The Impact of Instagram on Learning English Vocabulary among Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

Instagram is considered one of the most famous virtual social networks among all ages of human beings. Nowadays, the extensive popularity of social networking websites such as Instagram has made new chances for Iranian English teachers and learners. Accordingly, the present study tries to investigate whether Instagram would be a useful learning instrument of vocabulary for Iranian male EFL learners at the pre-intermediate at Shokouh Enghelab English Academy in Babol, Mazandaran, Iran. The participants in this study were 50 male EFL learners, ranging from 8-15 years old, selected randomly from 100 cases. After checking the homogeneity of the participants, they were divided into two groups. The participants in the experimental group were learning English vocabulary through ten Instagram pages for four weeks (12 sessions and 25 minutes per session). But the participants in the control group were only taught by the teacher. Pretest and posttest were applied to evaluate learners' knowledge about vocabulary during the session. Based on the research data, Instagram learning brings valuable technological and pedagogical advantages for Iranian EFL learners despite the popularity of social networks. It has a significantly positive effect on the development of vocabulary learning. The findings of this paper can be helpful in the English methodology issue.

Keywords: EFL Learners; Instagram; Pre-intermediate Level; Social Network; Vocabulary

1. Introduction

Nowadays, an extensive area of knowledge on various aspects of the scientific world over materials and different websites are available for academic experts who are working in various fields of science (Idrees Ibrahim, 2021). Based on Abrar (2021), social networking is one of the tools which can help instructors and learners to access information and facilitate the learning of English.

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It seems that since the education world is moving toward the use of virtual networking in education, teachers can no longer feel shy of the digital world. Education and teaching through the Internet are being more vivid and generic in the world. In many developing countries such as Iran, universities are becoming interested in online education. They motivate teachers to use the Internet in their teaching. Hence, the Iranian academic institutions need to improvise helpful policies and strategies on how they can use social networking sites to follow education and learning beyond the classroom.

In this regard, Instagram is one of the web applications serving a large online community which was launched officially in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. It was particularly for iOS at the time of starting. In April 2012, another version for Android was developed, and in November 2012, a website interface with limited features was released. The newer fashion for Windows 10 was pervaded in April 2016, while the world encountered a further upgrade for Windows 10 in October 2016.

Instagram is a social network that lets users share photos and videos. It allows the users to post and share their content publicly with others (Wissam et al., 2020). Based on Niayesh (2015), the number of Iranians who have adopted social networks like Instagram, a mobile social networks application has witnessed a huge boom recently. Probably, the adoption wave came after Iranian users experienced several difficulties in access to the other social networks applications, in particular, Viber or WhatsApp in recent years.

Using Online pages on Instagram has been commonplace amongst academics and the overall people. Instagram for training and educating is a noticeably new idea that has been the primary subject of many instructors and parents. Also, Instagram pages can suggest possibilities for us to display our research studies easily.

Based on Baran (2013), a major part of English learners' energy and time is devoted to reading formal and informal online texts on various social media pages and channels, watching the videos, and following the tweets and updates related to the course content. Instagram has many pages to educate English. Some pages promote English vocabulary learning. Learning vocabulary often seems to be of great importance to the typical language learner (Al-Jarrah et al., 2019; Botan et al., 2020).

Learning new vocabularies enhances learning a second language. Learners should know at least 5000 lexical items to understand non-technical English texts (Nation, 2006). Because of the limited class hours, EFL learners do not have a chance to speak and use all the vocabulary words in class. This creates diverse problems for English instructors and learners. Nation (2006) believed that instructors can instruct individual words explicitly, but deliberately teaching vocabulary is one of the least efficient ways of developing learners' vocabulary knowledge.

