comments explain the post better than the caption,”* and another said, *“I read comments to see how other people understand it.”* These observations highlight socially mediated learning, where meaning is co-constructed through interaction and peer input, consistent with recent findings on collaborative meaning-making in online environments (Sun & Zhang, 2023).

Challenges were identified, especially with informal language use. One participant said, *“Slang and abbreviations are confusing sometimes,”* showing that although Instagram offers authentic exposure, it also introduces linguistic complexity. This reflects a common tension in digital language learning, where authentic input enhances relevance but may require extra support for comprehension.

In summary, these qualitative insights reinforce the quantitative findings

by demonstrating that Instagram-based reading is influenced by multimodality, interactivity, and contextual strategies. They also underscore the necessity of addressing challenges associated with informal language.

CONCLUSION

Instagram has proved that it is not just utilized to connect with others, but also as an English learning medium. Its features, which allow users to upload and share photos, pictures, and videos for public or private, have attracted students’ interest. The findings demonstrate that Instagram serves as a meaningful learning environment in which comprehension is facilitated by exposure to authentic texts, multimodal input, and socially mediated interaction. Learners construct meaning through visual cues, contextual inference, and peer discussion, indicating that reading in digital spaces constitutes a dynamic and participatory process rather than an individual activity. From a pedagogical perspective, these insights indicate that Instagram can be strategically integrated into reading instruction to complement traditional materials. Educators can implement guided Instagram-based tasks focused on interpreting captions, analyzing comment discussions, and engaging with threaded conversations to promote deeper comprehension and critical thinking. The prominence of the comment section further suggests that collaborative reading activities, such as prompting students to respond, question, or clarify meanings, enhance understanding through shared knowledge construction. Nevertheless, the prevalence of informal language, including slang and abbreviations, underscores the necessity for instructional support. Educators should implement scaffolding



strategies, such as vocabulary guidance and digital literacy training, to assist learners in navigating authentic yet linguistically complex content. A limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias or inaccuracies in learners' perceptions of their reading comprehension improvements. More objective measures, such as standardized language assessments or longitudinal studies, could provide a more accurate evaluation of social media's effectiveness in enhancing language learning. Future research should also investigate how learners from diverse backgrounds, with different language proficiency levels and learning styles, engage with social media platforms to ensure that findings apply to a broader audience.

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