This motivates language researchers and instructors to search for alternative ways to traditional classroom instructing of vocabulary. One of the ways that can be useful for teachers in this regard is applying different technologies available to language learners. Socio-cognitive and cognitive approaches indicate how to integrate technology in instructing in the communicative trend (Garcia et al., 2018; Laufer, 1988; Mazman, 2010; Pikhart & Botezat, 2021). One of the technologies that can be applied to learning a foreign language is Instagram which is dominating most learners for life. It is not only a device for communication. In other words, this technology has introduced a new type of language learning.

The present study aims to investigate whether Instagram would be an effective vocabulary learning tool in EFL classrooms in Shokouh Enghelab Academy or not? In other words, the main goal of this study was to find the social impact of Instagram on English vocabulary learning. Based on the importance of vocabulary learning in learning a new language and the opportunities that Instagram provides, the present study addresses the following question:

1Q. Does the use of Instagram have any significant effect on pre-intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

2. Review of Literature

Instagram as a social network is becoming one of the central tools for education, and entertainment. Based on Mazman (2010), the fast development and enormous advancement in computer technologies have been affecting all aspects of life for more than three decades. Moreover, many researchers found a positive relationship between the use of the internet and social networking sites (SNS) and the academic performance of the learners. Learners who use the internet frequently get higher grades in reading skills tests and higher grades in other subjects as well (Chiou, 2014; Flad, 2010). One of the challenges that English learners encounter in learning a language is the lack of opportunities for authentic communication due to non-personalized course content, and complaints about being forced to follow a strict curriculum (Donmus, 2010; Lambert et al., 2017; Wang & Kim, 2017). Integrating Instagram pages into existing learning practices can provide informal learning contexts and create new opportunities for English learning. Thus, academic institutions and faculties are increasingly using social networking sites such as Instagram, Telegram, etc. (Abrar, 2021; Paul et al., 2012). However, American Educational Research Association conducted research and it was declared at its annual conference in California (2009) that SNSs users studied less and obtained lower grades eventually.

As Stockwell (2007) asserted, vocabulary has been one of the language areas which can be learned through technology in recent years (AlTarawneh & AlMithqal, 2019; Dodigovic, 2005; Gorjian et al., 2012; Yoshii et al., 2002). We can use technology-based applications to help EFL learners and teachers learn and teach better and more effectively. According to (Hanáková & Metruk, 2017; Kaymakamoğlu & Yıltanlılar, 2019; O'Brien et al., 2022; Zhao, 2004), there is a common belief that technology is just a tool and a means to an end in education. The study looks at Instagram in relation to its social impact on academic needs and English vocabulary learning. In studies with an educational context; it is a part of a virtual learning environment. Its common use for learning purposes makes this study imperative.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Setting

In the present study, the participants were 50 male learners at the pre-intermediate level who were selected randomly, ranging from 8-15 years old, learning English as a foreign language (studying at Shokouh Enghelab Academy, Babol, Iran). The learners were divided into

experimental and control groups (25 students per group). In order to homogenize the participants upon their level of proficiency, first, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to all 50 available participants.

3.2. Instrumentation
3.2.1. Oxford Placement Test
An Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to all the selected participants to show whether they in both groups are homogeneous or not. But there are 11 items in this test that assess the level of vocabulary proficiency at the pre-intermediate level. Based on the results of the one-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test all 50 EFL learners were at the normal level in this study.

3.2.2. Pre-test
It was a self-administered vocabulary test comprising 20 multiple-choice items based on the frequency of occurrence from ten Instagram pages. Accordingly, a small group of (n=20) Shokouh Enghelab learners who were selected randomly answered the self-administered vocabulary test. Before piloting the vocabulary test to reach the optimal content validity, the participants were given an orientation for the main research study and were asked to give responses and comments which helped us in improving the vocabulary test. Besides, the content validity of the test was checked by some experts in the field. By using SPSS software, the Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the self-administered vocabulary test. The estimated alpha among the variables was 92% proving to be highly reliable in measuring the effectiveness of Instagram in vocabulary learning.

3.2.3. Post-test
A vocabulary test was presented to the participants. This posttest was like the pretest.

3.3. Procedures
As it was mentioned earlier, the experimental and control group were chosen from a group of learners whose proficiency level was the same. However, since the study concentrated on vocabulary, a vocabulary test, taken from ten Instagram pages, aiming at learning vocabulary, was presented to both experimental and control groups to ensure that they were also homogeneous in terms of knowledge. In those pages, English vocabulary was taught by images, films, and audio.

Due to applying the treatment to the experimental group, the participants joined ten social pages of Instagram that were the most operative pages for learning English vocabulary. Participants in the experimental group became a member of these ten pages at the beginning of the study session (four weeks). The main point of those pages was to introduce the new English vocabulary with the help of attractive images and films containing the vocabulary. In other words, the experimental group learned 60 English vocabulary and their definitions by using images, English films, and audio on Instagram pages. Images and videos made learning English vocabulary more interesting for them. The sessions were conducted regularly for four weeks

(12 sessions and 25 minutes per session) outside of the classroom. It should be mentioned, during the session, the teachers themselves taught participants in the control group as usual based on their previous methods. The control group was not permitted to use Instagram at all. The participants in the experimental and control group were not allowed to share their information with another group. After four weeks of vocabulary learning in Instagram, a vocabulary posttest was conducted for both experimental and control groups as a final examination. It is worth mentioning here that the vocabulary posttest was exactly like the vocabulary pretest.

4. Results and Discussion

After administrating the OPT for 50 participants, descriptive statistics of the language proficiency test were used for the homogenization of the participants in this study. The participants were then randomly cleaved into experimental and control groups. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the homogeneity test.

Table 1.
The Descriptive statistics of the homogeneity test.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Mean. Error	Std. Deviation
Q 1	49	1	4	2.95	.078	.555
Q2	50	1	4	2.19	.067	.481
Q3	50	2	4	3.05	.057	.402
Q4	50	1	4	3.84	.072	.510
Q5	50	1	3	2.94	.045	.313
Q6	48	1	4	3.78	.088	.617
Q7	49	2	4	3.02	.046	.321
Q8	46	1	4	1.14	.092	.631
Q9	50	1	3	1.08	.056	.395
Q10	50	1	4	2.01	.043	.318
Q11	50	1	4	1.38	.117	.830

As indicated in Table 2, because of the study concentration on vocabulary learning and check of the homogeneity of the experimental and control group at the beginning of the experimentation, a vocabulary test was conducted for both groups as a pre-test, including 20 vocabulary-based items. The results revealed that there was no significant difference between the control and experimental groups confirming their similarity. Hence it can be concluded that test distribution is normal.

Table 2.
Normality of test distribution.

		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
		49	50	50	50	50	48	49	46	50	50	50
Normal Parameters[a] Mean		2.94	2.17	3.05	3.84	2.93	3.79	3.01	1.15	1.09	2.03	1.37
Standard Deviation		.556	.483	.402	.510	.314	.617	.322	.631	.396	.318	.831
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.401	.466	.441	.503	.536	.507	.464	.530	.541	.505	.476
	Positive	.354	.467	.440	.377	.423	.368	.465	.5f30	.540	.506	.475
	Negative	-.401	-.334	-.401	-.503	-.537	-.507	-.434	-.405	-.421	-.455	-.324

a. Test distribution is Normal.

In order to answer the research question, a paired sample of t-test was conducted to compare the mean score of pretest and posttest of the control group. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the control group as follows:

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics of the control group.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control pre-test	2.3020	25	.35778	.07157
Control post-test	2.2220	25	.11734	.02346

As it has been shown in Table 4, the observation for the comparison of the means of two groups was 1.117 at 24 degrees of freedom and Significant 275. Because the value is more than 0/05 (.275>0/05), there is no significant difference between scores of these two tests hence so both groups were in similar status.

Table 4.
Control group paired samples t-test.

	Paired Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control pre-test Control post test	.080	.35795	.07159	-.06775	.22775	1.117	24	.275

After four weeks of instruction, both experimental and control groups were given a similar post-test. The questions of the posttest were the same as the pretest. Table 5 summarizes the descriptive statistics of experimental groups.

Table 5.
Comparing the mean scores of pretest and posttest.

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
25	1.9340	.57549	.11510
25	2.6000	.39184	.07837

To compare the mean score of posttest and pretest for the experimental group another paired sample t-test was used. As shown in Table 6, the *t*-observed for the comparison of the means of both groups was - 4.133 (24 degrees of freedom and Sig is 0.0000. Because Sig is less than 0/05(.000< 0.05), therefore, there is a significant difference between scores of these two tests (pretest and posttest of the experimental group).

Table 6.
Significance difference between scores of pretest and posttest.

	Paired Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	
experimental pre-test experimental post-test	-.666	.80580	.16116	-.99862	-.33338	-4.133	24	.000

Then, to see whether the treatment was effective or not, the means of the two groups were compared through an independent sample t-test as shown in Table 7.

Table 7.
Comparison of scores of posttests in experimental and control groups.

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
VAR00001	Control post-test	25	2.6000	.39184	.07837
	Experimental post-test	25	2.2220	.11733	.02347

As indicated in Table 7, to answer the research question and show the effectiveness of the treatment through an independent sample t-test, the scores of posttests in the experimental and control groups were studied. There is a meaningful difference between the scores of these two tests (.000< 0.05). Hence, this study showed that Instagram has a significant effect on pre-intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary learning.

Generally, the purpose of this research was to assess the effectiveness of Instagram on English vocabulary learning of a group of Iranian EFL learners at a pre-intermediate at Shokouh Enghelab Institute. The notable achievement of this study approved the helpfulness

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of Instagram. The participants of the experimental group did significantly better than those of the control group in the posttest. However, there are some applied concepts about the impact of Instagram as socializing language learning, the finding of this paper can be in line with the results achieved by Niyayesh (2015), who worked more specifically on the impact of social networking services on English learning process.

This study was engaged more with the effect of SNS (Social Networking Sites) on language learning techniques. More consistency, Fisher et al., (2017), Karpinski (2010), Kirschner, Collins, and Halverson (2018), Pikhart and Botezat (2021), and Qarajeh and Abdolmanafi (2015) obtained the same results. They declared that using social networks is one of the effective ways to enhance the oral performance of EFL learners. The results of this study are the same as the research by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), and Klimova and Polakova (2020). Their experiment indicated that there is a direct relationship between social networks usage and advancement in the academic performance of learners. Furthermore, other research conducted by Idrees Ibrahim (2021) and Tess (2013) illustrated social networks as an alternative environment in which the language users at higher levels of education develop their social knowledge. In contrast, this research's results are inconsistent with the previous research results (Baran, 2013; Xuo et al., 2018). They found that the use of internet-based social media platforms motivates learners to learn English but their effectiveness is not more than the face-to-face classes.

5. Conclusion
The result from this study indicated that social networks such as Instagram can positively influence English vocabulary learning. Thus, EFL educators in the Iranian context can apply Instagram to improve English learning. The main application of this research is that teachers can use Instagram as a complementary device to face-to-face instruction. Also, language learners can use social applications for their self-evaluation and develop their self-assurance outside the classroom (Kaviani & Mashhadi Heidar, 2016). Self-evaluations or self-appraisals are worth taking seriously in language learning. Instagram provides an opportunity for language learners to reflect on their performance virtually. Educational politicians also in Iran can spend time on the proper use of cyberspace and use it to benefit the country. By using social networks properly and correctly, the country's education can be developed and promoted in the right direction. Especially in the current situation where the Coronavirus Pandemic has closed or partially opened classrooms, the use of virtual applications such as Instagram can be applicable.

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